



# Resilient Partnership

An interpretive approach to public-private  
cooperation in large infrastructure projects

Hans Ruijter



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## Colophon

### **Resilient Partnership**

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by **Hans Ruijter**

### **Reading Committee:**

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Erasmus University Rotterdam

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# Resilient Partnership

An interpretive approach to public-private  
cooperation in large infrastructure projects

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Hans Adriaan Ruijter

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promotor: prof.dr. M.B. Veenswijk

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Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you.

*Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)*

# Preface

A decade ago, if someone had predicted that I would begin a doctoral study in the future, I would not have believed it. Nevertheless, I started on this long process and now the final product - my doctoral thesis - is before you.

So why did I decide to do this? Essentially for two reasons. The first is a professional reason. I have long been interested in cooperation between people and organizations, and especially in cooperation between public and private organizations. In particular, why does this cooperation sometimes succeed, but at other times fail completely? I am convinced that the key to success in implementing increasingly complex infrastructure projects is a not more stringent plan-based approach or better contracts, but improved understanding of cooperation. The second reason is more personal. I was fortunate that I could look back on a wonderful and rewarding career, during which I held a wide range of jobs in the public domain and became involved in many large-scale infrastructure projects. Even though this work was satisfying and challenging, like many people at a certain point in their career, I started to think that 'I have seen everything' and I wondered 'what else do I want from life?'. I called it my 'professional mid-life crisis'. At some time during this 'crisis' I spoke with Professor Marcel Veenswijk, who later became my doctoral supervisor, about my views and ideas on cooperation between public and private parties. During this conversation, the idea of doing a PhD study on this topic came up. I had one condition: the research would not only contribute to science, but also to practice. I believed that Rijkswaterstaat and the infrastructure sector should also benefit from this research, and not just academia.

This was how I began my four-year journey through the world of infrastructure projects and cooperation. I use the word journey because in retrospect I can best describe my research in this way: a journey through my own professional past and a journey through the world of science, which was relatively unknown to me. I was trained as a civil engineer, so doing research in a new domain – that of social science – was exactly the challenge and change of scenery that I was looking for. Even after working in the infrastructure sector for more than 30 years, I learned many new things, not only about the field of study, but also about myself. As a result of this research, I can say that my skills as a project manager became broader and richer. Or in other words, during this journey into the world of science, I have seen myself in a new light.

In recent years, I was regularly asked how it was possible to combine PhD research with my job as director of the Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere infrastructure program (SAA). My answer was always the same: this was possible because I created a win-win situation. On the one hand, the SAA program was the object of my research; a large infrastructure program with all the corresponding aspects, such as significant societal impact, involvement of many parties, and unexpected events, tensions and dilemmas. The daily practice in the SAA program became a virtually inexhaustible source of data, also regarding cooperation between public and private parties. On the other hand, I have continuously tried to apply my research findings and the theoretical concepts behind them to that daily practice with the aim of improving the performance of the program. Looking back, I think I succeeded in this aim. In my thesis, I reflect extensively on this topic. Reflection is also one of the central themes in my thesis: the presence or absence of joint reflection on events in practice and the process of giving meaning to these events. The cover photo on my thesis is therefore not a coincidence. It is a photograph of the iconic new railway bridge, reflected in the water, which was taken the day before the bridge was moved to its final position over the widened A1 motorway. This was one of the highlights of the SAA program. The two people in the middle of the photo are Michel Schwarte, one of the directors of the contractors consortium, and myself, the commissioning authority on behalf of Rijkswaterstaat. This photograph therefore symbolizes the cooperation between the private and public sectors. Another important theme in my thesis is resilience, especially resilient cooperation. This ensures that cooperation can endure setbacks, which are bound to happen in every infrastructure project. Hence the title of my thesis: *Resilient Partnership*.

I hope that all readers of this thesis, those in both science and in practice,



enjoy their reading. I realize that a thesis is not usually read by a wide audience, but I have paid a lot of attention to readability. Moreover, to increase accessibility for Dutch professionals, the thesis has been published in both English and Dutch. I sincerely hope that my research and my thesis can contribute, even if only slightly, to the improvement of project management in the fascinating world of infrastructure.

**Hans Ruijter**

IJsselstein, January 2019



# Chapter 1

## Introduction



## 1.1 A sunny Sunday in August

*It is Sunday afternoon when my phone rings. It is the Project Manager of the A1/A6 project: "The demolition of the old railway bridge is not going well. There have been setbacks, and the work is taking longer than expected. We are afraid we will not meet the deadline on Monday morning, so we have to decide between causing delays in train traffic or road traffic. You'd better get over here." Oh damn, I think to myself, everything seemed to be going so well this weekend. And I'm just about to go to the neighbors with my wife for a birthday visit. Anyway, the Project Manager does not call on Sunday without good reason, and I can go a bit later to that birthday party. So I get in my car and drive to the construction site at Muideren along the A1.*

*On the way my thoughts wander to the construction work this weekend, August 20 and 21, 2016, when the climactic operation of the A1/A6 project, part of the Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere infrastructure program, is supposed to happen. A few days previously, our traffic manager had summarized the planned activities in an interview with the De Telegraaf newspaper: "It is a very large-scale set of operations. Normally, work of this scale is never done in one go, but to limit the inconvenience for rail and road traffic as much as possible, we decided to do everything in a single weekend. That means just one weekend of traffic disruption instead of three. These are gigantic operations that will be carried out simultaneously over the next three days: the installation of the 255 meter railway bridge over the A1, the commissioning of the widest aqueduct in Europe and the new bridge over the Amsterdam-Rijnkanaal. In addition, during those three days the old railway bridge will have to be demolished so we can open a new section of motorway for public traffic starting on Monday over a length of seven kilometers. Due to the demolition, all train traffic between Flevoland and the center of the Netherlands will also be stopped for a week." With 30 years of experience working with projects at Rijkswaterstaat, the last four years as director of the program, I have become accustomed to large-scale infrastructure projects, but this mega-operation is giving me an adrenaline rush. I had gone to the construction site already on Saturday, in part to speak to various representatives of the regional and national press. All that media attention was great, but this also increased the pressure: everything had to go smoothly. Three months previously, a remarkable feat was accomplished when an 8400 ton railway bridge was moved across the A1 to its temporary location, adjacent to the old bridge. And this weekend, the subsequent, perhaps even more complex climactic operation in the project is scheduled, with many simultaneous activities at various locations. The most critical part of this mega-operation is the demolition of the*



old railway bridge above the A1 motorway and the installation of the new bridge, which has now been completed at its temporary location and has therefore become much heavier: 14,500 tons. And despite the complexity, during the first part of this weekend the work went exceptionally well and entirely according to plan. Until this afternoon, that is.

After arriving at the construction site, I immediately notice the relative calm and quiet concentration that prevailed. There is no panic, no heated discussions and no reproaches. Those present include employees of the contractor, Rijkswaterstaat and ProRail, the organization responsible for the railway network in the Netherlands. Formally and contractually, the contractor is in charge of the weekend operation. But none of those present are talking about this aspect, and if I had been an outsider I would not have been able to tell who was from which organization. I notice a very strong sense of solidarity among the men and women who are working at that moment: "we started this together, we experienced the easy parts and setbacks together and we will we solve this problem together." At one point I am sitting with the team at the large conference table in the construction office, together with a board member from the contractor and my colleague from ProRail. The progress on the project is being discussed, the disappointing demolition work and the possible fallback scenarios if the demolition continues to be slower than planned (or perhaps much slower). Then the discussion shifts to the impending trade-off: we have to decide whether rail traffic or road traffic would be most affected by the setback. And just before I could discuss this with my colleague from ProRail, one of the team's representatives, I do not even remember if it was someone from the contractor, Rijkswaterstaat or ProRail, turns to me and my colleague: "I am glad you came, but I think that we must make this decision ourselves as a project team. We went through the weekend together and we know the work through and through. Give us two hours to come up with a tightly planned scenario. And if you do not think it is sufficient, then you will still have time to make adjustments." At that point we really have no other option, so I leave the team alone as requested; two hours later we agree on the plan without having to discuss the annoying issue about whether to give priority to the car or the train. In retrospect, we hear that the maneuvering space and the trust we gave the team was very decisive and contributed to the successful operation that weekend.

After the meeting I drive back home, but stay in close contact with the team by telephone. That evening I manage to go to the birthday party, but I spend most of the time outside on the phone discussing the operation and coordinating with colleagues and managers at Rijkswaterstaat. At night, I have to get out of bed several times to consult with our traffic manager. It is very tight, but they

*think they are going to get it just done before the road has to re-open for traffic before the Monday morning rush hour. Then there is another setback at the very last moment. When demolishing the last part of the old bridge, a large piece of concrete falls onto the road, despite the protection measures taken, it makes a hole in the road surface. This means that cars cannot use that part of the roadway; the asphalt must first be repaired and cured. For traffic in the direction of Amsterdam, only part of roadway will be useable that morning. The team is very disappointed; they had worked so hard and then at the last moment there is a setback. Still, not long after, the team, including myself, is proud; proud about what they had achieved and proud about their cooperation. This pride was enhanced by the response from the Minister of Infrastructure and the Environment: "With the completion of this operation, an important step has been taken towards improved traffic flow at the Muiden junction. This was a huge job for Rijkswaterstaat and ProRail, which was completed in only a few days' time: a remarkable achievement." A few days later a discussion is going on within Rijkswaterstaat: according to the contract, due to the limited availability of the road on Monday morning, the contractor had to be penalized. After taking account of the heroic effort during the weekend and the positive feeling of the team about the outcome, I decide not to impose that penalty.*

This story is about the possibilities in a large infrastructure project and how people from different organizations work together. It is, of course, a story about a remarkable event, one that does not happen every day and on every project, but during smaller scale and less complex operations people are also faced with these kinds of challenges, which they have to solve together. This thesis is about these kinds of stories, about infrastructure projects, about the challenges and tensions that go with them, about how people experience them and how they look jointly for solutions, and how they succeed or sometimes fail. As in the above story, some of the stories in this thesis will be about my own experiences as director of the Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere infrastructure program (SAA) of Rijkswaterstaat, the largest infrastructure program in the Netherlands at the time of this study.<sup>1</sup> In scientific terms, this thesis therefore has a 'auto-ethnographic' character, which I will explain further on.

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1) Rijkswaterstaat (the Directorate General for Public Works and Water Management) is the implementing organization of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management in the Netherlands. This organization is responsible for the management and realization of motorways and waterways with a commitment to a sustainable living environment.

## 1.2 The context: Public-private cooperation within the Dutch infrastructure sector

Infrastructure projects in the Netherlands, such as the construction of roads, bridges and tunnels, have become larger and more complex in recent years (e.g. Hertogh & Westerveld (2010)). Besides the construction itself, more and more factors have come into play, such as environmental aspects and landscape integration, and societal engagement in these projects has also increased. These are often projects with a large societal impact, a long duration and high societal costs, which quickly run into tens or hundreds of millions of euros. For example, the SAA infrastructure program has a total construction time of more than 10 years and a financial volume of around 4.5 billion euros.

At the same time, with the rise of neoliberal thinking (*New Public Management*) in the last decades of the 20th century, the mode of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractors in the infrastructure sector in the Netherlands has changed (Kickert, 2013; Kuipers et al., 2014; Overman & Van Thiel, 2016; Pollitt, 2001; Verhoest, Van Thiel, Bouckaert, & Laegreid, 2012). Since then, under pressure from politics and the private sector, more and more tasks and responsibilities have shifted from the public sector to the private sector, and the large public contracting authorities such as Rijkswaterstaat have increasingly distanced themselves from the actual projects. The relationship between the commissioning authority and the contractor became more and more contract-driven, and the respective contractual responsibilities have become more strictly separated.

Because the progress on infrastructure projects and everything that happens around them is never fully predictable, however, a good contract does not automatically guarantee a good project. There is a risk that separation of responsibilities in the contract will lead to parties gradually losing contact with each other (e.g. Clegg (1992)). To bring a project to a successful conclusion, it is important that the commissioning authority and contractor stay in contact with each other from the beginning to the end of a project and continue to cooperate. In the new Market Strategy – which was developed jointly by Rijkswaterstaat, other public contracting authorities and parties from the private sector – a shift can therefore be seen from separate responsibilities to a focus on a joint task for the commissioning authority and contractor, in which these parties make better use of each other's expertise (*'Bouwen doe je samen'* [Building together], Rijkswaterstaat et al., 2016). In this strategy both parties, the commissioning authority and contractor, focus on the project as a mutual task.

This idea has been implemented within the infrastructure program SAA under the name *'resilient partnership'*. Resilient partnership is about the ambition of both the commissioning authority and the contractor to be of service to the underlying societal aspects of the project. Resilient partnership means, among other things, that the construction process of the contractor can proceed as uninterrupted as possible. This is in the interest of both the commissioning authority and the contractor. To achieve this kind of partnership requires a shift at the commissioning authority from a controlling role to a more facilitating role with respect to the contractor. Based on the idea of an inverse template, this means that the contractor must also see the project responsibilities (political and otherwise) from the perspective of the commissioning authority. In this way, 'being of service to the project' means that both parties are aware of and consider each other's roles and interests in such a way that everyone's expertise serves the realization of the project. Starting point is that facilitating requires a different kind of effort and attitude than controlling. Substantive expertise and craftsmanship are important, along with competences such as cooperative attitude, empathy, predictability, flexibility and decisiveness.

The traditional commissioning practice within Rijkswaterstaat usually involved an instrumental approach in which the logic of the contract and the standard operational method were central to day-to-day operations (Rijkswaterstaat, 2008). This provided clarity for employees in practice. If the pressure to avoid project failure is high, this will lead to even more employees choosing the 'safe' route and following the line of the contract even more strictly. In such situations, however, this usually turns out to be counterproductive. I will return to this later. In resilient partnership, people are encouraged to continually ask themselves and judge for themselves whether the agreed standard course of action is still suitable in case of altered circumstances and whether they should deviate from the standard course. It is not the intention to question all frameworks. The point is to continue to provide guidance within the existing frameworks. This requires an intelligent 'sense' of the situation, looking beyond the 'here and now', reflection and adaptive capacity. The perspective in this approach is the added value to the project and not just the logic of the contract and the project execution. Resilient partnership therefore does not offer a new recipe or checklist with instructions on how to act in every possible situation. The approach requires a significant change in attitude and values, both on the part of the public authority and on the part of the contractor from the private sector.



Figure 1.1: A construction site of the SAA infrastructure program (Photo: Rijkswaterstaat)

At SAA, experience is currently being acquired with resilient partnership. Like any major infrastructure project, the SAA program also operates in the field of tension between following the line of the contract and working according to an open cooperative relationship. The story from the previous section is an example of this tension and this relationship. It is the experience gained in the implementation of resilient partnership, and the meaning that can be given to these experiences in relation to improved management of infrastructure projects, that are central to the present study.

### 1.3 The research question

This study takes as starting point an interpretive research approach, which is in line with recent interpretive dissertations in the infrastructure domain by, among others, Berendse (2013), Duijnhoven (2010), Merkus (2014), Smits (2013) and Willems (2018). This approach is based on the assumption that phenomena in the social domain, such as modes of cooperation between people and organizations, are social constructs and not natural phenomena. According to this approach, these constructs can best be investigated by focusing on processes of

interpretation by people, hence the term interpretive research. This qualitative research method is fundamentally different from the more common quantitative method, in which matters such as quantitative data collection and objective measurability are central. The present study therefore does not make a broad comparison between various modes of cooperation in the infrastructure sector in the Netherlands or abroad, and does not determine the 'best' mode of cooperation (assuming this is even possible). In the following chapters, I substantiate the chosen approach.

The social identity of an organization is, as I will explain later, largely determined by how people within such an organization work together and have conversations with each other. For example, the conversations on the work floor between employees of a healthcare institution are expected to be different than those between employees of a financial organization (e.g. Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012) and Van Hulst, Ybema & Yanow (2017)). In the present study I investigated the extent to which this aspect of organizations also applies to projects and the corresponding cooperative relationships. My research centered on the conversations, i.e. the narratives on the work floor, and the changes in these narratives over time.<sup>2</sup> The point of departure of the study was the following: narratives lead to understanding about the events in an organization and can give meaning to these events. Subsequently, through this sensegiving change can be made possible. With this narrative approach, my study connects with and expands on the work of researchers such as Alvesson (2002), Boje (2001), Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) and Weick (2001, 2009).

The object of my research was the program organization SAA with its cooperating partners, including the various contractors, stakeholders and municipalities. The organization is responsible for the realization of the SAA infrastructure program, which aims to improve the accessibility and quality of life in the northern part of the Randstad (the urban conglomeration in the western region of the Netherlands.) To achieve this aim, about 63 km of the national road network is being widened between Schiphol, Amsterdam and Almere, and various landscape integration measures are being implemented. In a later chapter I explain the ins and outs of the program in more detail. The focus of my research was

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2) In literature the terms narrative and story are often used interchangeably (e.g. Gabriel (2004), and Vaara, Sonenshein & Boje (2016)). In this thesis the word 'story' is used to refer to an illustration (a plot), whereas 'narratives', as a theoretical concept, refer to more comprehensive discursive constructions related to organizational stability or change. See Sections 2.2 and 4.2.

primarily on the cooperative relationship with the abovementioned partners. To this end, I searched for narratives about cooperation and about the corresponding dilemmas and tensions. By taking an interpretive approach, I formed a picture of and gave meaning to aspects related to cooperation within a large infrastructure program such as SAA. Subsequently, I looked at how changes in that mode of cooperation can be brought about through narratives. In doing so, I linked my findings to scientific theory about partnering, building trust and adaptive capacity. In particular I found connections with the work of theorists such as Bresnen (2007), Cicmil (2006) and Clegg (1992). Narratives on cooperation were collected in various ways, for example through observations, interviews, interactive workshops with employees of SAA and with employees of the commissioning authority and contractor together, and during employee meetings of SAA. This type of action research links up with the work of, among others, Bate (1997, 2005), Johnson (2007) and Van de Ven (2007).

Based on the foregoing, I formulated the main research question for this study as follows:

**How do public and private actors give meaning to the concept of resilient partnership within the Dutch infrastructure domain?**

This main question was then divided into three sub-questions, a theoretical, a descriptive and an explanatory question, respectively.

1. Theoretical sub-question: How are the dynamics of cooperative relationships in complex organizational chains conceptualized in the literature?
2. Descriptive sub-question: How have partnership relations between public and private parties within the SAA program taken shape between 2014 and 2017?
3. Explanatory sub-question: How can these partnership relations be understood through action research and how can the acquired understanding be used to initiate a shift in that partnership through a narrative approach?

The above questions address the partnership relations between public and private parties in the infrastructure domain, the way in which these relationships are realized in practice and how this process is guided. As stated previously, the focus of the research was on the program organization SAA and its partners. As a result, this led to me as a researcher taking an unusual double role; in addition to being a researcher, I also headed this program during the research period as its director. I return to this in the following section.

## 1.4 Auto-ethnographic research and role duality

Narratives and stories about events in organizations often have multiple dimensions. For example, I wrote the story at the beginning of this chapter based on my personal memories and experiences. If experiences from other stakeholders are added to an individual narrative, a 'richer' image of a situation can emerge. Research into the emergence of narratives in organizations, with their dimensions, diversity and ambiguity, and into the process of giving meaning to these narratives, lends itself well to an interpretive organizational-ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research focuses on the day-to-day behavior of people and organizations by observing how they interact with each other, what conversations they have with each other and how they respond to each other and to external influences. By doing this over a longer period of time, a picture is created of what happens in an organization when circumstances change and the narratives in that organization possibly change as well. This also clarifies the meaning that arises from those narratives.

In general, the ethnographic researcher<sup>3</sup> conducts research from the sidelines, and from this position observes what happens within the organization or the cooperative relationship that is to be studied. In the present study, an unusual situation arose: as the researcher, I also worked within the organization to be studied, the SAA program of Rijkswaterstaat. If the ethnographic researcher is part of the organization he is investigating, or if he is an employee of that organization, and is therefore part of the object of research, this is known in science as auto-ethnographic research. This was indeed the case in the present study. In addition, I was not only an employee of this organization, during the study I was also its Program Director.<sup>4</sup> This unique position gave me various advantages. For example, it not only gave me access to all relevant individuals within the departments of Rijkswaterstaat, but also to individuals from the private sector and other stakeholders. This type of access can be difficult for an external researcher to acquire. In addition, due to my 30-plus years of experience at Rijkswaterstaat and in the Dutch infrastructure sector, I had the advantage of being able to give meaning to events in the organizations that

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3) For purposes of readability, only the male pronoun is used for 'researcher'.

4) This is comparable with a recent auto-ethnographic study into the effects of a telephone helpline for the victims of terrorist acts in which the helpline was initiated by the researcher herself (Haimov, 2017).



are involved with the implementation of major infrastructure projects. The latter advantage, however, also implies a potential disadvantage. It is precisely because of this involvement and long experience that it is conceivable that I interpreted certain events only from my own frame of reference and that I may have developed 'professional blindness' that prevented me from seeing a different explanation. To keep these disadvantages from standing in the way of the aforementioned advantages, in this study I not only took the potential risk of this role duality into account, but also took measures to prevent this risk from manifesting itself.

## 1.5 Structure of the thesis

In the next chapter, the context of my research is explained in greater detail based on the development of public commissioning over the past 30 years in the Dutch infrastructure sector in general, and at Rijkswaterstaat, one of the largest commissioning authorities, in particular. An important issue that is addressed in this context is whether the previously outlined development of the cooperative relationship between public and private parties was gradual, or whether specific events influenced this development or gave it a different direction. To answer this question, I studied the relevant policy documents and parliamentary debates from that period, I interviewed past and present key officers from Rijkswaterstaat and the private sector, and I used my own experiences as an employee of Rijkswaterstaat in that period. Three time periods are considered: the period around the completion of the Delta Works (circa 1985 to 1990), the period around the construction fraud inquiry in the Netherlands (circa 2000 to 2005) and the period around the economic crisis in the Dutch construction sector (circa 2010 to 2015). The findings are then linked to the theory on narrative change. This chapter ends with an overview of elements that are necessary for certain events to function as *triggers* for change.

Chapters 3 and 4 are the theoretical chapters of this thesis, in which the *theoretical* sub-question is answered. Chapter 3 addresses cooperation, specifically cooperation in project relationships between the commissioning authority and contractor. In this chapter I also refer to the more recent literature on cooperation, in which a shift can be seen from functional and contract-based cooperation to a more substantive and holistic approach. I introduce the concept of *partnering*. In the relevant literature, this notion is addressed not only as a set of methods and techniques, but it also emerges that partnering is largely related to a change in attitude and behavior among the people and organiza-

tions that work together. In this chapter I make clear that partnering is not a fixed concept, but is the result of an interactive process, of which the final implementation and effectiveness are determined by the joint experiences that are acquired during the course of a project. It is explained that elements such as mutual trust and the building of resilience or adaptive capacity in the cooperative relationship also play an important role, especially in creating a balance between contract-based management and control on the one hand and providing room to maneuver and cooperate on the other. These are also the central themes in my research.

Chapter 4 addresses the question of how aspects such as trust and adaptive capacity can arise in a cooperative relationship. The chapter explains how a process of sensegiving and change within an organization can be initiated through a narrative approach. This focuses on replacing the 'old' narratives in that organization with 'new' ones, a process that involves the entire organization, its management *and* its employees. The narrative at the beginning of the present chapter is an example of such a new narrative. In this narrative, the parties involved were very emphatic about seeking cooperation, while in older narratives they might have become fixated on the contractual separation of responsibilities. In this chapter I also discuss the role of emotions in this process of sensegiving and the possibilities for enhancing this process with the aid of symbolism and metaphors. On this basis, I develop a conceptual model which I use to make a link between creating a balance between contract-based management on the one hand and cooperation-based management on the other and how this balance can be achieved through a process of narrative influencing of sensegiving. At the end of this chapter, based on the theoretical analysis, I further specify the last two sub-questions for my study.

Chapter 5 elaborates on and explains the methodological design of the research. The choice for the aforementioned interpretive approach is substantiated. The research approach is then specified as a combination of auto-ethnographic organization research and action research. This approach, which combines scientific research and application in practice, also referred to as 'engaged scholarship' (Van de Ven, 2007), was a natural fit with my own dual role as researcher and as Program Director of the SAA program. As indicated in the previous section, I also reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of this double role and I discuss the measures that I took in this regard. At the end of this chapter I discuss the collection of data from practice for my research, which involved retrieving and generating narratives from the SAA program.

Chapters 6 and 7 are the empirical chapters of this thesis, which address the *descriptive* sub-question. After an explanation of the infrastructure program SAA, I zoom in on my own position in this organization and I explain how I began working towards a more substantive mode of cooperation with parties from the private sector under the aforementioned name of 'resilient partnership'. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, this involved a shift from a primarily contract-based approach towards a more cooperative approach. The underlying societal objectives of the project are central to this approach. These chapters deal with the search for this new mode of cooperation and its implementation within the organizations of the commissioning authority and contractor. These are narratives from practice, from all levels of the respective organizations; they address the tensions and dilemmas that have arisen among employees in their efforts to achieve a balance between strict compliance with contractual provisions on the one hand and striving for more cooperation and serving the underlying societal aspects of the project on the other. Because large infrastructure projects often involve multiple parties<sup>5</sup> who influence these tensions, these parties are also given a place in the narratives. Precisely because resilient partnership is not a new 'cookbook' with standard recipes, but a dynamic mode of thinking and working, the narratives play a central role in this change process. These chapters show how the SAA program organization has given meaning to the narratives and how this has influenced the attitude and behavior of the SAA employees and of the contractors. It is explained that this process can be regarded as a type of overarching meta-narrative about a search for a different mode of cooperation.

In Chapter 8, the insights gained from the empirical findings (Chapters 6 and 7) are linked to the theoretical framework (Chapters 3 through 5) and on this basis I formulate the outcome of my research in an interpretive way, with respect to both theory and practice. As a result, this chapter answers the *explanatory* sub-question. To this end, I first reflect in a first-order analysis on the narratives from the project practice of SAA. In doing so, I zoom in on how employees in the grey area between paper and practice have dealt with their search for a balance between the contract-driven approach and the cooperative approach. Furthermore, I indicate how this has led to a change process within the organizations of the commissioning authority and contractor. With this, I show that a

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5) Besides the commissioning authority and contractors, these parties include other government agencies such as municipalities, other private parties and interest groups.

change in culture coincides with a change in narratives. Next, in a second-order analysis, I link the empirical findings to the relevant theory, such as the scientific debate on *structure versus agency* (e.g. Giddens (1979, 1984) and Levitt & Scott (2016)), with which the question is analyzed more deeply. This brings me to a number of action strategies with a broader scope for making a trade-off between these approaches.

In this final chapter, I also look back on my own dual role in the research and on the pros and cons of auto-ethnographic research in a broader sense. Through reflexivity and transparency, I have tried to limit these disadvantages as much as possible and prevent them from negating the advantages. I explain how I have given concrete form to this, thereby seeking connection with similar approaches in other recent theses.

The recurring theme in this study is achieving a balance between the contract-driven, bureaucratic approach and the cooperative, holistic approach. The stories from practice show that achieving this balance is difficult and will not always be rational. Indeed, the bureaucracy in an organization is often so recalcitrant that it prevents us from choosing a different approach. At the end of Chapter 8, I reflect more broadly on this topic. I conclude the thesis with a number of recommendations for follow-up research.

Chapter		Content
1	Introduction	Context, research questions and structure of the thesis
2	Triggers for change in the Dutch infrasector	Outline of developments in public commissioning in the Dutch infrastructure sector over the past 30 years
3	Resilient partnering: on building trust and adaptive capacity together	Theory on cooperation and partnering and the role of building trust and adaptive capacity in this process
4	The circle of sensemaking and sensegiving	Theory on how a change in organization culture can be initiated through a narrative approach and a process of sensegiving
5	From theory to practice and from practice to theory	Study design and theory on auto-ethnographic research and my dual role as researcher on the one hand and director of the organization to be studied on the other
6	Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere: via cooperation to project result	Empirical chapters in the thesis with narratives from the project practice of the SAA infrastructure program about the search for a new mode of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor, including the corresponding dilemmas.
7	Resilient partnership in practice: from exploration to professionalization	
8	Reflection and looking ahead: analysis, discussion and conclusions	Connecting the insights gained from empiricism with the theoretical framework, and on this basis formulating the outcome of the research

*Table 1.1: Summary of the structure of the thesis*



# Chapter 2

## Triggers for change in the Dutch infrasector

## 2.1 Introduction

As explained in the previous Chapter, the civil engineering sector in the Netherlands continues to develop. Partly in response to parliamentary inquiries, the legitimacy of infrastructure projects in society is changing due to disruptions, delays and cost overruns. At the same time, a shift can be seen in the allocation of responsibility between the various actors in the civil engineering sector. Market players are involved much earlier in the development process and consequently fill roles that were previously held by the public sector, as explained below. Moreover, the use of new types of contracts with complex financing arrangements involves a different allocation of risks between the commissioning authority and the contractor (Rijkswaterstaat et al., 2016).

This development has been going on for some time. Until the end of the 1980s, civil engineering projects in the Netherlands were characterized by a traditional commissioning process. At that time, such projects were designed in detail by public contracting authorities such as Rijkswaterstaat, and contractors 'simply' implemented the projects. The public contracting authority essentially envisioned the realization of the project. On the one hand, this situation provided certainty and order, but on the other hand the innovative potential in the market remained dormant or was underutilized. Due to a series of factors - including the increasing complexity of infrastructure projects, the desire expressed by market players to be engaged more substantively at an earlier phase in the process and questions about the legitimacy of this collaboration resulting from parliamentary inquiries (Tweede Kamer, 2002/2004) - new types of contracts emerged, known as 'private sector, unless' (*markt, tenzij*) or 'professional commissioning'. This was also advantageous for commissioning authorities such as Rijkswaterstaat. Due to these new types of contracts, such as D&C (Design & Construct) and DBFM (Design, Build, Finance & Maintain), they were able to reduce costs and staff deployment because the risks that were previously held by the commissioning authority were transferred to the contractor. The commissioning authority became more distant from the contractor and responsibilities were separated. However, the distance between the commissioning authority and the contractor became so great that mutual communication was lost, with miscommunication as a result. The contractor also lost the assistance of the commissioning authority with matters such as contacts with other government agencies, which were previously the responsibility of the authority. The commissioning authorities and contractors made insufficient use of each other's capabilities, became increasingly opposed to each other, and if something went wrong they blamed the opposing party. For many projects,



this led to arbitration and large time and cost overruns. The increasing uneasiness with this approach is illustrated by a recent joint initiative from large public contracting authorities and market players in the Netherlands to develop a new Market Strategy (Rijkswaterstaat et al., 2016). In this new strategy, a shift can be ascertained from separate responsibilities to shared responsibilities between commissioning authorities and contractors.

## 2.2 Triggers for change - theoretical framework

The question addressed in this chapter is whether the developments described before have taken place gradually, linked to more general societal developments, or whether specific points in time or events, so called '*triggers for change*', can be indicated that impacted these developments.

In recent decades various scientists have conducted research into organizational culture in general, and into the phenomenon of triggers for change in particular. Generally speaking, two approaches can be distinguished, depending on the ontological perspective from which the changes within organizations are viewed. The differences between these two approaches are discussed below and summarized in Table 2.1.

Researchers taking the first approach have a positivist perspective and assume a rational-analytical feasibility approach of organizations. In the instrumental concept of culture, which is part of this approach, it is assumed that culture is a behavioral entity that can be deliberately influenced and can be controlled by traceable factors such as the structure and the processes in organizations (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982). The organizational research that takes this approach is usually empirical and quantitative, whereby the researchers focus primarily on cause-effect relationships of specific types of triggers, such as those in the surroundings of an organization, in the dynamics of a process or in a structural change that has consequences for changes in thinking, behavior and similar aspects. As a result, the triggers for change within an organization are defined statically (Beddowes & Wille, 1990; Reay, Golden-Biddle, & Germann, 2006; Stuart, 1995). Examples of these types of triggers include changes in management of an organization, implementing radical innovations, entering new markets or an impending bankruptcy. These triggers frequently involve intense events for the employees within such an organization that can elicit strong emotion and movement, such as a threatened loss of job security. In this way, these triggers are a starting point for an organizational change, such as a new organization structure, changes in market assortment or different operational procedures. These types of changes are

initiated top-down from management, in contrast to the bottom-up change discussed below (Bate, 2004).

The second group of researchers takes an interpretive approach, assuming that the culture in an organization cannot be described objectively, but comes about through social construction as a product of interaction and sensemaking between individuals, such as Geertz (1973), Blumer (1969), Smircich (1983), Weick (1979), Alvesson (2004) and more recently Holt & Cornelissen (2014), Maitlis & Christianson (2014) and Sandberg & Tsoukas (2014). As a result, this approach - also referred to as postmodern - is fundamentally subjective (Parker, 1992; Pitsis, Kornberger, & Clegg, 2004). Later on, researchers from this social constructivist school have proposed that this social interaction comes about primarily through narratives. Consequently, culture changes within an organization are considered from a narrative perspective. These changes within an organization occur because new narratives become dominant over old ones (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009; Finstad, 1998). The change therefore takes place in a bottom-up fashion, and can be seen more as a cultural change because the new narratives lead to a change in sensemaking among the employees (Bruner, 1990). As a result, narratives help to propagate the culture in an organization (Bate, 2004). Viewed from a social constructivist perspective, these narratives in an organization derive their power not from their truthful content, but primarily from the way in which they give meaning to the employees; compare the difference between 'being right' and 'being proven right'. At the same time, the plausibility of the narrative is more important than its accuracy; this contrasts with the positivistic approach in which the narrative is true only if it can be objectively 'proven' based on facts and arguments (Bruner, 1986; Czarniawska, 2004; Merkus, 2014). In a more philosophical sense, this concerns the classical difference between the German *erklären* [to explain] and *verstehen* [to understand] (M. Weber, 1922). A narrative can gain plausibility if it contains a clear plot that can give meaning to that narrative (Czarniawska, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1987; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). The extent to which a story evokes emotions in people also plays a role in this process (Holt & Cornelissen, 2014; Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013; Steigenberger, 2015), and using metaphors can be helpful (Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, & Phillips, 2008; Patriotta & Brown, 2011; Ragsdell, 2000; Stone, 1997). I will return to this topic in a later chapter.

Viewed in this way, narratives within an organization soon acquire political overtones, and it even becomes possible to distort facts as long as the plot of the narrative remains clear and plausible (Throgmorton, 2003). In his standard work *Rationality and Power* (1998), Flyvbjerg went even further by arguing that

Perspective	Characteristics of triggers	Motive	Outcome	Examples of authors
Positivism	Static quantitative	Seeking cause-and-effect relationships (objective)	Organizational change top-down	Deal & Kennedy, Peters & Waterman, Stuart, Beddowes & Wille
Social constructivism	Dynamic qualitative	Seeking shared understanding (subjective)	Cultural change bottom-up	Blumer, Smircich, Weick, Barry & Elmes, Bruner, Bate, Boje, Van Marrewijk, Maitlis, Clegg, Tsoukas

*Table 2.1: Two approaches for research into triggers for change within organizations*

the impact of a narrative is ultimately determined not only by its plausibility, but especially by the position and power of the person who tells the story. He based this assertion on the philosophical debate between Habermas and Foucault, i.e. between reasoning based on argumentation on one side and power play on the other. From the viewpoint of Habermas, reason derives its power from argumentation, and aspects such as politics and power play obstruct good decision-making (Habermas, 1984). This contrasts with the viewpoint of Foucault, in which power is an essential component of the decision-making process and is essential to break a stalemate in argumentation (Foucault, 1980).

In the present study, changes are considered from a social constructivist perspective, and the way in which one narrative becomes dominant over another is examined, i.e. how dominant narratives and counter-narratives reach a different dynamic balance (Boje, 2008, 2011). Is this a gradual process, or can critical events or triggers result in one narrative becoming dominant over the other? If the latter is the case, what are the characteristics of these types of triggers (i.e. what makes an event into a critical event?) and is it possible, for example, to direct these triggers for change by means of focused narrative building? The aim of these questions is to link up with debates about triggers for change, narrative building, storytelling, sensemaking and the work of researchers such as Balogun, Barry & Elmes, Bate, Merkus, Van Marrewijk and Weick.

In subsequent sections I will attempt to answer these questions by examining the development of public commissioning during the past 30 years in the Dutch infrasector in general, and at Rijkswaterstaat, one of the largest public contracting authorities, in particular. The study took place by means of triangulation: an analysis of relevant documents, including policy documents and parliamentary discussions from the period under review, interviews with key functionaries (past and present) at Rijkswaterstaat and various market players, and my own observations during the past 30 years as an employee at Rijkswaterstaat (the last 15 years of which as a commissioning authority for various market players). Due to my personal involvement with the developments examined in this study, the interviews with key functionaries were not so much question-and-answer sessions, but more open discussions, during which I attempted to have the interviewee retrieve images of a specific period. When discussing these developments, I refer to interviews both in terms of general descriptions of these images and actual quotations from the interviewees<sup>6</sup>. In this chapter, if findings are based on my own observations, this will be indicated explicitly.

## 2.3 Context: the development of public commissioning at Rijkswaterstaat from 1985 to 2015

The analysis of the developments in the period 1985-2015 is based on three specific points in time or events that have been reconstructed according to an analysis of relevant documents and the interviews with key functionaries from the various periods. As discussed below, three events have influenced the direction and/or rate of the development during that period to such an extent that they functioned as tipping points. These are the completion of the Delta Works (*Deltawerken*) at the end of the 1980s, the Parliamentary Construction Fraud Inquiry (*Parlementaire Enquête Bouwnijverheid*) at the beginning of the current millennium and more recently the financial-economic crisis that had a severe impact on the construction sector in the Netherlands.

### The period around the completion of the Delta Works (circa 1985-1990)

In October 1986, the first phase of the Delta Plan was completed – the closure of the sea arms in the Delta region – when Queen Beatrix officially opened

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6) The references after the quotations in this section refer to the date on which the interview took place. An overview of the persons interviewed can be found in Appendix A.



*Figure 2.1: Opening of the Oosterscheldekering by Queen Beatrix on October 4, 1986  
(Photo: Rijkswaterstaat)*

the Oosterscheldekering (the Eastern Scheldt storm-surge barrier). This signaled the completion of one of the largest civil engineering projects in Dutch history. This megaproject was an outstanding incubator for innovations in many areas, both technological and organizational (Tweede Kamer, 2004; Hertogh & Westerveld (2010)). Often these innovations were born out of necessity, because conditions required new and innovative solutions, and they occurred regularly because megaprojects attract creative minds, and once they joined forces, these minds generate trendsetting ideas.

The Oosterscheldewerken (the Dutch name for a series of projects in the Eastern Scheldt) were also innovative regarding cooperation between the public and private sectors. Until that time, and also with other infrastructure projects, the civil engineering sector in the Netherlands (including Rijkswaterstaat) was dominated by the traditional commissioning process. This resulted in situations in which the commissioning authority (Rijkswaterstaat) did all the detailed design work, which the contractor then 'only' had to implement. For example, Rijkswaterstaat calculated the bearing capacity of the structures and the amount of reinforcement that was required, and the contractor focused on implementation at the construction site. Rijkswaterstaat therefore envisioned

the total project and had the required expertise in-house. “*Civil engineering bureaus existed at that time, but had little importance*” (interview 110815). The actual engineering work was done by Rijkswaterstaat. On the one hand this provided certainty and order, but on the other hand it appeared that the innovative potential in the private sector was dormant or underutilized. This situation changed with the construction of the Oosterscheldewerken. This was inevitable because everything was new and all available expertise had to be deployed to realize such an innovative project. Cooperation became the motto, and at a given time the market players involved in the project worked on a cost-plus basis, under the responsibility of Rijkswaterstaat. This cost-plus approach is sometimes blamed for the final cost of the project being much higher than the original estimates. However, the cost overrun could have also been attributed to other factors: the innovative work was difficult to impossible to estimate, or the long duration of the project resulted in inflation playing a role in the final cost.

In 1987 the Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, N. Smit-Kroes, appointed an independent committee (Tweede Kamer, 1987; CSW, 1987) to study the feasibility of a moveable storm surge barrier as an alternative for the controversial second and final component of the Delta Plan: a large-scale project to raise the height of the dikes along the rivers (Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, 1997). The committee was named the *Commissie Studie Stormvloedkering Nieuwe Waterweg* (CSW). The Minister decided to appoint an independent committee because Rijkswaterstaat could be seen as having a conflict of interest due to its involvement in the project. In that same year, the CSW announced a competition to design a storm surge barrier in the Nieuwe Waterweg between Hoek van Holland and Maassluis. Five consortia of Dutch, German and Belgian contractors submitted designs. At that time, engaging the business community for such a project was considered to be revolutionary, because such complex civil engineering projects were previously designed exclusively by Rijkswaterstaat. The design specifications for the storm surge barrier were minimized to give the designers maximum freedom. For the assessment of the submissions, CSW used the expertise of Rijkswaterstaat and external experts. Three months after the competition was announced, five consortia submitted designs with corresponding bids (Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, 1997). Once it had been decided to build a storm surge barrier, CSW chose two of the consortia and asked them to work out the technical and financial details of their designs. Ultimately, one consortium won the competition and was commissioned to make a definitive design, build a movable storm surge barrier, and maintain it for five years. This was the Maeslantkering, which became operational in 1997. The project was ultimately



*Figure 2.2: The Maeslantkering in the Nieuwe Waterweg (Photo: Rijkswaterstaat)*

realized with a modest overrun of 40 million guilders on the initial budget of 840 million (Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, 1997).

While the construction of the Oosterscheldekering was groundbreaking in several areas, the construction of the Maeslantkering marked a shift to a different form of cooperation between the public commissioning agency and private sector contractors (seen in retrospect, as discussed below). However the first change was initiated at the time of the Oosterscheldekering. With the above mentioned cooperation on a cost-plus basis, civil engineering design bureaus consisting of both private and public sector employees were already in operation, but still under the final responsibility of Rijkswaterstaat. As mentioned above, until the construction of the Oosterscheldekering and subsequent projects, all the design work had been done exclusively by Rijkswaterstaat. The shift to more private sector involvement and responsibility in designing infrastructure projects was also linked with, and strengthened by, an increasing call from poli-

ticians to shrink the civil service. This shift also kept pace with the emergence of neoliberal thinking, which had arrived in the 1980s in the Netherlands from Anglo-Saxon countries such as Great Britain (Thatcher) and the USA (Reagan) (Pollitt (2001), *New Public Management*). However, the Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management at the time, who was a member of the Dutch Liberal party, experienced the shift as too slow and perceived that the desired changes would not gain momentum internally, i.e. from within Rijkswaterstaat itself. Indeed, this would require the organization to disadvantage itself. According to responsible directors at Rijkswaterstaat from that time, after completing the Oosterscheldewerken with its large cost overruns, there was political reluctance to begin another such adventure with an unknown cost margin (interviews 040915 and 110815). When the construction of the Maeslantkering came up for discussion, the Minister therefore hesitated to approach this project in the same way as the Oosterscheldekering. Although Rijkswaterstaat had already completed a design for this new storm surge barrier, the Minister requested the CSW to ensure that both the design and the construction of the Maeslantkering would be done by the private sector. Rijkswaterstaat would remain involved, but only in the role of assessor, and no longer as designer. During the procedure, Rijkswaterstaat had to take a backseat to the private sector. As a result, the technical prestige of the commissioning authority was severely compromised (Bosch & Van der Ham, 1998). It is not surprising that Dutch politicians were not all on the same side regarding this aspect. The liberal constituency of the Minister obviously welcomed the plan to appoint an independent committee and give more responsibility to the private sector, while the more socialist parties in Parliament wondered out loud whether it was not smarter to make better use of the experience of Rijkswaterstaat, which it recently acquired with the Oosterscheldewerken, and they even questioned the independence of the committee. Below are several quotations from a debate of the Parliamentary Committee for Transport, Public Works and Water Management on April 6, 1987:

- *Member of Parliament Eversdijk (CDA): "For this study extensive use should be made of the know-how, the expertise, the contribution of Rijkswaterstaat. We have invested a great deal in this expertise. The Oosterscheldewerken are nearly finished, so these people should be extensively involved, especially in policy analysis and risk analysis." "However, without praising Rijkswaterstaat excessively - I understand that this is not advisable as well - I would like to point out that in recent years the know-how at Rijkswaterstaat has grown enormously, and that it is still present. This know-how has been expressed in studies and reports, and soon in another project of historical importance, but it is still emphatically*



- present in the people who work at Rijkswaterstaat. We should utilize this know-how.”*
- *Member of Parliament Zijlstra (PvdA): “Why appoint an external committee while we still have civil servants who are outstandingly skilled and are uniquely capable of assessing the technical, spatial planning and financial aspects? These civil servants, at Rijkswaterstaat, are skilled in various disciplines that are required for comprehensive policy analysis. Have they not proven themselves with the Delta Works projects that have been completed up to now? With such a committee there is a serious risk that important aspects will not be considered objectively. With a representative of the contractors’ consortium chairing the committee, there is a danger that any technical aspects that do not have direct commercial appeal will be inadequately addressed in the study. We believe that the Minister is taking the wrong path. The situation of working towards a single specific solution must not occur again. By taking this path, the Minister appears to be making this possible.”*
  - *Minister Smit-Kroes (VVD): “It goes without saying that we will not venture onto thin ice. This project is much too important to take such risks. We must consider all aspects of possible variants of the design. ... This must be a comprehensive approach, which we have always used before. It has been agreed with Rijkswaterstaat, and with the three distinguished men on the committee, that the entire operation will be implemented in close cooperation. So there will be optimal cooperation. I am convinced that this will lead to a positive result. ... I am committed to an objective assessment, involving contributions from all fields of expertise to which we have access.”*

Even the works council of the construction directorate of Rijkswaterstaat played a role in the debate by sending a confidential letter to the Parliamentary Committee in which it expressed concern about what this would mean for the position of employees at Rijkswaterstaat. However, the submitted motions failed to pass, and the approach of the Minister was continued (Tweede Kamer, 1987).

When it became known at Rijkswaterstaat that the Maeslantkering would not be designed in-house, the employees initially refused to cooperate on this project: *“If we were unable to design the project, then we would refuse to cooperate”* (interview 040915). The director of construction management at Rijkswaterstaat was pressured by the works council to withhold support for the Minister’s policy. This director, who had previously worked as CEO of a construction company and had experienced that such projects could also be approached differently, argued effectively that such a refusal, given the political

climate of the time, could backfire and the entire construction management staff at Rijkswaterstaat could become jobless. According to this director, *“The works council tried to put me under pressure and told me I had to refuse to accept this new approach. I tried to convince them that this was exactly the wrong strategy, that this could lead to a situation in which the entire staff of the civil engineering department would be forcibly transferred. If the staff at Rijkswaterstaat had continued to argue that they were the only ones who could design this project, then this would have been an absolutely calamitous strategy in the political context of that time.”* (interview 040915).

The design for the storm surge barrier that Rijkswaterstaat had already prepared was used to formulate the contract requirements and to assess the designs submitted by the private sector. The formulation of contract requirements turned out to be more difficult than initially assumed: *“Outsourcing is difficult, because then you have to state exactly what you want. This required a different, more systematic frame of mind, also about the work done internally. We had to ask ourselves: why do we actually do things this way? Rijkswaterstaat did not have an internal design protocol.”* (interview 040915). Within Rijkswaterstaat, there was a struggle between various factions on this point: the conservatives, who wanted to continue working in the old way, wanted detailed design specifications (*“It can only be good if the private sector designs it exactly as we would have.”*) and the progressives, who saw the new approach as a challenge, went to the other extreme and wanted the fewest possible specifications (*“Only three specifications were needed: the barrier had to be closable, it obviously had to withstand high water when closed, and then had to open again.”*) (interview 250815). The works council subsequently tried to submit the reference design to the competition, but the director rejected this: *“No, we will continue with the agreed strategy.”* (interview 040915). To initiate change within the construction management division at Rijkswaterstaat, employees were encouraged to think explicitly about the purpose of their activities and whether this contributed to the new frame of mind. The ‘heroes’ of the Oosterscheldewerken were given responsible positions in the new project to act as stewards for the new approach. The Minister, who had initiated this approach, also appeared to be closely involved in the subsequent phase. The team from Rijkswaterstaat was asked to meet with her several times to explain the progress in detail, which was rather unusual at that time.

After the winning design was selected, the quote was converted into a D&C contract for the design and construction of the barrier, which was the first contract of this type for such a large project in the Netherlands, and a contract for five years of maintenance. To emphasize the new approach, D&C was understood

to mean “no communication between commissioning agency and contractor”, according to an employee Rijkswaterstaat at the time (interview 250815). Although the commissioning authority and the contractors’ consortium were housed in the same building, there was little or no communication between them. *“It was probably not coincidental that the commissioning authority was accommodated on the upper floors and the consortium on the lower floors.”* (interview 250815). Consequently, when the detailed plans submitted by the contractors’ consortium had to be evaluated by employees at Rijkswaterstaat, this was the first time they had seen these plans. For many employees at Rijkswaterstaat, evaluating the work of others was completely new. The before-mentioned struggle between the conservative and progressive factions also emerged during this evaluation. Certainly for Rijkswaterstaat employees who had traditionally been responsible for designing highly complex civil engineering projects, it was very difficult to evaluate the work of others objectively; they would have much preferred to have designed the project themselves. *“The evaluators at the commissioning authority had to continually bite their tongues because they really wanted to participate in the design and contribute their expertise and experience,”* stated an engineer at the civil engineering department of Rijkswaterstaat who was closely involved in the project (Bosch & Van der Ham, 1998). In fact, a first selection was made here between those who were prepared for the Rijkswaterstaat of the future and those who were not or not yet (personal observation).

For the contractors, this approach was also new. The design team consisted of employees from various companies and organizations, many of whom had gained experience with the Oosterscheldewerken. The contractors’ consortium was frequently annoyed by the way in which the engineers at Rijkswaterstaat interfered with every detail of the design and all the time that this took (Bosch & Van der Ham, 1998). A design manager at the contractors’ consortium at that time stated that he had difficulty getting innovative solutions accepted by Rijkswaterstaat (interview 061115). To avoid delays in the planning, innovative ideas were sometimes abandoned. He then had the feeling that he was sitting in front of a tribunal. According to the design manager, this was partly caused by jealousy at Rijkswaterstaat, but sometimes the engineers there had a valid point. After all, they had the expertise and experience to make such judgments. However, he did not perceive a very cooperative attitude from the other side of the table. Seen in retrospect, it is possible that being asked to take an entirely new approach with such a technically innovative and complex project was asking too much from Rijkswaterstaat. In any case, working on the project led to a pioneering mindset in the private sector and to greater cooperation between businesses and certain components of the organization.

Viewed objectively, the project was successful: the costs remained reasonably within the margins (Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, 1997). As it turned out later, one crucial component of the design was eliminated for budgetary reasons at the beginning of the project, but later on, during the implementation, the design was modified again for a comparable amount. All in all, however, the conclusion was that an innovative project had been built that Rijkswaterstaat had not designed itself, and that this was done well within budgetary and planning constraints. It demonstrated that the private sector, despite the counter-arguments from the conservative faction at Rijkswaterstaat, was capable of completing such a project. From that time, the traditional procedure – in which Rijkswaterstaat worked out all the details in-house and then dictated how the project should be built by the private sector – became a thing of the past (interviews 040915 and 110815). This was a tipping point, not only for Rijkswaterstaat but also for the private sector. According to those involved, Rijkswaterstaat ‘was knocked off its pedestal’ somewhat. The success of this project also helped with the internal change process within Rijkswaterstaat. It provided more legitimacy to the new approach, which made it easier to sell to the employees. From that point in time, this approach became increasingly normal and Rijkswaterstaat started to use it with more projects. Notably, a ministers’ intervention and the appointment of an external committee were required to achieve this.

### **The period around the construction fraud inquiry (circa 2000-2005)**

The completion of the Delta Works, beginning with the construction of the Oosterscheldekering and followed by the Maeslantkering, was noted by many as the beginning of the shift of more responsibilities – and more risks – from the public sector to the private sector. The public pressure to shrink the civil service, together with the lobby from the private sector to acquire more responsibility, resulted in the continuation of this shift. Government policy was aimed at promoting innovation in, and mutual cooperation with, the private sector (Actieplan Professioneel Inkopen en Aanbesteden, Ministerie van Economische Zaken, 1999). The corresponding approach should have been for the commissioning authority to set functional requirements, rather than technical ones, and to outsource these activities instead of keeping them in-house. Other important aspects were the focus on lifecycle costs and a fair allocation of roles and risks between the public and private sectors. Due to this policy, the buyer, i.e. the government, was compelled to make deliberate and clear choices and to be innovative when commissioning new projects. In 1999 Rijkswaterstaat also published more details about the government policy in the report *Interdepartemen-*

*taal Beleidsonderzoek (IBO), Innovatief Aanbesteden bij RWS: van uitzondering naar regel* [Interdepartmental Policy Research, Innovative Commissioning at Rijkswaterstaat: from exception to rule] (Rijkswaterstaat, 1999). The following advantages of innovative commissioning were cited in the report:

- Better utilization of knowledge in the private sector;
- Improved risk allocation;
- Lower project costs;
- Increased planning flexibility;
- An enhanced international position for the Dutch private sector.

The most important conclusions and recommendations were the following:

- Rijkswaterstaat should release tasks and responsibilities and give more room to the private sector, and
- Rijkswaterstaat should transfer specific knowledge to the private sector.

The Cabinet subsequently endorsed the conclusions and recommendations from the report and ordered Rijkswaterstaat to begin deploying innovative commissioning on a large scale in the Netherlands. The action plan *Professioneel Opdrachtgeverschap 21e eeuw (POG-21)* [Professional Commissioning for the 21st Century] (Rijkswaterstaat, 2001) functioned as an umbrella framework to deal effectively with the organizational change process in practice. POG-21 emphasized the aim of the Ministry to take a fundamentally different approach to the commissioning process. This approach was different in the sense that its starting point was the societal return of the products and services of Rijkswaterstaat. It was also intended to create a more businesslike relationship between the commissioning authority and contractors. According to the plan, the intended changes could best be characterized as a shift from writing detailed specifications to contract management. Simultaneously, activities should become more standardized and uniform, based on the principle 'standard work where possible and custom work where required'. An additional impulse for this new approach was the ongoing study about the transformation of Rijkswaterstaat into an agency, resulting in increased emphasis on a businesslike attitude.

Based on the action plan and its predecessors, Rijkswaterstaat set off energetically on this new course towards innovative commissioning. However, despite the introduction of new procedures such as a project-based approach and new types of contracts, little attention was paid – especially at the beginning – to the day-to-day management of behavioral practices on the work floor. Clearly, these changes were received by the employees with mixed feelings.

At the management level, at both Rijkswaterstaat and in the private sector, stakeholders reported that there was reasonable consensus at that time about the direction that had to be taken. The response on the work floor was different, however. An evaluation from 2004 (Ministerie van Verkeer en Waterstaat, 2004) showed that the POG concept was broadly familiar to management and employees (“it concerns the relationship between Rijkswaterstaat and the private sector”), but the interpretation on the work floor ranged from narrow (“deployment of innovative contracts”) to broad (“a theme for organization-wide change with consequences for personnel, culture, process and organization”). This difference in interpretation emerged because many employees at Rijkswaterstaat still believed that the private sector was ‘not ready’ and were worried that the private sector would take all the interesting work. According to a responsible director from that time, *“We did not feel that the private sector was ready for this change, but the fact that we simply didn’t like it could have also played a role. The important thing was that we could no longer do the work we had always done, that it would have to be done elsewhere. That was not only very difficult for us to accept, but also to explain to people in our surroundings. Nevertheless, we understood the political necessity.”* (interview 110815). But not everyone in the private sector was happy with the new direction either: the previous system of working with very detailed specifications was very clear and predictable, *“so why should we take on more risks?”* (interview 100815). In any case this led to a major change in the status of Rijkswaterstaat as an employer. Until that time it was the ideal place for young civil engineers to begin their careers, but for this group Rijkswaterstaat became less attractive, while other professional groups, such as lawyers, business administrators and business experts, were just employed by Rijkswaterstaat (interview 110815 and 100815). At the same time, specific expertise that had previously been acquired exclusively at Rijkswaterstaat was transferred deliberately to the private sector. To this end, special frameworks of cooperation were established with various civil engineering bureaus, such as that with Tunnel Engineering Consultants (TEC), an engineering consortium involving Witteveen+Bos and Royal Haskoning DHV.

An important consequence of this change was that the civil engineering monodisciplinary perspective and corresponding status that had been the dominion of Rijkswaterstaat for many years continued to erode in favor of a more pragmatically oriented, multidisciplinary policy perspective (Veenswijk, 2004). During this period, the concept of ‘integral management’ became a new credo within the organization of Rijkswaterstaat. Simultaneously, an operational management concept was introduced with which the responsibilities for implementing the policy were shifted as much as possible to the local units. This

took place under the motto 'decentralized, unless'. As a result, the ongoing shift towards the private sector was implemented locally in different ways, as also concluded in the POG-21 evaluation from 2004. For the market players, this did not make it any easier to continue the change process, which was already moving very quickly. This was because the private sector also had to recruit new disciplines to implement the new allocation of roles. Stakeholders from the private sector reported that this process required a number of years, and that only recently did they begin to feel confident about responding to the changed demand from the commissioning authorities.

After this, operational management at Rijkswaterstaat was increasingly shaped by the principles of New Public Management (Pollitt, 2001) as a type of business, with mottos such as 'honor your agreements' and objectives defined in terms of output, such as output per employee, percentage of overhead and percentage of new types of contracts (Rijkswaterstaat, 2004). In the organizational culture, the accent shifted from content-based sensegiving to process-based values, norms and regulations, which paradoxically enough were called 'product-based management' and 'output-based management' (Veenswijk, 2004). The question of how the content-based expertise for managing contractors should be maintained within the organization, now that all the design work had been outsourced, became a stubborn problem for which no solution was found, and which appears difficult even today. Although the standardization that was initiated with POG-21 had a positive influence on manageability, uniformity and efficiency within the organization, this process was difficult to get started due to the shift to local implementation, as shown in the evaluation from 2004. Many employees at Rijkswaterstaat experienced the use of standardized contracts as too rigid; it also deprived them of opportunities to acquire experience and skills, thus constraining the innovation that was essential to the transition.

On November 9, 2001, the television program *Zembla* on the VARA/NPS network aired a report on alleged fraudulent activities in the construction sector. The title of the program '*Sjoemelen met miljoenen*' [Cheating with millions] concisely summarized its main message: enormous fraud in the commissioning of construction projects. Businesses allegedly made illegal price agreements and fraudulently invoiced each other. In the construction world, moreover, many payments took place off the books, to the detriment of the commissioning authority, which was systematically overcharged. In 2002, a parliamentary inquiry was launched into the nature and magnitude of the construction fraud (Parlementaire Enquête Bouwnijverheid, 2002-2003), known popularly as the *Bouwfraude Enquête* [Construction Fraud Inquiry]. The inquiry indeed ascertained

large-scale fraud in the construction sector. Due to illegal price agreements, the Dutch government had been overcharged by many millions. According to the inquiry, the traditional passive attitude of people holding powerful positions in business, the national government and monitoring agencies ensured that the fraudulent system could continue unhampered for years. However, no concrete evidence was found to support the allegation that civil servants had been bribed. The chief recommendations emerging from the parliamentary inquiry were the following: a statutory framework should be created for commissioning construction projects with improved government oversight; contact between civil service and contractors should be limited to business aspects; and the commissioning of standardized projects should be determined by the lowest price resulting from fair competition.

The causes and consequences of the construction fraud have been studied by various researchers. The most important causes were found to be the following (Dorée, 2004):

- Culture: due to the long history of banking and trade in the Netherlands, there is a natural tendency to form cooperatives, make compromises and seek consensus (e.g. the Dutch *Poldermodel*);
- Commissioning methodology: a predictable selection process in which the contract was awarded to the lowest bidder (one-dimensional competition);
- Less uncertainty for the contractor: peak workloads and were avoided and the 'curse of the lowest bidder' (the lowest bidder may disregard crucial aspects) was prevented;
- Closed system: outsiders could be eliminated relatively easily, along with businesses that no longer wanted to bid.

Additional causes include the rapid tempo with which the government shifted to innovative commissioning with new types of contracts. This introduced new responsibilities and especially new risks for contractors; certainly at the beginning, the private sector did not understand how to deal with this. To limit these risks, the contractors formed consortia. Moreover, until several years previously, a transparent form of 'price fixing' between contractors was permitted by law. Its purpose was to prevent contractors who made a mistake in their tender from being compelled to complete the project for an unrealistic price. It enabled such a contractor to withdraw from the bidding process prematurely, thus ensuring a realistic winning bid. However, colluding secretly with the aim of mutually allocating the work has always been forbidden.

Due to these factors, a method emerged that could maintain itself relatively



easily. Based on the above, it can be hypothesized that the main cause of construction fraud was not companies colluding illegally with each other, as concluded by the Parliamentary inquiry, but was more the effect and result of an imperfectly functioning market (Dorée, 2004). According to Dorée, if viewed in this way the proposed solutions from the Parliamentary inquiry, i.e. the neoliberal idea of focusing more strictly on the free market, could backfire. Indeed, an excessive focus on competition could lead to more plunging prices and ultimately to a race to the bottom. Over the long term, this could constrain innovation and technological development in the private sector, thereby standing in the way of prosperity. This is because the minimum quality requirements specified by the commissioning authority are perceived by the contractor as the maximum to be delivered.

Within Rijkswaterstaat, the construction fraud inquiry had a severe impact on the employees concerned. According to a responsible director at Rijkswaterstaat from that time: *“The construction fraud inquiry made a huge impression on me, and I was especially troubled because I had lost my personal trust in people in the private sector. For me it definitely played a role in the accelerated implementation of a more contract-driven approach.”* (interview 110815). In this way, the construction fraud resulted in various employees of Rijkswaterstaat losing their personal trust in their private-sector colleagues, whom in many cases they had known since their university days. According to a number of stakeholders, this also resulted in an internal struggle between wanting to trust people and worrying about being too naïve. In any case, it led to a much more businesslike approach to the contractors, which sometimes went so far that mutual dialogue was avoided entirely. In this sense, the parliamentary inquiry into the construction sector can also be seen as a tipping point in the cooperation between government and the private sector.

### **The period surrounding the economic crisis in the Dutch construction sector (circa 2010-2015)**

In response to the construction fraud inquiry, there was a strong call for more transparency and accountability within public contracting authorities such as Rijkswaterstaat. This is also when Rijkswaterstaat began implementing its first business plan (Rijkswaterstaat, 2004). The priorities of the plan were the following: Working in a more public-oriented fashion, generating higher quality with fewer people through more unity and less bureaucracy, and allocating roles with the private sector in a clear and businesslike fashion. At Rijkswaterstaat

this plan would be linked to a substantial reduction in staff, under the motto *'private sector, unless'*. This goal would be achieved by implementing innovative commissioning for 80% of all activities. Rijkswaterstaat would concentrate on the 'front side' of the design and implementation process, on professional and expert commissioning and on active safeguarding of the public interest. The private sector would be given the opportunity to continue the implementation process at its own discretion, while utilizing its creativity. Rijkswaterstaat aimed to incentivize the market to generate more innovative products and methods that would lead to greater societal value (more sustainability, fewer traffic problems and so forth). In addition, Rijkswaterstaat would focus more on price and quality. By taking this position, Rijkswaterstaat would become a professional commissioning authority that distances itself from the private sector, and would provide more room for the expertise and experience of the private sector while focusing on professionalism, integrity and sound market forces. At that time, this strategy led to a very distant relationship and a strong 'us versus them' mindset between government and the private sector, sometimes with ideological approaches on both sides.

The new operational approach would have consequences for Rijkswaterstaat as an organization, the size of its workforce and the knowledge and skills of its people. Previously introduced themes such as 'integral management' and 'decentralized, unless' were replaced by more centralized control. As a result, integral management was reserved for the top level of the organization. To support the more professional 'distancing' from the private sector, Rijkswaterstaat had to invest in people with other knowledge and skills and the politically imposed cutbacks in the organization were primarily sought in the technical positions. This also required a change in attitude: *"We could no longer act like we were superior, but we became a business partner for the private sector."* (Rijkswaterstaat, 2004). As a result, the organization would break loose from the situation from before the construction fraud inquiry, and trust in the construction sector would be restored through greater transparency (Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2016). In the subsequent business plan (Rijkswaterstaat, 2008) this approach was professionalized even more, and the term 'leading commissioning authority' was introduced. Among other things, this meant that the purchasing/commissioning process of Rijkswaterstaat would become more structured with multiyear programming, that market policy would become more consistent, and that the corresponding contracts would become more standardized. On the one hand this offered great advantages in terms of efficiency and predictability for the private sector, but on the other hand it left little room for

project-specific interpretation. Slowly but surely, the dialogue with the private sector was intensified and institutionalized for various phases in the construction process, including market scans, market consultations in the exploratory phase of projects, rounds of competitive dialogue during commissioning and project start-ups, and reflection on the process during construction. The objective was to incentivize good performance by the private sector with bonuses, contract extensions or subsequent contracts where possible, and disincentivize poor performance with penalties and less likelihood of contracts in the future.

Partly driven by the consequences of the construction fraud inquiry and the necessity to cut the workforce, management at Rijkswaterstaat began working energetically on reorienting towards the private sector. On the work floor, however, this turned out to be rather difficult. Many employees interpreted the motto 'private sector, unless' as a euphemism for 'fewer employees'. According to a director from that time, many employees were incapable of changing their behavior, and they did not sufficiently perceive the external pressure: *"Generally speaking, if people have done the same work for a long time, they are incapable of letting it go and watch how someone else does it."* (interview 100815). When this staff reduction actually began to take shape, the pressure ultimately increased, which sometimes led to strong emotions, especially among technically-oriented employees, who felt that they had lost job security and control over their own career. In middle management, this often resulted in a balancing act: on the one hand they felt the pressure to change from above, but on the other hand, as responsible managers they sympathized with their staff (personal observation). This was not made any easier by the fact that the private sector was slow to accept and adequately deploy its newly acquired responsibilities. Especially for activities that were relatively new for the private sector, such as stakeholder management and applying for permits, employees at Rijkswaterstaat were frequently asked how this should be done. At the executive level, this was discussed openly, but on the work floor it was seen as proof that the private sector was still incapable.

The original idea of engaging the private sector at an earlier phase was that this would lead to higher profit margins. A director from that time reported that a margin of about 10% was anticipated. This would make it possible for the necessary innovation in the sector to be implemented. In practice, however, the results were disappointing. The margins usually remained stuck at about 2%, which is very low relative to the risks taken by the private sector: *"We really had to learn how to calculate the risks more accurately."* and *"The margins that we*

*earned were not in proportion to the risks that we took.”* (interview 180915). The causes of the low margins were thought to be the fierce competition and the low entry threshold for newcomers. Working in consortia with changing partners also constrained profits. Partly as a result, the private sector was unable to change quickly enough, while the rate of change within Rijkswaterstaat was experienced by the private sector as very fast. The new responsibilities compelled the private sector to invest in new types of employees with different backgrounds. It also compelled them to deploy a different type of leadership, which was less directive and more people-oriented. According to one stakeholder, at the beginning this often failed, and the Project Manager was often frustrated in trying to control the design process, having to ask questions such as *“Why aren’t the blueprints ready?”*, and was unable to even think about answering questions from the commissioning authority (interview 180915). Slowly but surely, the private sector realized that this had to change, especially the internal processes. Ultimately this change took years to complete. A private sector executive from that time viewed the change process eventually as successful, although the shift in culture continues today. He reported that recruiting new employees with different backgrounds was an enrichment for the company. On the other hand, it can be said that the contract-oriented approach in the private sector resulted in commercialization and created a world that had little to do with the external work: *“Regarding the approach to the commissioning authority, it remained difficult to choose between aggressive tactics and being vulnerable by asking for help. Rijkswaterstaat should also been more appreciative of the very effective solutions that were emerging from the private sector. These solutions were still insufficiently appreciated not only because the commissioning authority no longer had sufficient expertise in-house to evaluate them, but also because the accountant was the one in charge.”* (interview 180915).

These examples show that the change process *‘private sector, unless’* was experienced differently by the public and private sectors. For both the government and the private sector, the change took place primarily top-down, initiated by management, while taking little account of processes that were actually taking place on the work floor (Alvesson, 2002). The conservative culture in the sector and the negative, stereotypical images that the public and private sectors held about each other – a result of the recent construction fraud inquiry – led to an increasing gap between the ideology conveyed by management and the actual practice on the work floor. Incidents tended to strengthen the traditional attitudes, which were indeed supposed to disappear due to the change process that had been initiated (Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2016).

The initiated change process could not prevent politicians in the Netherlands from being confronted with a number of severe cost overruns on large infrastructure projects. This led to an urgent demand from politicians for more predictability and transparency in the realization of such projects (interview 230915). To strengthen this demand, the coalition government agreement of 2010 even specified DBFM as a desirable type of contract for such projects based on the assumption that this would be cheaper and would lead to a predictable process with a reliable result (Rijkswaterstaat, 2011). Because the economic crisis had also impacted the Netherlands at this time, together with the introduction of this new type of contract, more risks were shifted to the market; based on efficiency considerations the contracts also became larger and larger. Due to the crisis, the private sector was compelled to accept the work, but it did not always take the risks sufficiently into account. *“If you are very hungry, you are not as picky”*, stated the top executive of one of the largest construction companies in the Netherlands in an interview with the magazine *Cobouw* (Koenen, 2015). In the end, this did not lead to the close cooperation and reliable results that were intended by the coalition government. *“Although specifying this type of contract in a Coalition Agreement was meaningful in the sense that it indicated the direction to be taken, it overlooked the fact that this was new for both government and the private sector, and they still had to learn to work with this type of contract.”* (interview 230915)

Because the government was simultaneously implementing severe budget cutbacks, it was impossible to introduce the new approach and new type of contract gradually. The choice was therefore imposed from above, and there was no discussion about whether the new type of contract was really suitable for specific project situations. With the emphasis on contract form and contract-based management, there was less room for reflection on what happened during the day-to-day practice of project implementation. Because the culture in the construction sector was focused on avoiding conflicts, it entered a vicious circle of increasing frustration, less innovation and reduced capacity for dealing with change (Sminia, 2011). An illusion was created that the contract would solve everything; if something still went wrong, new control mechanisms were introduced. Paradoxically, these mechanisms decreased the flexibility and tended to increase, rather than decrease, the chance of error (Hertogh & Westerveld, 2010).

Due to the changing allocation of roles and responsibilities, the attention of the government Project Manager shifted from content to process. This became especially obvious when things went wrong and when unplanned incidents occurred on the project site. During such incidents, the contractor wanted to

communicate in terms of content, but the commissioning authority, due to its uncertainty about the content or its fear of taking on a responsibility that had been contractually allocated to the contractor, felt compelled to exert control by means of process and procedures. Not infrequently, this resulted in miscommunication, and this method of controlling the work tended to lead to conflicts rather than solutions. As reported by a director at Rijkswaterstaat, *“It was underestimated that this shift would also mean a different personnel policy. We invested a great deal in people who were good at drawing up complex contracts, but we did not sufficiently realize that they would be less capable of accepting that contracts are not infallible, and that situations can occur on the building site that are not covered by the contract. We did not invest sufficiently in the technical core, in seniority in the construction process, in people who can communicate at that level with their counterparts and understand what is going on.”* (interview 100815)

In this way the economic crisis, which primarily impacted the private sector, led to a shift in thinking about public-private partnerships and letting go of the motto *‘private sector, unless’* and especially the associated dogmatic thinking. Due to the separation of responsibilities, the government and private sector gradually lost the dialogue with each other. The commissioning authority and the contractor, each taking their own role, should now realize a process that is guided more by the content and knowledge of the result. The idea was that this approach would increase the likelihood of a successful project. In the new Market Strategy, developed jointly by the public and private sectors, a shift can therefore be seen from separate responsibilities to responsibilities that are shared between the commissioning authority and contractor, in which these parties make better use of each other’s expertise: *‘Bouwen doe je samen’* [Building together] (Rijkswaterstaat et al., 2016).

According to Yanow and Tsoukas, because people in the construction sector appear to learn primarily from their own experience, it is important to include periodic moments of reflection in the construction process. By considering and sharing the positive and negative day-to-day experiences, the change in culture also becomes a bottom-up process, and this can enhance the process that was initiated from above (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). Because this approach cannot succeed in one go, it is important to create a culture in which there is also room for learning from mistakes, and not to choose the traditional approach in which the manager who makes a mistake is replaced by a new manager, and this new manager, because he was unable to learn from this mistake, will make the same mistake again.

Regarding the change process, the Director General of Rijkswaterstaat said the following: *“We still had a long way to go, but we were moving in the right direction. The crisis in the construction sector was also an opportunity, as a trigger for change. The trick is to transform the subsequent abrupt change into a gradually implemented change process, otherwise you don’t achieve anything. To this end, strong leadership is required, but without macho behavior on both sides. It is not a question of simply writing it up and getting back to work; it is a much more meticulous and sensitive process that we have to go through together, with patience. This will succeed only if we are able to enhance our mutual strength by focusing on cooperation. We must have the intrinsic motivation to change the construction process together.”* (interview 230915). As expressed on the front page of Cobouw magazine by the top executive in the construction world: *“This impasse can be broken only if both parties are interested in successfully completing a project. In the current social and political landscape, this is not an easy task. It requires true leadership and is not for the fainthearted. The key lies with the commissioning authority, but they cannot do this alone ... We must talk to each other and not talk about each other.”* (Koenen, 2015)

## 2.4 Analysis and discussion

In the previous section it was described how public-private cooperation in infrastructure between Rijkswaterstaat and Dutch construction companies developed during the past 30 years. During this period, a number of events occurred that, viewed in retrospect, led in any case to a shift in thinking and working within the sector. Viewed from a narrative perspective, these events led to a shift in the dominance of narratives. Table 2.2 provides an overview of these narratives, counter-narratives and illustrative quotations. It is interesting to look at how the shift in the dominance of narratives came about. The text and the table are based on the proposition that during every shift in the dominance of narratives, there is a critical moment that caused that shift. If that is the case, why was this moment so critical that the shift occurred?

What we can learn from the developments described before is that during all three periods, a new type of public-private partnership – the culture of cooperation – emerged after a struggle between various narratives. Change in the culture of cooperation therefore means a change in narratives (S. Kaplan, 2008; Merkus, 2014). The question is whether this shift occurred independently, or whether a critical event, a trigger, was required, such as the intervention of the Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, in the approach to the construction of the storm surge barrier in the Nieuwe Waterweg.

Episode	Societal trend/ carrier	Narratives	Counter narratives	Critical event/ trigger
<p>Completion of the Delta Works (circa 1985-1990)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emergence of neoliberalism</li> <li>- New Public Management</li> <li>- More private sector, less government</li> </ul>	<p>The expertise is present at Rijkswaterstaat; this is where the design work is done, the private sector implements what Rijkswaterstaat says.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Member of Parliament (PvdA): Why appoint an external commission while we still have civil servants who are outstandingly skilled and are uniquely capable of assessing the technical, spatial planning and financial aspects?</i></li> <li>- <i>Employees at Rijkswaterstaat: If we cannot do the design work, then we refuse to cooperate. If we leave it up to the private sector, objectivity will be lost and conflicts of interest can occur.</i></li> <li>- <i>Member of Parliament (PvdA): With a commission such as this one, there is a major risk that important aspects will not be considered objectively.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Not another cost overrun like the Oosterscheldewerken.</p> <p>To realize such complex projects, all available expertise is required, also that from the private sector.</p> <p>One faction at Rijkswaterstaat (the 'young progressives') is enthusiastic about implementing the new types of contracts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Director at Rijkswaterstaat: If Rijkswaterstaat had argued that it was the only one who could design this project, then in the context of this time it would have been an absolutely calamitous strategy.</i></li> <li>- <i>Minister VVD: I am committed to an objective assessment, involving contributions from all expertise to which we have access.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Intervention by a liberal minister who appoints an external committee and wants to have the project designed and built by the private sector (Design &amp; Construct contract).</p>
<p>Construction fraud inquiry (circa 2000-2005)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increasing commercialization, output-based management</li> <li>- Broader societal focus; rejection of a purely technocratic approach</li> </ul>	<p>The hard core at Rijkswaterstaat tries to retain the substantive design work; they find it difficult to let go of their technical expertise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Rijkswaterstaat: We did not feel that the private sector was ready for this change, but the fact that we simply didn't like it could have also played a role.</i></li> </ul> <p>The private sector is not ready for the new approach and tries to reduce risks with illegal collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Private sector: We really had to learn to calculate risks correctly; at the beginning mistakes were often made and the Project Manager ineffectively tried to control the design process with questions such as "why aren't the blueprints ready?"</i></li> </ul>	<p>Introduction of new disciplines, less focus on the technical side alone; commercialization due to contract- and output-based management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Director at Rijkswaterstaat: The construction fraud inquiry made a huge impression on me, and I was especially troubled because I had lost my personal trust in people in the private sector. For me it definitely played a role in the accelerated implementation of a more contract-driven approach.</i></li> </ul>	<p>Construction fraud inquiry that led to accelerated implementation of a contract-based management approach to the private sector.</p>



<p>Economic crisis in the construction sector (circa 2010-2015)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic crisis in the construction sector that led to a number of bankruptcies or near bankruptcies</li> <li>- Societal discomfort with the increasing regulatory mania in the Netherlands</li> </ul>	<p>Focus on transparency and accountability. Centralized management focusing on standardization and efficiency</p> <p>Distance from the private sector; strict allocation of risks.</p> <p>Strong focus on control; in case of problems, looking for the guilty party instead of determining the causes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Private sector: There should have also been more appreciation for very effective solutions from the private sector. These solutions were still insufficiently appreciated by Rijkswaterstaat, not only because the commissioning authority no longer had sufficient expertise in-house to evaluate the solutions, but also because the accountant was the one in charge.</i></li> <li><i>Our profit margins are not proportional to our risks. If you are very hungry, you are less choosy</i></li> </ul> <p>(due to the economic crisis, the private sector felt compelled to submit low bids and took major risks as a result).</p>	<p>A good contract does not make a good project. The parties sometimes need each other to realize a project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Rijkswaterstaat: It was underestimated that this shift would also mean a different personnel policy. We invested a great deal in people who were good at drawing up complex contracts, but we did not sufficiently realize that they would be less capable of accepting that contracts are not infallible and that situations can occur on the build-ing site that are not covered by the contract. This will succeed only if we are able enhance our mutual strength by focusing on cooperation.</i></li> <li>- <i>Private sector: We must talk to each other and not talk about each other. This impasse can be broken only if both parties are interested in successfully completing a project.</i></li> </ul>	<p>The economic crisis compelled the private sector and the government to reflect on the big picture and led to the notion that "things have to change", which resulted in a new Joint Market Strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Rijkswaterstaat: The crisis in the construction sector was also an opportunity, as a trigger for change.</i></li> </ul>
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Table 2.2: Shifting narratives as a trigger for change in public-private cooperation

What we also see is the struggle of duality in the governance of construction projects between the control-oriented approach, with its focus on output, and the more cooperation-oriented process approach (Clegg, 1992; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). Certainly in the most recent period described above, we see that the contract-based management approach was experienced as increasingly restrictive, and that there was an increasing call for more cooperation, as ultimately expressed in the joint Market Strategy. The struggle also clearly illustrates the stratification of the problem. Although the origin of the duality in public-private cooperation and governance of construction projects lies in the societal debate between the belief in the power of the market versus the belief in a powerful government, the ultimate effects were visible on the work floor, where people felt compelled to radically change how they worked. These are also the 'micro-stories' from the work floor that give effective direction to the change in culture within an organization, which often differs from the original top-down intention (Balogun, 2006; Veenswijk, 2006). This is illustrated by the strong emotional reactions of Rijkswaterstaat employees to the construction fraud inquiry, which possibly contributed to the overshooting of management policy to limit discussions with the contractors. Recent research has shown that the effective restoration of mutual trust after a breach of integrity (such as the construction fraud inquiry) requires more than the audit-oriented approach (Eberl, Geiger, & ABländer, 2015; Gillespie, Dietz, & Lockey, 2014).

Characteristics of the control-oriented approach include a lack of mutual trust, a strong faith in contracts and a strict allocation of risks. The cooperation-oriented approach is characterized by an intrinsic motivation to cooperate and a belief that cooperating and sharing risks leads to greater value for both parties. The hazard of the first approach is that conflicts, because cooperation is not sought as a solution, lead to ever-increasing mistrust and an ever-stronger focus on contract-based management, resulting in a downward spiral. But the second approach is not without hazards either. Indeed, if this approach overshoots it can lead to groupthink and naivety. We see both approaches during the period around the construction fraud inquiry, but also during the economic crisis. The first time the focus was on output- and contract-based management, the second time it went in the opposite direction. This happens more frequently when dissatisfaction about a specific approach or policy becomes widespread; this results in a call to restore the old ways, which leads to overshoot to the other side<sup>7</sup>, while there are also good reasons to let go of the old ways. It is therefore not a question of taking one approach to the exclusion of the other,

but finding a balance between both approaches (Clegg, 1992; Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003).

Let me now return to the question of whether and how a specific critical event can act as a trigger, thereby shifting the dominance of narratives in an organization or sector. Generally speaking, the inherent inertia of an organization or sector results in changes occurring gradually, at most. For more radical changes, critical events or triggers are required (Halinen, Salmi, & Havila, 1999). Looking back on the developments in the construction sector in recent years, it is apparent that this was indeed the case, although certain events can be labeled as critical in retrospect in the sense that they functioned as catalysts to amplify the power or meaning of an already-present but dormant narrative to such an extent that it dominated the formerly prevailing narrative (Weick et al., 2005). Viewed in retrospect, these events can be characterized or framed as tipping points in the change process regarding the governance of construction projects. From a social constructivist perspective, these events can be labeled as tipping points because people have given them symbolic value afterwards. Indeed, labeling them as tipping points in this chapter also contributes to this symbolism.

However, this is obviously not the only reason that an event is considered critical and has functioned as a trigger. What is also important, which was the case in all three of the above episodes, is that at the time of transition a counter-narrative was already becoming increasingly manifest, and that this counter-narrative linked up with a societal trend, which propelled and strengthened the counter-narrative (Flyvbjerg, 1998). In the example of the completion of the Delta Works, this societal trend was the emergence of neoliberalism and New Public Management. An important aspect therefore appears to be the presence of a societal trend or ideology which can propel and give shape to a new narrative or new culture. Indeed, narratives are not powerful because they are true, but primarily because they connect with other narratives or societal trends that are already powerful (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Weick et al., 2005). In the theoretical framework, however, it is argued that the narrative must be believable, at least for some of the employees. For example, after the private sector showed that it was capable of designing and building the storm surge barrier in the Nieuwe Waterweg, this made an important contribution to the sensemaking of the change process for employees at Rijkswaterstaat; see also Balogun (2006). At the same time, within

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7) See also the article by Prof. Weggeman in the NRC that called for restoration of the position of head engineer (Weggeman, 2015).

the organization there must also be a 'leading group' of employees who support the change, help to give shape and color to the new narrative and can take it further within the organization. In the case of the Delta Works, these were the 'heroes' of the Oosterscheldewerken who catalyzed the new approach. Indeed, the employees from the leading group tend to attach more importance to the symbolism of the critical event than the conservatives in the organization, because they are inherently more open to the change (Jansen, Shipp, & Judd, 2016).

In any case, timing is also crucial. An important reason why the construction fraud inquiry had such a large impact on the construction sector is because it acted as a catalyst for the shift to a greater focus on output- and contract-based management, which until that time had proceeded with difficulty (evaluation POG-21). Finally, the impact of the symbolic moment is also important. At the completion of the Delta Works, this was the intervention of the Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, which gave symbolic meaning to the moment. This links up with the proposition of Flyvbjerg that the power of a narrative is determined primarily by who is telling the story (empowerment) (Flyvbjerg, 1998). For the other two points in time, this concerned events with major emotional consequences in the construction sector: the construction fraud inquiry into the large-scale fraud of construction companies, which led to loss of trust in former classmates, and the economic crisis, which led to bankruptcy or gigantic losses at a number of large construction firms, often with massive layoffs as a result. Emotion is an important motor that drives change (Bate, 2004; Maitlis et al., 2013), which can also explain why some parliamentary inquiries have more societal impact than others. For example, the 'Fyra' inquiry from 2015, due to its technical complexity, elicited fewer emotional reactions from society and consequently had primarily political significance. In contrast, the construction fraud inquiry was framed rather simply - fraudulent activities of people - and consequently led to a simple response: people from the government and construction companies were forbidden to talk with each other; eliminate the human factor and focus entirely on contract compliance.

## 2.5 Summary and conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to consider culture changes within organizations from a narrative perspective. The case study concerned the development of public-private cooperation in the Dutch infrastructure sector during the past 30 years, focusing specifically on the contrast between the organizational changes within Rijkswaterstaat as a large commissioning authority and the changes within the Dutch construction sector. From the narrative perspective, it was argued

that cultural changes occur as a result of new narratives becoming dominant over old ones within an organization or sector. It was also argued that a critical event or trigger is required to initiate a tipping point or a different dynamic balance between narratives. The research focused on how such a critical event can function as a trigger and which characteristics can be linked to the event. In summary, the following elements can be reconstructed from these events:

- There must be a *societal trend* which can propel and give shape to the new narrative; indeed, narratives gain power if they link up with a powerful trend.
- The *impact of the symbolic moment* must be sufficiently great, whether this due to the status of the initiator at the time (in the case of the Delta Works this is illustrated by the intervention of the Minister), or the magnitude of the emotion that the moment elicits in the stakeholders (loss of trust in people, massive layoffs).
- Linked to the societal trend, the *timing of the moment* it is also important.
- Within the organization, there must be a *leading group* of employees who support the change, help shape it and as *editors* give meaning and nuance to the change and can take it further within the organization (Veenswijk, 2006).
- Finally, the *framing of the triggers* is important. Indeed, by framing them afterwards, the cultural changes within the sector give weight and meaning to the triggers. Therefore, the moments themselves are not critical, but they have been made critical by the way in which people and organizations have responded to them (Halinen et al., 1999).

The following question then remains: can symbolic moments, constructed deliberately upfront, also give direction to an intended cultural change so that they can actually function as triggers? Considering the example of the Delta Works, when the Minister gave a ‘final push’ to the ongoing change process with her intervention, it appears that this question can be answered in the affirmative, although the other elements were also important. The threatening prediction of the responsible director at Rijkswaterstaat, that refusing to participate in the change would mean the end of the organization’s civil engineering department, also contributed to this final push. Therefore, this involves a crucial combination of factors, including a carefully built narrative that appeals to individual responsibility and the power of individual employees to help give shape to the change. In this way, a dynamic process in the sector can arise in which the cultural change can be achieved through the bottom-up development of narratives. These changes are more durable than those achieved through static triggers that are initiated top-down (Bate, 2005; Veenswijk, 2006). Considering the current practice, with its excessive focus on contract-based manage-

ment and control mechanisms, a narrative perspective on the downside of these mechanisms could reveal how organizations become trapped in their own actions, which could help to legitimize processes of change (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Vaara & Tienari, 2008). As shown in the previous analysis, framing gave meaning in retrospect to the tipping points in the development of public commissioning in the infrasector, which acted as a trigger for change. Similarly, frames can also be used to provide direction to change processes in the future (S. Kaplan, 2008).

Another aspect that emerged from the case study is the struggle or duality in the governance of construction projects between the contract- and output-based approach on one side and the more cooperation-based process approach, with a focus on added value for both the private sector and government, on the other. This struggle appeared in all three of the episodes in the case study, during which the dominance shifted between the one approach and the other. In line with Sundaramurthy & Lewis (2003) it can also be concluded that one approach is not superior to the other, but that both approaches are effective in different circumstances. In a subsequent chapter I will explore what this means in concrete terms for public-private cooperation in the infrasector, how a balance between contract-based management and relationship-based management can be achieved and which types of cooperation are suited to this process.

I would like to close this chapter by again citing Dorée's warning (2004), which he made in response to the recommendations of the construction fraud inquiry: commissioning authorities should be cautious about taking a management approach that is based too strictly on competition and market price. Recent examples from the infrasector in the Netherlands have shown that this can lead to collapsing prices, sometimes with disastrous consequences (Rijkswaterstaat et al., 2016). Remarkably, two of the directors interviewed for this study independently cited a statement made more than a century ago by John Ruskin, the English social critic (1819-1900), thus breathing new life into his work:

*"It's unwise to pay too much, but it's worse to pay too little. When you pay too much, you lose a little money - that's all. When you pay too little, you sometimes lose everything, because the thing you bought was incapable of doing the thing it was bought to do. The common law of business balance prohibits paying a little and getting a lot - it can't be done. If you deal with the lowest bidder, it is well to add something for the risk you run, and if you do that you will have enough to pay for something better."*

# Chapter 3

Resilient Partnering:

On building trust and adaptive capacity between partners

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter on theory consists of four components. First, the key debates and development of project management as a field of study are discussed. This is important as a context for cooperation in projects between commissioning authorities and contractors. In Section 3.2, it is explained that researchers in this field look at projects and project management from different perspectives: as ‘technical instruments’ and as ‘social constructs’. In this chapter I will explain why I have taken the latter interpretive approach in my research into project management.

In Section 3.3 I focus on a critical success factor for projects and project management: cooperation between people and organizations. I briefly describe various forms, gradations and elements of cooperation and show that cooperation, like project management, can be viewed in different ways. In my research I connect with the more recent literature on cooperation, in which a shift can be seen from functional and contract-based management to a more substantial and holistic approach. In the latter approach, the concept of *partnering* was introduced to the field of study. In Section 3.4, this concept will be discussed in more detail, including references to the various scientific perspectives on this concept. In the relevant literature, partnering is not only addressed as a set of methods and techniques, but it also emerges that partnering involves a change in attitude and behavior in the partners and in people who cooperate with each other. An important aspect in this regard is that the interests, as well as the perceptions of interests, of organizations and people differ and can also change in time. Factors are addressed that can influence this entire process, such as personal experiences from the past or frameworks from a parent organization. From an interpretive perspective, this means that the implementation and the effect of partnering are pluralistic, which is then explained in this chapter. As a result, partnering becomes a dynamic and iterative process of which the final implementation will be determined by the collective experiences acquired during the course of the project. Finally, in Section 3.5, it is explained that the parties should also seek a balance between a system-oriented approach, based on contracts and standard operational methods, and a more process-oriented approach, in which parties develop the capacity to reflect and learn more effectively to deal with unexpected events. It is explained that trust and adaptive capacity are required to achieve this. In literature, the term resilience is sometimes used as a synonym for adaptive capacity. Resilience and trust, and the balance between contract-based management and control on one hand and freedom of movement and relationships on the other, are the



central elements in the interpretive approach to partnering between commissioning authorities and contractors, and are consequently the central themes in my research.

### 3.2 From projects as technical instruments to projects as social constructs

To draw a clear picture of cooperation between commissioning authorities and contractors in large infrastructure projects – or in a broader sense the management of these projects – it is useful to first explore the historical development of project management. Understanding how specific practices developed in the past will help us to better understand their current dynamics (Söderlund & Lenfle, 2013). The historical description of the development of project management as a field of study is based on the work of other researchers (Khan, Gul, & Shah, 2011; Morris, 2013a; Morris & Geraldi, 2011; Van Marrewijk, 2015). Notably, in his book *Reconstructing Project Management* (2013a), Morris described this development in detail. The description below is based on this work. As Morris also indicated, however, it should be understood that history is no longer considered to be an objective science, but is seen more as a social construct. Indeed, historians always view historical ‘facts’ from their own perspectives, from which they give greater weight, or different interpretations, to certain facts than others. Therefore, it is sometimes suggested that one should *study the historian to understand the history* (Carr, 1961). Nevertheless, in this chapter I will attempt – as objectively as possible – to provide a concise summary of the historical development of project management as a field of study.

As a first step, I would like to define the concepts of *project* and *project management*. The concept of *project* has many definitions (Morris (2013a), Wijnen (1984), Harrison (2004), among others). In a general sense it can be stated that a project is an activity, limited in time and resources, with the aim of creating something unique. A project is usually implemented in cooperation with different people and organizations (PMI, 2013). All projects, large or small, have a similar sequential (plan-based) approach: (1) determine the desired result, (2) prepare a strategy on how and with which resources this result will be achieved, (3) make a plan, (4) implement the plan and (5) complete the project and determine whether the desired result has been achieved. Consequently, projects differ from more routine, continuous activities such as a production line in a factory. The concept of *project management* can subsequently be seen as the control of the above-mentioned activities.

Projects have existed since the emergence of mankind. Centuries ago, complex projects were implemented, such as the Great Wall of China and the Pyramids of Giza. To complete the pyramids, an estimated 70,000 people moved approximately 25 million tons of stone. Clearly, to make an operation of this size possible, some form of organization, of project management, was required, although it probably had a different name. Only in the 20th century did project management become a serious field of study. It is known that the Greeks and Romans divided up large building projects, such as the city walls of Athens and the Colosseum of Rome, into smaller work packages and commissioned various contractors to build them. The Greek philosopher Plutarchus (circa 46-120 AD) could have been referring to modern-day commissioning practices as well when he wrote the following: *“When the local authorities intend to contract the construction of a temple or the erection of a statue, they interview the artists who apply for the job and submit their estimates and drawings; whereupon they select the one who, at the lowest price, promises the best and quickest execution.”* (Straub in Morris, 2013a, p.14).

In the subsequent centuries, the management of large projects was based largely on craftsmanship, experience and intuition, although in that era large infrastructure works were also approached in a more or less project-based fashion. Specialization was based primarily on the various crafts (hence the guilds) rather than on specific positions (such as the engineer or the Project Manager). This situation began to change only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of the industrial revolution. The industrialization of work was accompanied by a different frame of mind about organizations and their management. The term ‘scientific management’ was introduced, referring to a mechanistic approach to repetitive activities (Taylor, 1911). In this context, in 1917 the first bar charts for planning were introduced, known as Gantt charts, named after their inventor Henry Gantt (Clark, 1952). These charts and the mechanistic approach would be used intensively for decades in the management of major infrastructure projects.

As a field of study, project management began to develop rapidly during the Second World War and the decades thereafter, especially as part of military and aerospace projects (Manhattan Project, US Air Force and NASA with its Apollo projects). At that time the focus was still on the technical side of projects, on ‘tangible’ aspects such as control, planning techniques and methodologies (such as CPM –Critical Path Method – and PERT- Planning and Evaluation Review Technique). It goes without saying that these methodologies made effective use of the electronic computer, which had recently become available. In 1959, one of the first articles on project management was published in the *Harvard Business Review* (Gaddis, 1959). Remarkably, in his article Gaddis primarily

emphasized the people management aspect and to a lesser extent the instruments and techniques that dominated the debate on project management, certainly into the 1970s. An important characteristic of the NASA projects was that these could be implemented in the rather isolated world in which NASA (and ESA/ESTEC in Europe) operated at that time. When the methods developed by NASA and others were applied to projects that had to be implemented in the midst of a political/administrative arena, this resulted in major problems with cost overruns and project delays (Hall, 1980; Sayles & Chandler, 1971). In the early 1970s, projects in the Western world, with the emergence of the environmental movement and similar lobby groups, were increasingly influenced by external factors such as politics, economics and environmental concerns. The standard approach to project management until that time was to build 'a fence around the project', and assume that the rest of the world was 'malleable'. However, the technocratic reverse reasoning that was deployed for such projects frequently led to problems with their acceptance by society and to criticism of the corresponding approach. Until that time, little attention was paid to the societal context and its impact on the process and outcome of projects. Concepts such as stakeholder management did not yet exist.

At the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, the realization therefore began to grow that project management was a specific field of study, and not 'only' something that engineers do 'on the side'. At the same time, there was a need to develop a type of certification for Project Managers, a 'license to operate'. To implement the certification, a community for project management (PMBOK: Project Management Body of Knowledge) was established by the Project Management Institute (PMI). The handbook published by this organization focused primarily on standard methodologies concerning the realization of the project outcome (scope) by controlling a number of standard project focus points: time, money, quality, information and organization (Wijnen & Storm, 1984). According to Morris, when preparing the PMBOK handbook, PMI focused primarily on the instrumental side of project management, such as delineation, phasing and control based on time and money. As a result, it became more of an instruction book than a body of knowledge (Morris, 2013a). The handbook did not provide an overview of other aspects that are necessary for successful management of complex projects. As Morris noted, the handbook did for example not address the leadership styles that are so important to project success and did not discuss how to deal with the complexity and ambiguity of the societal context of projects. Indeed, major infrastructure products are generally long term and are therefore impacted by a changing social environment and political climate. Considering projects and project management as objectively definable enti-

ties disregards the fact that projects are essentially socially constructed, are created by people, and are therefore ambiguous by definition (Morris, 2013a).

Due to disappointing project results, researchers in the 1980s and 1990s began to look more at what makes projects and projects management successful or unsuccessful (Jaselskis & Ashley, 1988; Morris & Hough, 1987; Pinto & Slevin, 1987). The result of these studies was a broader and more holistic view on projects and project management, and on the factors that result in successful projects. This was also the period in which the academic world of organization experts and social scientists began to gain interest in projects as temporary organizations and in the management of these organizations. This resulted in a different epistemological view of the field of study. Until that time, research into projects was conducted primarily in an instrumental and practice-oriented fashion, and was largely normative and prescriptive, with a focus on what should happen to improve project management. But after this time, researchers began to focus increasingly on what actually happens in projects (Packendorff, 1996). This new scientific approach, introduced under the term *Practice Turn* (Schatzki, Knorr-Ketina, & Von Savigny, 2001), emphasized action and interaction between people and organizations, and studied what people do and say regarding a specific event (Cicmil, Williams, Thomas, & Hodgson, 2006; Lindgren & Packendorff, 2007). In this approach, project organizations are seen as complex social environments in which all participants have their own norms, values and interests, and can respond in different ways to a specific situation or context. In literature after the turn of the century, we therefore see a shift from a functional approach to a more substantial approach, with more attention for the 'soft' side of project management, based on the idea that context is not predictable and that management which is based only on hard elements does not guarantee project success (Bresnen, 2007; Bresnen, Goussevskaia, & Swan, 2005; Bresnen & Marshall, 2000, 2002; Cicmil, 2006; Morris, 2013b; Pitsis et al., 2004; Söderlund, 2004; Van Marrewijk, Clegg, Pitsis, & Veenswijk, 2008). Table 3.1 illustrates the shift in focus from projects as technical instruments to projects as social constructs. In the technical instrument approach, the emphasis is on the delineation of the work and a rigid system-oriented tactic with clearly defined tasks for all project staff. In contrast, the social construct approach assumes a changing context, and the emphasis is much more on the necessity of human interaction to arrive at acceptable project results. In addition, the aim of the technical approach is reducing complexity to make the project more manageable, while in the social construct approach this complexity is embraced and is used to generate added value for the project.

	Project as a technical instrument	Project as a social construct
<b>Perspective</b>	Feasibility / manageability	Human interaction
<b>Focus</b>	Methods / techniques Fixed roles / task-based management Rational control	Adaptive capacity Flexibility / ambiguity Context and complexity
<b>Characteristics</b>	Reductionistic (reducing complexity through simplification) Restrictive ('fence' around the project)	Holistic (embrace complexity; 'everything is related') Interactive (fluid boundaries, co-creation)
<b>Motive</b>	Efficiency (according to plan, on time and budget)	Effectiveness (impact on society)
<b>Epistemological position</b>	Normative	Interpretive
<b>Rationality</b>	Functional	Substantial
<b>Relevant authors</b>	Harrison & Lock, Wijnen & Storm, PMBOK guide	Morris, Bresnen, Söderlund, Clegg

Table 3.1: Projects as technical instruments and as social constructs

The foregoing does not lead to the conclusion that one approach should replace the other and that instruments and rational control are no longer important for project success. Both approaches are important for project success and should therefore not be seen separately from each other (Bruner, 1990). It can also be stated that no single theory can be applied to the implementation of the concept of project management (Koskela & Howell, 2002). Caution is therefore required when making definitions and using standards and rules. The way in which these are formulated and used will influence the outcomes of projects and project success! Consequently, the concept of 'project success' is pluralistic: when is a project successful and who determines that? Is a project successful when it is delivered 'according to plan, on time and on budget'? Or is it successful if the completed project makes the best possible contribution to the needs of the commissioning authority and the final user, which in the case infrastructure projects is usually society. According to Morris, it should be the latter. If this is not the case, he argued, then project management would become an inward-directed field of study with little hope for the future (Morris, Patel, & Wearne, 2000). Consequently, projects and project management should not

focus only on efficiency, but certainly on effectiveness as well. In my research I therefore connect with and elaborate on the interpretive approach of project management, focusing on the balance between instruments and rational control on the one hand, and adaptive capacity and social interaction on the other.

### 3.3 Cooperation as a success factor for infrastructure projects

As indicated in the previous section, cooperation between people and organizations is a crucial component of projects and project management, certainly regarding the realization of large infrastructure projects. This was the case with projects in antiquity and is still the case today, although with the increasing complexity of the context in which projects must operate, the cooperative relationships between the parties involved have also increased in number and complexity (Pitsis, Sankaran, Gudergan, & Clegg, 2014). Examples include cooperation between a project organization – as a temporary organizational context – and the parent organization, cooperation with stakeholders such as municipalities, provinces and many other public or private organizations that are influenced by or hold interests in the construction of the new infrastructure, and cooperation with contracting parties such as construction companies, engineering bureaus and suppliers. To effectively realize a project, all parties involved in the project should combine their knowledge, skills and experience and search jointly for solutions that extend beyond their own horizon (Gray, 1989; Pitsis et al., 2004).

Despite differences in culture, operational methods and interests between organizations, the parties involved depend on each other, which makes interaction or cooperation inevitable. However, in the construction sector many examples can be found of problems with cooperation, especially between the commissioning authority and contractor (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). The resulting lack of integration between parties and a culture in which blame is shifted back and forth between parties instead of looking for solutions, have led to disappointing project results (Dietrich, Eskerod, Dalcher, & Sandhawalia, 2010; Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011; Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008). As stated in the previous chapter, the construction sector, after receiving severe criticism from society for these disappointing results, felt compelled to focus on better cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor (Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2016). In the research on this topic, cooperation in a complex environment such as the construction sector is also seen as a critical factor for a successful project (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Meng, 2011; Vaaland, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). If parties

Level of interaction	Type	Perspective	Time required to achieve this	Effort /added value
<b>Cooperation</b>	Superficial, informal	Sharing of information; taking account of each other's aims	Short term	Low
<b>Coordination</b>	More commitment, along formal lines	Besides sharing information, also coordinating planning, activities and risks; seeking efficient task performance and win-win situations	Medium term	Medium
<b>Collaboration</b>	Intense relationship, based on mutual trust	Sharing risks; added value/ synergy that is more than the sum of the parts	Long term	High

Table 3.2: Three levels of interaction between organizations (Keast et al., 2007)

are able to find a way to cooperate with each other, in which knowledge is exchanged, problems are solved, interests are brought into line and potential conflicts are addressed before they become claims, this will contribute to a more positive project result. However, cooperation between the parties involved in large infrastructural projects is not only difficult and complex, but is also hard work (Williams, 2002).

In the literature on cooperation, many forms, gradations and criteria are described. Regarding gradations of cooperation, the work of Keast et al. (2007) and Smits (2013) is relevant. For example, Keast and colleagues distinguish between three levels of interaction, with increasing intensity: *cooperation*, *coordination* and *collaboration*. Notably, some researchers use these terms interchangeably, but here they are used to clarify the level and intensity of interaction between parties; see Table 3.2.<sup>8</sup>

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8) In this thesis the term 'cooperation' is used as collective term for the interaction between people and organizations.

With the increasing intensity of interaction, the difficulty for the parties to achieve this also increases. For example, the first level requires little effort but will not often yield much value. At the third level (collaboration), the likelihood of achieving added value is much greater, but it also requires much more effort and a change in attitude and behavior. The parties must also take a vulnerable position, which is not always easy. In practice, according to Keast et al. (2007), they therefore have the tendency to fall back to the first level because this is more familiar, safer and easier to control; it is often more compatible with the existing structures in organizations. The art is therefore to choose the best type of cooperation for the situation and the time, based on a joint aim: “*Collaborate on everything is a major inefficiency, we should only collaborate when issues are complex or where they cut across organizations. So get the right mix.*” (Keast et al., 2007, p. 21). In long-term and complex infrastructure projects, creating collaboration has clear added value.

Smits (2013) introduces the term *Collabyrinth*, a merger of the words Collaboration and Labyrinth, to reflect the complexity of cooperation. In her research, Smits also looked at cooperation in day-to-day practice, at how people and organizations actually act, thus giving meaning to the aforementioned *practice turn*. To this end, she divided practices of cooperation into three categories and ranked them on a horizontal scale, known as the *collaboration continuum*, which was previously introduced by Huxham & Vangen (2000). The categories are positioned from left to right as follows (A) Adverse practices that constrain cooperation, (B) Building practices that are aimed at establishing cooperation, and (C) Connecting practices that effectively realize and enhance cooperation. With this categorization, Smits attempts to demonstrate that attention for practices in project management and cooperation is essential to better understand how actors give meaning to intercultural cooperation and to understand what they do, how they do this and under which conditions they implement these practices (Smits, 2013). Smits thus connects the actual practice of cooperation with the work of Keast et al. (2007): where Keast reveals gradations, Smits focuses more on the practices that are suited to these gradations.

The above examples clearly show that cooperation is not simple, that it can be viewed from various perspectives, and that it can vary in intensity: from a monolinear and commercial interpretation, focusing on increasing efficiency, to a more holistic interpretation based on mutual trust and focusing on increasing effectiveness and added value. Viewed from a scientific perspective, cooperation can therefore be considered in a similar way as project management



in a broader sense, as discussed in the previous section. Based on the previous assertion that cooperation between people in organizations is an essential component of projects and project management, this is a logical conclusion. In the literature on types of cooperation between commissioning authorities and contractors in large infrastructure projects, we also see this dual interpretation. In some of the research on cooperation, the focus is primarily functional and oriented to contract management and task management and to parties maintaining consistent roles (Aarseth, Andersen, Ahola, & Jergeas, 2012; Chen, 2011; Jacobsen & Choi, 2008; Pinto, Slevin, & English, 2009; Suprpto, Bakker, & Mooi, 2015; S. Verweij, 2015), while in other (often more recent) research, a shift can be seen to a more substantial and holistic approach, which takes greater account of the ambiguous context in which projects – and the cooperating parties – have to function (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Veenswijk, Van Marrewijk, & Boersma, 2010). In the published research that takes this interpretive approach, we also see the appearance of terms to characterize this method of cooperation, such as *partnerships* and *partnering*. The previously discussed categorization of Keast can also be positioned in this perspective, in which *cooperation* and *coordination* are compatible with the functional approach, and *collaboration* is clearly based on the more substantial approach. The interpretive approach is compatible with the focus on practices that give actual shape to cooperation, as indicated by Smits.

### 3.4 Partnering – a dynamic and interactive process towards cooperation

The concept of *partnering*, as described in the scientific literature, has different meanings for different people, in different situations and at different points in time (Haley & Shaw, 2001). However, there appears to be consensus that essentially two categories of partnering can be distinguished: the first concerns long-term, commercial and strategic agreements between different organizations, and the second focuses more on the process of achieving cooperation in temporary project situations (Manley, Shaw, & Manley, 2015). In the remainder of this chapter, when I use the term partnering I mean this second category. In this case as well, multiple definitions are provided in the relevant literature. Below, I would like to cite two examples of these definitions:

- Khan et al. (2011) define partnering as a mutual agreement between the commissioning authority and contractor with the aim of avoiding antagonistic behavior, and seeking cooperation with the aim of achieving joint aims.

This definition emphasizes that projects are essentially dynamic. As a result, overly rigid and strictly defined contractual agreements at the beginning of the project entail the risk of insufficient cooperation and partnering, leading to the possibility of delays, cost overruns, claims and dissatisfaction of one or both parties. Predefined penalty clauses are a sign of distrust between parties, while the focus in partnering should be on the joint management of risks, thereby improving technical performance and improving customer satisfaction.

- Ronco & Ronco (1996) describe partnering as a process of communication between parties to improve and jointly build a culture of teamwork, cooperation and trust between people and organizations that are working on a project. They do not view partnering from an explicitly judicial perspective, but primarily from a relational perspective. In addition, partnering is seen as a process which reflects action and not just words.

It is emphatically not my intention to arrive at a new definition of the concept of partnering. More important for my argumentation is to investigate which aspects of professional practice are considered to be decisive for partnering, and whether an unambiguous picture can be derived from this. Both examples of definitions of partnering indicate an interpretive approach to cooperation that centers on working towards mutual trust and achieving added value. It is also clear that partnering does not happen by itself; it is hard work for both parties (Manley et al., 2015). Various researchers have therefore established criteria and checklists for the joint development of partnering. These criteria range from system-oriented conditions to more value-oriented conditions. To emphasize that partnering does not occur spontaneously and to give an impression of what is required to achieve partnering, it is useful to examine these criteria in greater detail. Below I present an overview of the criteria or conditions for partnering from four scientists who were involved with research into partnering from normative as well as interpretive perspectives. It should be noted that the sequence of the scientists in this overview is not chronological, but is linked to various scientific perspectives, which I subsequently explain. In this way it will become apparent that scientists from both positivist and social-constructivist perspectives attach importance to the same types of factors and criteria with respect to partnering. In the analysis I look primarily at the practices of cooperation that are based on these criteria.

- Dietrich et al. (2010) developed a conceptual framework that explains the collaboration-oriented elements and their mutual dependency in multi-partner

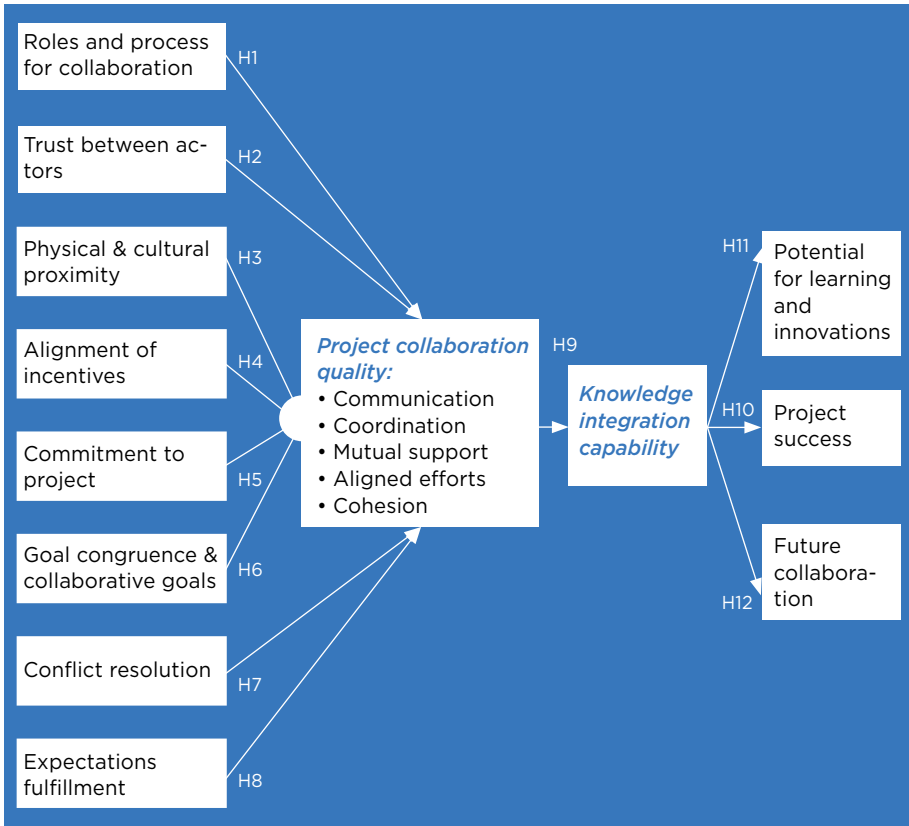


Figure 3.1: The Dynamics of Collaboration in Multipartner Projects (Dietrich et al., 2010)

projects. These elements and their relationships were derived from empirical data and theoretical research into cooperation, knowledge integration and project success. The researchers defined eight criteria for cooperation and three perspectives, see Figure 3.1. Their causal model, shown below, provides an overview of which elements are important for increasing the quality of cooperation and projects (H1-H8). It shows a positive relationship between this quality of cooperation and the capacity for knowledge integration (H9). In this analysis, this capacity for knowledge integration leads in turn to increased project success (H10), increased learning potential (H11) and greater likelihood of cooperation in the future (H12).

- Suprpto, Bakker, Mooi, and Moree (2015) supplemented the literature on project-oriented frameworks of cooperation with experiences from profes-

1	Teamwork	Common identity and vision, sharing knowledge and information, reflection and self-assessment.
2	Relational attitudes	Mutual trust, open communication, long-term orientation, commitment from top management.
3	Capability	Coordinate and utilize each other's skills and expertise.
4	Team integration	Open sharing of knowledge and information with the aim of anticipating changing conditions more effectively.
5	Joint working	Joint approach, problem-solving and decision-making.
6	Contract	Contract provisions focusing on cooperation.

Table 3.3: Six key categories for cooperation in infrastructure projects (Suprpto, Bakker, Mooi, et al., 2015)

sional practice reported by Project Managers of infrastructure projects. On this basis they formulated a picture of the essential ingredients to improve the cooperation between commissioning authorities and contractors. The researchers arrive at six key categories that form the various conceptual perspectives from which cooperation in projects can be explained (see Table 3.3).

However, some comments can be made regarding the last category, *Contract*, which Suprpto et al. (2015) did previously as well. Cooperation-oriented contracts generally contain elements that focus on the method of reimbursement, which is often fully or partly incentive-based instead of lump sum, such as bonus/malus conditions, and on mutual allocation of risks and responsibilities. According to Suprpto, the actual implementation of contracts is often determined by the commissioning authority based on its own organization-specific criteria. Obviously, this impairs the equality of the relationship from the beginning of the project. Contract-based incentives therefore do not automatically ensure successful cooperation or partnering (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Ng, Rose, Mak, & Chen, 2002). Merrow (2011, p. 292) takes this idea further by asserting that *“designers of alliances also thought that they would get the best features of lump-sum contracts with none of the draw backs [...] what we actually end up with [is] the worst features of lump-sum contracts combined with the worst features of reimbursable contracts.”* Recent research shows that

partnering/alliance contracts and incentive contracts do not necessarily result directly into a better project performance. This will be determined more by relational attitudes and how they play out into actual team working behavior (Suprpto, Bakker, Mooi, & Hertogh, 2016).

Suprpto et al. then compared their own study to two other studies (Black, Akintoye, & Fitzgerald, 2000; Rahman & Kumaraswamy, 2008). All three studies confirm the importance of mutual trust, open and honest communication and shared aims for successful partnering. The support of senior management is also experienced as important. Furthermore they emphasize that a good working relationship cannot be imposed by a contract; to achieve this more is required. On the other hand, according to the researchers, this does not mean that contracts are no longer necessary; contracts are intended to prevent ambiguity at the beginning of the project, but are generally less suitable for helping parties deal with problems that can occur as the project proceeds.

- At the end of her thesis Smits (2013) makes five recommendations concerning intercultural cooperation in large infrastructure projects for people who need to work together in projects and project management; these are called five Ps (see Table 3.4). She bases these recommendations on ethnographic research into social phenomena in project management, during which she studied what happened on a daily basis in a project organization. Her aim was to acquire insight into how project staff give meaning to the daily working environment.

- Finally, Bresnen (2007) provides a critical analysis of the *Seven pillars of partnering*, as previously developed by Bennett and Jayes (1998), by shifting the focus to *Seven pillars, seven paradoxes and seven deadly sins*, see Table 3.5. In support of this critical analysis, Bresnen – who sees partnering as a reflection of a deeper culture (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002) – states that relatively little research has been done into the social and psychological aspects of partnering, and that the normative approach has been overexposed. Bresnen calls for a more interpretive approach to this theme. An important conclusion of Bresnen's analysis is that the development, implementation and success of partnering is largely influenced by the way in which paradoxes, contradictions and unintended consequences are dealt with.

1	Partners	Become acquainted with the partner with whom you are cooperating, and if possible its people as well. Learn about its culture, essential values and work practices, as well as its intentions and expectations regarding project participation. If problems occur later on, you can use this knowledge to reduce risks.
2	Possibilities	Cultural differences between parties can also enrich a project. Look for these differences (differing combinations of knowledge and skills, operational methods, etc.) and use this to create a connection.
3	Patience	Remain patient in case of disagreement and frustration. Indeed, conflicts are unavoidable and are essential to strengthen cooperation. Accept conflicts and use them to strengthen cooperation and develop new operational methods. In this way, a conflict can initiate a process of change. Avoid becoming stranded in emotion, because this creates an obstacle to cooperation.
4	Philosophy	Introduce a joint project narrative. This enhances engagement and strengthens the cooperative relationship.
5	Promotion	Give serious attention to cooperation and promote this process from management. Reward 'good behavior' (maximize it) and reject 'bad behavior' (minimize it).

Table 3.4: The five Ps to enhance cooperation in projects and project management (Smits, 2013)

If we review the various approaches to the concept of partnering presented before, we see differences and similarities. Suprpto et al., Dietrich et al. (in part) and the original *Seven Pillars of Partnering* of Bennett and Jayes viewed the concept of partnering primarily from a normative perspective (*How should partnering be done?*), while Bresnen took a more interpretive approach (*How can partnering be achieved?*). Smits' recommendations fall in between these approaches. There are also similarities: all approaches use terms such as trust, commitment, coordinating shared objectives, choosing joint problem solving, learning what is important to the other partner and using feedback and reflection.

According to the overviews, described in this section, in both the normative and interpretive approaches, partnering can be seen not only as a set of operational methods and techniques, but also as involving a change in attitude and behavior in both partners. Trusting only the operation of the contract will not be enough to attain these changes in attitude and behavior. More is required, and that begins with a deeply rooted conviction at all levels of the organizations

The seven pillars of partnering	Original recommendation (Bennett & Jayes, 1998)	Critical analysis (Bresnen, 2007)
1. Strategy	Need for commitment, continuity, standardization of processes, freedom for development and learning to deal with ambiguity.	The risk is that a top-down strategy is seen as wishful thinking and an overestimation of the idea that if a strategy established at the top of the organization is good enough, then successful implementation is taken for granted.
2. Membership	Diligence in seeking out partners, an open relationship, providing security for the parties.	Investing too much in the relationship can lead to a high degree of mutual dependence and can constrain a critical viewpoint that is essential to cope with unexpected developments.
3. Equity	Fair distribution of burdens and benefits, open books, working with incentives, making agreements on ownership of innovations and the like.	Because power is always distributed unevenly between partners, this could lead to exploitation and opportunistic behavior, especially if the partners do not consider the incentives to be equitable.
4. Integration	Creating trust, long-term relationships and integration at various levels between the partners.	Opportunistic behavior should be prevented, but this is less effective if trust is formalized and goes hand-in-hand with a desire for auditing and control mechanisms.
5. Benchmarks	Using performance indicators to monitor cooperation.	By placing too much emphasis on measurable results, however, the 'soft' side of partnering is neglected. As a result, real change may not be achieved. Furthermore, benchmarking relative to other projects entails a risk of over-generalization of experiences, which leads to inadequate attention to project-specific problems.
6. Project processes	Using a standard approach, methodologies and best practices.	This entails the risk of over-engineering the processes, resulting in inadequate attention for the social aspects, the way in which processes are interpreted and their effects; standardization of processes is often the most important cause of irritation and frustration for people.
7. Feedback	Evaluation process improvement by sharing experiences and using feedback loops.	Assume that employees will do this, also in an objective fashion; 'hard' performance results are often overexposed and 'soft' experiences underexposed; in addition, those who have personally experienced partnering on the work floor are better able to learn from their experiences than those who evaluate these experiences from a distance. Finally, pride about the completion of a project can lead to overemphasizing the positive experiences.

Table 3.5: The seven pillars of partnering

of both the commissioning authority and the contractor that cooperation and joint problem-solving will lead to a more effective way to achieve not only the objectives of each organization separately, but also the joint project objectives.

Nevertheless, in the literature on partnering we see a schism between researchers who see partnering as something formal that can be actively managed (Aarseth et al., 2012; Chen, 2011) and researchers who see it more as something that can be developed informally and organically (Bresnen & Marshall, 2000; Veenswijk et al., 2010). As stated previously, the contract-based approach to partnering, with contract-based incentives and bonus/malus arrangements, does not by definition lead to positive project results. On the other hand, the more traditional contract-based approach obviously does not always lead to poor project results as well. However, contracts between project partners will never be able to cover every contingency. Certain aspects of contracts are subject to multiple interpretations and/or are contradictory. As a result, in conflict situations they will be explained differently based on differing interests (Clegg, 1992). The way in which parties do this jointly can greatly influence the result of the project (Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). Although contracts are intended to create clarity and to avoid conflicts, at the same time they are also an important source of conflict (Clegg, 1992).

The conclusion that the contractual approach does not always lead to positive results makes trust between parties an important factor (Jones & Lichtenstein, 2008; Van Loon & Van Dijk, 2015). Having confidence in another party is based on the willingness to be dependent on the actions of that other party and the expectation that they will act in a way that will not adversely affect the trusting party (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Trust is not something that can be contractually 'arranged' in advance (Swärd, 2016). It comes about through experience, and is especially important in unforeseen circumstances. However, it is impossible to determine in advance whether and when these circumstances will arise in the relationship and whether or not trust will be required (Swärd, 2016). The parties therefore have to build trust through a working relationship. The principle of reciprocity is important here (Serva, Fuller, & Mayer, 2005), where trust is given when it is received ('quid pro quo') (Bosse, Phillips, & Harrison, 2008; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; Luhmann, 1979; Markle, 2011). Also important is which party will be willing to take the first step in this process, as will be explained below. Furthermore, it is not only the content of reciprocity that matters, but also the timing. If the 'repayment' of trust takes too long, then a feeling of 'indebtedness' to the other party can arise, which does not enhance trust (Bignoux, 2006).



Another important aspect of cooperation between different organizations and the development of mutual trust is that their interests also differ and are possibly conflicting. With cooperation, and certainly with partnering, it is important for the parties to be able to transcend their own interests to benefit the joint interest that focuses on achieving the joint project result (Bresnen & Marshall, 2000; Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Polley, & Marosszeky, 2002; Pitsis et al., 2004). The choice to cooperate in this way has characteristics of the *prisoner's dilemma*: all parties achieve the best result when they cooperate, but from an individual point of view one party can be better off than the other if they decide *not* to cooperate (Zeng & Chen, 2003). Despite the expectation that both parties can achieve the greatest benefit when they cooperate, it can be a problem if neither party wants to put itself in a vulnerable position by being the first to seek cooperation without the guarantee that the other party will do that as well; this leads to a continuous threat of keeping their individual options open, or falling back on these options (Brady, Marshall, Prencipe, & Tell, 2002; Kollock, 1998; Lanzara, 1998; Miller, 1999; J. M. Weber & Murnighan, 2008).

Furthermore, each organization not only has its own interests, but it also has its own perception of the interests of the other organization (Medlin, 2006). This perception of the interests of the other generally contributes to the increased emphasis on individual interests. In other words: the interests of an organization are not objective facts, but are also motivated by how that organization perceives the interests of others. For example, if someone *thinks* that the other will give priority to his own interests (which in reality may not be the case at all), he will also tend to give priority to his own interests, and give less priority to the joint interest. The interests of organizations that have to cooperate are therefore socially constructed and are thus influenced by the behavior of people in other organizations (Leufkens & Noorderhaven, 2011). That which applies to the perception of the interests of the other, applies in equal measure to the joint interest: parties do not always see this in the same way, and therefore have their own perception of joint interest. Consequently, the prisoner's dilemma is also a social construction that emerges from the perceptions of interests. To illustrate this, Berger & Luckmann (1966, p. 74) used the following example: "*A watches B perform. He attributes motives to B's actions [...]. At the same time, A may assume that B is doing the same thing regarding A.*" The important aspects in this example are the mutual observations and mutual assumptions of motives. These motives again point to their respective interests. This context is also suitable for a frequently occurring example from the Dutch construction sector: "*This contractor is certain to submit a claim later on, so we will deal with them now as strictly as possible.*"

In their study, Leufkens & Noorderhaven (2011) asked the following question: what are the factors that influence the above-mentioned perception of each other's interest and how does this influence the capacity to cooperate effectively? They identified three such factors:

1. The explicit and implicit frameworks and instructions that employees in a project take with them from their parent organization;
2. The actual behavior that is displayed by the employees of the other party in the project;
3. Personal experiences from the past that go beyond the current project.

The first factor concerns the notion that the commissioning and contracting parties who work together in a project cannot always operate independently. Indeed, both parties, each in its own way, are linked to a parent organization, or in the case of a contractors' consortium, to multiple parent organizations. All of these parent organizations have their own objectives and interests, and they set their own requirements about how project organizations should operate. Moreover, these objectives and interests can vary in time. As we saw in Chapter 2 in the discussion about the period surrounding the crisis in the construction sector in the Netherlands, aspects such as the economic climate will influence how organizations 'join the game'. In addition, these organizations often have to be accountable, for example to politicians or to owners and shareholders. Emerging from this process will be all kinds of demands and limitations on the way in which project organizations can plan and execute their work. For example, considerations in parent organizations concerning the efficiency and predictability of project execution will lead to project organizations being encouraged or compelled to use standard operational methods, and the obligation to be accountable to politicians and shareholders will lead to audits and control mechanisms. This is often difficult to reconcile with the before-mentioned dynamic and process-oriented approach to partnering. Consequently, an employee will look differently at a partner organization if he originates from an organization that takes a strong contract-based and control-based approach than an employee who works at an organization that focuses inherently on participation and co-creation.

The second factor concerns how people perceive and assess the behavior of others and shape their own behaviors accordingly. As discussed previously, this has to do with mutual trust and predictability of behavior, and especially with the example of behavior provided by the management of both organizations. In addition, working on a joint *project narrative* can help to create a discussion

about how organizations see each other that is as open as possible. I return to this in the subsequent chapter.

In the discussion about the consequences of the construction fraud inquiry in Chapter 2, we saw how the third factor – experiences from the past – can influence this process. Years afterwards, the resulting mistrust of government agencies towards their contractors had consequences for how the public and private parties cooperated in construction projects. In practice, team members from both parties remained stuck in their values and norms from the past regarding each other, making it difficult to change deep-rooted habits and routines. In this case agreements on a new approach towards cooperation don't go much further than window dressing. Unexpected events thus result almost immediately in a return to old habits. Partnering is therefore not only about making agreements on new methods and new forms of cooperation, but also about letting go of old habits and routines (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011). Ultimately, the fact that cooperation in a project is not a one-time event, but that the partners will encounter each other more often in the future, influences their strategic view of the joint interest (Bresnen & Marshall, 2000).

From an interpretive approach, the implementation and effects of partnering are therefore pluralistic by definition. In that regard, partnering is nothing other than operational methods that are used in the context of the project. The ultimate effectiveness of these methods will depend on how the methods are interpreted and applied to specific situations in practice. As a result, partnering becomes a dynamic and iterative process in which the implementation will be determined by the collective experiences acquired during the course of the project. Based on this reasoning, no blueprint can be provided for successful partnering (which indeed would be a normative approach), and a successful approach in one project will not necessarily lead to the same success in another project. It is not a 'trick' that can be easily imitated. As a result, partnering is not the solution for all problems (Barlow, Cohen, Jashapara, & Simpson, 1997).

### 3.5 On balance, adaptive capacity and resilience

As stated before, the professional practice of complex infrastructure projects and partnering is dynamic; unexpected situations and setbacks can always occur. To deal with such situations, the commissioning authority and the contractor need to work together. In the previous section we saw that there are various ways to deal with aspects such as complexity and ambiguity (Table 3.1). On

one side of the spectrum is the system-oriented positivist approach, in which complexity is dealt with by reducing it with the aid of standard methodologies (Wijnen & Storm, Dietrich et al. and Suprpto et al., among others). On the other side of the spectrum is the social constructivist approach, which actually embraces the complex context to make it robust and manageable (Bresnen, Veen-swijk, among others). According to Bruner (1990) these approaches cannot be seen separately from each other, and it is not about choosing one approach instead of the other. Ultimately, the parties should seek a balance between a system-oriented approach, which is based on contracts, standard operational methods and control, and a more process-oriented approach, in which the parties develop an adaptive capacity to reflect on unexpected events and learn how to deal with them more effectively (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). We also saw this in Chapter 2 with the duality in the governance of construction projects between the control-oriented approach with a focus on output-based management, and the more cooperation-oriented process approach with a focus on effectiveness and added value for both parties. (Clegg, 1992).

In the literature, the term resilience is sometimes used as a synonym for adaptive capacity (Boin & van Eeten, 2013; Comfort, Boin, & Demchak, 2010; N. Johnson & Elliott, 2011). Although this term is often used in the context of crisis management to indicate the capacity of organizations to recover after a crisis situation, resilience also has conceptual value in the context of project organizations and projects situations. Indeed, in this context organizations must also be capable of responding to and dealing with setbacks, even though they are not immediately defined as crises. According to Sutcliffe and Vogus (2003), this goes further than just 'dealing with' a crisis. They argued that organizations survive not only because they have been able to withstand a difficult period, but especially because of how they learn from these difficulties and how they use this knowledge to prepare more effectively for future changes. This creation of learning capacity in a project organization is therefore crucial to building resilience.

From resilience, the commissioning authority and contractor – in a dynamic process – should seek a kind of tradeoff between a system-oriented, functional approach based on efficiency, structure and control on the one hand, and a more adaptive, substantial approach, focusing on variation and innovation on the other (Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003). According to Sutcliffe and Vogus, this balance (or tradeoff) must be finely tuned. Organizations that focus excessively on efficiency and output cannot be sufficiently flexible when dealing with unexpected situations, while adaptive organizations, which are indeed rich in crea-

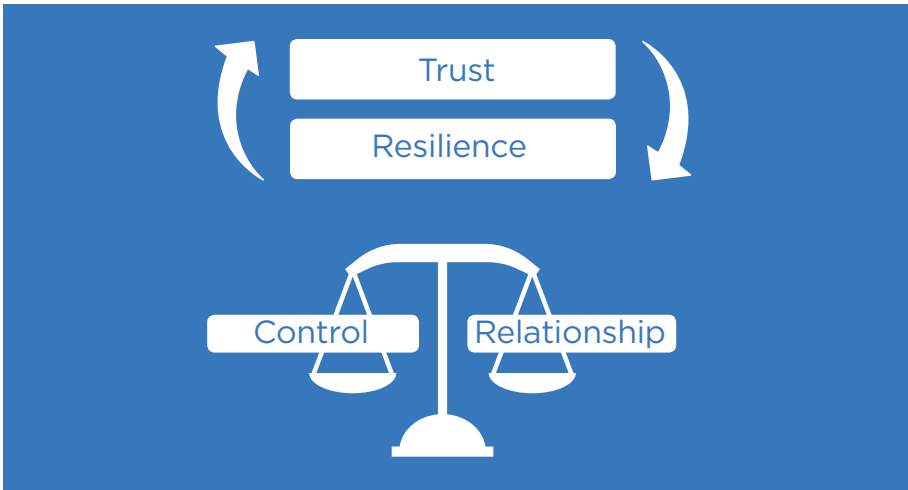


Figure 3.2: The interaction between trust and resilience, as a tradeoff between control and relationship

tivity and improvisation, do not have the capacity to transpose this into consistency, efficiency and productivity.

I would like to approach resilience as a *shock-absorbing cushion* that must be filled to withstand unexpected situations or setbacks, which will obviously occur in every complex project. To fill this cushion, mutual trust is essential (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Khan et al., 2011; Samba & Vera, 2013; Svedin, 2009). A mutually reinforcing process then emerges: trust enhances resilience, which in turn enhances trust, and so on. If the cushion is sufficiently filled, the parties can 'withstand a shock' if something happens. With increasing resilience, the parties are increasingly able to reflect on their actions. In the above metaphor, the capacity to find solutions in the cooperative relationship also increases in order to find a good balance between contract-based management and control on one side, and greater elbow room and relationship on the other. This is illustrated in Figure 3.2. In my opinion, resilience and trust, and the balance between control and relationship, are the central elements in an interpretive perspective on partnering between the commissioning authority and contractor. In this thesis I will elaborate on this perspective. In the subsequent chapter, I address the question of how a cooperative culture, focusing on developing resilience and trust, can be achieved.

### 3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have briefly described the development of projects and project management as a field of study, as a context for the development of cooperation in these projects. I also showed that projects and project management can be viewed from different perspectives: on the one hand as 'technical instruments', with a focus on the delineation of the work and on a strict, system-oriented approach, and on the other hand as 'social constructs', which pay more attention to the often recalcitrant and changing context within which projects must operate and which emphasize the importance of human interaction to arrive at acceptable project results.

Insights from the literature on cooperation were then discussed, and the concept of partnering was introduced. It was shown that partnering cannot only be seen as a set of methods and techniques, but that it also involves building mutual trust and a change in attitude and behavior in the organizations and people who cooperate with each other. An important aspect of this process concerns the interests of the organizations and people who are involved. It was emphasized that the interests, and especially the perceptions of the interests, can differ and also change over time. Viewed from an interpretive perspective, this means that the interpretation and implementation of cooperation and partnering is pluralistic. As a result, partnering becomes a dynamic and iterative process in which the final implementation will be determined by the collective experiences that are acquired during the course of the project. Ultimately, the parties involved, while taking their diversity into account, must continually seek common ground to coordinate their activities and complete the task at hand.

Focusing on the relationship between the commissioning authority and the contractor in large infrastructure projects, I argued that in partnering it is important for these parties to jointly seek a balance between a system-oriented approach, which is based on contracts and standard operational methods, and a more relationship-oriented approach in which both parties develop the capacity to reflect and learn to deal more effectively with unexpected events. Finding this balance is crucial for successful partnering and for the successful completion of projects. As shown in this chapter, a strict, contract-driven approach does not take sufficient account of the complexity and ambiguity of the context within projects must operate. Contracts will never be able to cover all situations, but on the other hand an approach without structure and contract-based management in such complex projects provides insufficient guidance for both parties. To be able to reflect jointly and find this balance, mutual trust and adaptive capacity is needed for both parties. For adaptive capacity, I have used

the term *resilience*, which I have approached as a *shock-absorbing cushion* that must be filled in order to withstand unexpected situations or setbacks, which always occur in every complex project.

In summary, resilience and trust, and the balance between control and relationship, are the central elements in the interpretive approach to partnering between commissioning authorities and contractors, and are consequently the central themes in my research.





# Chapter 4

The circle of sensemaking and sensegiving

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how trust and resilience can be established between parties. Taking a social constructivist approach, I show how narrative building can be used to initiate a process of *sensemaking* and *sensegiving*. This is based on the corresponding theory from Chapter 2. I also discuss the use of narratives in this process and how they can help one to view cooperation and partnering between the commissioning authority and the contractor from various perspectives. At the end of this chapter, based on the foregoing, I will present the conceptual model for my study and further refine my research question from Chapter 1.

## 4.2 Towards a culture of partnership

As argued in the previous chapter, collaboration or partnering can be termed resilient when different parties become increasingly successful in adapting so they can tackle problems. To achieve this, the culture of cooperation of these parties must focus on the development of resilience and trust. This is often not automatic, and changing the culture of cooperation is usually a long and complex process (Bresnen & Marshall, 2000; Cicmil & Gaggiotti, 2014; Geiger, 2009; Leufkens & Noorderhaven, 2011). To change the culture in the direction of more trust and resilience between cooperating partners, it is important to look at what is actually happening on the work floor, which narratives have been created there, which normative force emerges from these narratives through sensegiving and how both parties reflect on this process (Geiger, 2009). At the same time it is important to realize that this practice is dynamic, that it is influenced by the context and is continually subject to change. As a result, the standards of cooperation are continually adapted by both parties (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011).

As stated in Chapter 2, the point of departure with an interpretive approach to culture change is that this is based on a social construct (Blumer, 1969; Weick, 1979). The development of resilience and trust between partners are given shape by means of a social interaction between individuals. This is because new narratives are created which become dominant over the old ones (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Brown et al., 2009; Finstad, 1998; Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 1998; Vaara et al., 2016). These narratives are the carriers of culture within an organization, and new narratives lead to a change in the sensegiving of the employees in the organization (Bate, 2004; Bruner, 1990; Weick et al., 2005). Organizational narratives can be defined as temporal, discursive constructions that provide a means for individual, social, and organizational sensemaking and sensegiving (Vaara et

al., 2016). In other words: narratives involve descriptions of temporal chains of interrelated events or actions in an organization with which members of that organization understand and explain what is happening in their organization. Organizational narratives can in this way be seen as parts of an organizational discourse (Gabriel, 2004). This narrative approach is still relatively new in the world of cultural change. In the past, intervention programs in the construction sector to change the cooperative relationship between public and private parties were often set up as large technocratic projects, deployed primarily top-down from management and taking little account of processes that actually occur in practice on the work floor (Alvesson, 2002). According to Alvesson, these are incompatible perspectives. Because the daily practice on the work floor is experienced differently by employees, a major culture change initiated by management tends to strengthen undesired behavior rather than change it (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Indeed, recent studies on the effect of intervention programs in the construction sector in the Netherlands between 2004 and 2010 have shown a similar picture: the message from management apparently does not connect with the day-to-day experiences of employees on the work floor (Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2016). The researchers based this conclusion on the following observations:

- There was no ‘shared project narrative’ – each party created their own narrative;
- The parties lacked experience with the innovative contract forms and what this would mean for mutual cooperation; as a result, they were not equal partners but regularly fell back into the traditional commissioning authority-contractor relationships (Sminia, 2011);
- Employees of both parties continue to have negative stereotypes about the other party, based on a long history. As a result, a large gap developed between the ideology disseminated by management and the actual practice on the work floor;
- The parties difference in their perception about pricing risks and changes in scope, resulting in amplification of mutual distrust;
- Both parties had the tendency to become overwhelmed by day-to-day issues. As a result, too little time remained for mutual reflection on the process of cooperation.

According to Van Marrewijk and Veenswijk, the above aspects obstructed the enhancement of trust between the public and private sectors. Moreover, incidents, which are inherent to large construction projects, tended to strengthen the traditional relationships rather than change them. Yanow and Tsoukas

(2009) also emphasized the importance of reflection: due to positive and negative day-to-day experiences, the change in culture also becomes a bottom-up process, which can enhance the process that was initiated from above.

Moreover, research has shown that an ongoing culture intervention initially reaches only a small part of the organization – the ‘elite group’. As a result, the intervention has little organization-wide impact in the long term. To achieve the latter, the ‘old guard’ within the organization must be persuaded to take part in the new approach, which can be difficult because their habits and routines are deeply ingrained (van Marrewijk, Veenswijk, & Clegg, 2014). The new type of cooperation then remains only a ‘fad’. In addition, contractors can be submissive to the preference of the commissioning authority; as a result, the new approach is not truly internalized and the long-term effect will be absent (van Marrewijk et al., 2014). It can be concluded that partnering, and the associated building of trust and resilience, not only involves making agreements about new types of cooperation and practices, but especially letting go of old routines. This applies both to the teams that are required to work together and to the individual employees on the teams (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011). Letting go of old behaviors is often as difficult as learning new ones. To illustrate this, I repeat a quotation from Chapter 2, originating from a former director at Rijkswaterstaat: *“We did not feel that the private sector was ready for this change, but the fact that we simply didn’t like it could have also played a role. The important thing was that we could no longer do some of the work that we had always done.”*

As explained in Chapter 2, based on an interpretive approach, culture change in an organization occurs primarily through social interaction, as a product of interaction and sensegiving between individuals (Alvesson, 2004; Blumer, 1969; Geertz, 1973; Holt & Cornelissen, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick, 1979). In this approach, culture change occurs because new narratives within an organization become dominant over old ones, which gives meaning to the day-to-day events in an organization (Bate, 2004; Bruner, 1990). According to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) culture change results from an interaction between sensegiving and sensemaking. Sensemaking involves how employees experience and understand their day-to-day activities, while sensegiving has to do with how the management of an organization attempts to influence the process of sensemaking towards the culture change that they desire (Corvellec & Risberg, 2007; Dane, 2013; Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Rouleau, 2005; Smith, Plowman, & Duchon, 2010). Consequently, sensemaking involves understanding and sensegiving involves influencing. Ac-

According to Gioia and Chittipeddi, the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving occur sequentially and reciprocally; in this way, an ever-increasing part of the organization becomes involved in the process of change, see Figure 4.1. Management-directed sensegiving in an organization focuses on and enlarges new narratives on the work floor to replace the old ones. Employees respond to this with sensemaking, which in turn leads to sensemaking for management and 'adapted' sensegiving that is based on the new practices. This creates a process of interaction between sensegiving and sensemaking involving the entire organization, management and employees. Sonenshein (2010) describes these stories or narratives as discursive constructions which employees use as a means to clarify the situation for themselves (sensemaking) and as a means to influence the understanding of the situation by others (sensegiving). This results in collective construction of meaning. The use of language thus plays an important role in the process of sensemaking and sensegiving. This is certainly the case if the circumstances are unclear and a collective process of sensemaking has to be initiated via language to give meaning to what is happening (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Boje, Oswick, & Ford, 2004; Phillips & Oswick, 2012). For projects whose goals are not clearly defined, this can lead to endless discussions about sensegiving, whereby various conflicting narratives can push the project in different directions (Alderman, Ivory, McLaughlin, & Vaughan, 2005; Boddy & Patton, 2004; Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008). There is also a paradoxical side: striving too hard for a single narrative can also impair the individual strength of the narratives that had to be brought together (Pitsis et al., 2004). How managers and project leaders give meaning to the narratives and the language that they use in the process are crucial for understanding how projects develop. How this is done with respect to a particular problem, and whether it is framed as an opportunity or a threat, influences how others respond to it and can determine the further course of the project (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Havermans, Keegan, & Den Hartog, 2015). In this way, leadership can be seen as the management of sensegiving (Fairhurst, 2009; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). This is in line with the literature on organizational culture with regard to the way in which employees respond to incidents and the role that leaders play in shaping these reactions (Schein, 1990, 2017). Leaders can shape the reactions to complex problems by, for example, focusing attention on specific threats, formulating a new direction for the organization or trying to entice employees into different behaviors (Schein, 1990).

Dane (2013) also showed how experienced leaders use specific events as sensegivers, thereby framing them to support a bigger narrative. On the other hand, employees can also combine their sensemaking experiences into narra-

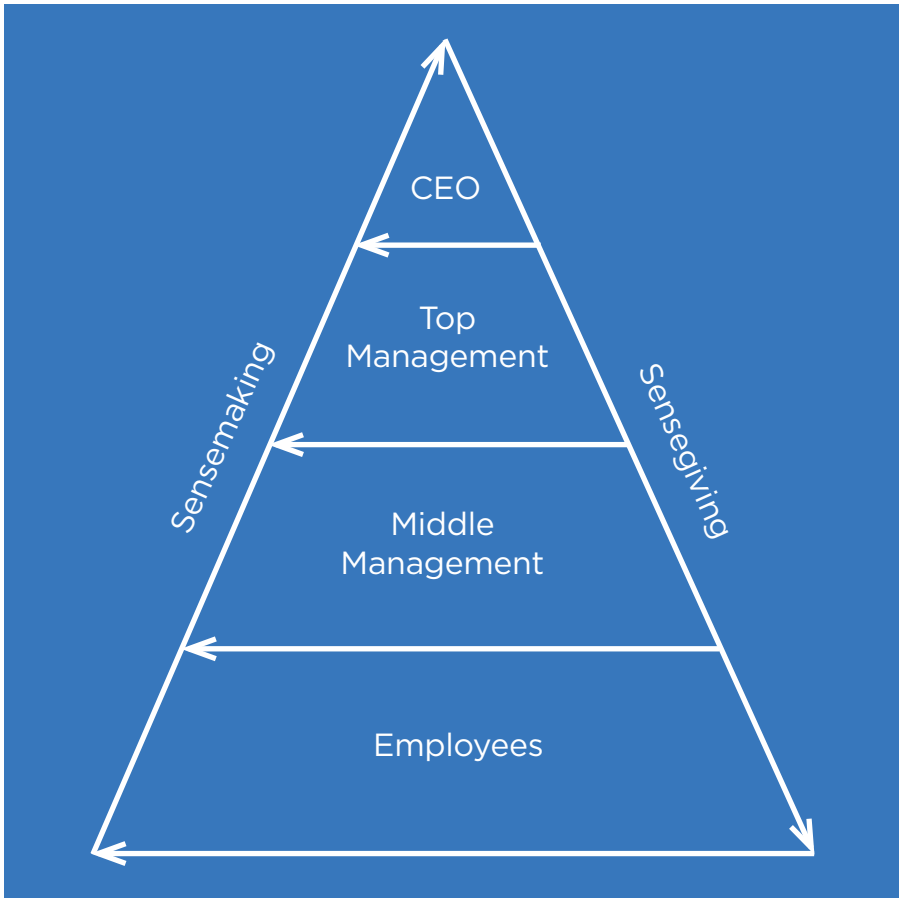


Figure 4.1: The cycle of sensemaking and sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991)

tives that strengthen the overarching narrative. In this way, new narratives can lead to a new culture of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor and can create and enhance a new type of resilient partnering. As a result, the narratives become the air with which the *shock-absorbing cushion* (from Section 3.3) can be filled.

At the core of sensemaking and sensegiving is the development and enhancement of new narratives through narrative building and storytelling (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Bartunek, Krim, Necocchia, & Humphries, 1999; Bruner, 1990; Grant & Marshak, 2011; Merkus, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1987; van Marrewijk et al., 2014; Veenswijk et al., 2010). As stated in Chapter 2, narratives can gain cred-

ibility and power if they have a clear plot that can transmit a message, that can give meaning to the narrative (Czarniawska, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1987).

### 4.3 The role of emotions and the use of symbolism and metaphors

As indicated previously, the extent to which a narrative evokes emotions in people plays an important role in the process of sensemaking and sensegiving (Maitlis et al., 2013; Steigenberger, 2015). Based on the notion that emotions are an important indicator for human decision-making, their absence may in any case lead to an incomplete sensemaking process (Steigenberger, 2015). It can therefore be argued that emotions such as anger, fear or hope, but also pride, guilt, envy, shame or sympathy, are important fuel for sensemaking (Damasio, 2010; Maitlis et al., 2013; Steigenberger, 2015). Emotions also play a role in sensegiving. For example, the decision to invest energy in sensegiving is influenced by a number of subjective considerations: Is the situation important enough to justify the effort of sensegiving? Will I have an opportunity to influence the sensemaking of others? And is this influence also legitimate in this case? Emotions certainly affect the first two of these considerations (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Zohar & Luria, 2003).

In the process of sensemaking, emotions are rationalized, as it were, and they are transformed into a subjectively plausible narrative. This in turn provides a personal explanation for the emotions that are experienced, and thus forms the link between the emotions and the world as it is perceived (Weick et al., 2005). In this process, a relationship is established with issues that may have triggered the emotions, such as events in the past (something that has happened), in the present (you see or hear something) or in the future (you think of something that might happen) (Damasio, 2010). In the previous section, I explained how processes of sensemaking and sensegiving in organizations come about through social interaction and construction. This takes place not only on an individual level; thought-formation based on emotions also takes place within groups or organizations through a kind of 'emotional contagion' (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000). Based on the foregoing, the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving in organizations therefore have a cognitive as well as an emotional dimension, in which cognitive and emotional aspects do not always have to be aligned, and various emotions can simultaneously play a role (Klarner, By, & Diefenbach, 2011; Liu & Perrewe, 2005; Scherer, 2009; Steigenberger, 2015). Psychologists have found that in these cases the emotional valuation leads to

action sooner than the cognitive valuation (Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001), depending on the strength of the emotional experience.

The use of symbolism, analogies and metaphors can help to give meaning to new narratives and provide a type of framework for the new storyline or plot within which narrative building can take place (Ragsdell, 2000; Stone, 1997). The deliberate use of images and metaphors eases the analysis and design of abstract entities such as organizations and partnerships. At the same time, they can bring 'underlying, implicit and unconscious' images to the foreground. Metaphors can not only improve the understanding or diagnostic reading (sensemaking) of the functioning of an organization, but can also improve the communication on this aspect with others and can aid in the visualization of new practices (sensegiving) (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). Ragsdell (2000) also sees advantages in using metaphors to aid change management:

- They can help to elicit discussions about matters that are usually not mentioned;
- They can help to bring matters up for discussion without being too confrontational;
- They can help to bring up 'soft' aspects in organizations for discussion that are frequently dominated by 'hard' technocratic aspects;
- They can aid teambuilding;
- They can encourage employees to become engaged and take responsibility for their own organization.

To enhance sensegiving through metaphors, the metaphor itself must not only be powerful, but it must also connect effectively with the target group. Some metaphors are understood and internalized by some target groups more quickly than others. Consequently, a specific metaphor may be effective with one organization but not necessarily with another. In this study of resilience through building trust, the metaphor should also help to improve mutual understanding within the target group about where the new cooperative relationship should lead. If it is sufficiently powerful and linked effectively to the target group, a metaphor can help people in the group to engage in the right conversation about abstract matters such as a different way of cooperating (Cornelissen, Holt, & Zundel, 2011; Jermier & Forbes, 2016).

Many researchers who study metaphors have based their approach on the influential work of Morgan. At the end of the 1980s, Morgan identified a number



of metaphors that are characteristic of interpreting organizations from various perspectives (Morgan, 1986). With his work, Morgan tried to show that the same organization can be interpreted differently from different perspectives. Because his metaphors provide a broad palette of perspectives, they can be used to aid the diagnosis of organization problems and give direction to organizational change. An important limitation when using metaphors is that they allow organizations to be seen and understood in a way that illuminates only part of the organization. For example, we often refer to organizations as if they were machines (one of Morgan's metaphors) that are designed to achieve predetermined objectives and that should operate smoothly and efficiently. As a result we often try to organize and lead in a mechanical fashion, where we - often inadvertently - relegate the human factor, which is central to other metaphors of Morgan, to the background.

Based on an interpretive perspective, the functioning of organizations is seen as complex, ambiguous and paradoxical. Consequently, a consideration based on a single metaphor will undoubtedly fail to account for this complexity. By using various metaphors, a better and richer picture can be created of the complex and paradoxical life in an organization. Of course, Morgan's metaphors are not exhaustive, but I believe they do provide a broad picture for further elaboration, to which newly developed metaphors can be connected. And if the functioning of individual organizations can be viewed in this way, this is also possible when looking at the functioning of cooperative relationships between organizations and between the people who work there. In my study into resilient partnering, I will elaborate on these insights.

#### 4.4 Conceptual model and research question

The focus of my research is on how - linking up with an existing societal trend such as the financial crisis in the construction sector and the resulting new Market Strategy developed jointly by the public and private sectors - new narratives on the work floor concerning cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor can be encouraged and how symbolism and metaphors can aid this process. This connects with the conclusions in Chapter 2 about triggers for change and their associated characteristics, such as the presence of a societal trend (Market Strategy), timing, the presence of a 'leading group' within the organization (as editors of the new narratives) and the framing of this process. The latter can take place by means of sensegiving (focusing on partnering by building resilience and trust), selectively enhancing the sensemaking (narrative building, storytelling) on the work floor, making use of

the societal trend and the timing by giving it a symbolic charge, thus creating or strengthening a trigger for change. By connecting with this trigger, focused narrative building can then be used to work towards new storylines and thereby towards a new approach to partnering between the commissioning authority and contractor in complex infrastructure projects.

The foregoing has an inherently paradoxical aspect: does a new narrative lead to a trigger for change or does the trigger for change lead to new narratives? This appears to be more of a self-reinforcing cyclical motion, see Figure 4.2 as a visualization of my interpretation of this aspect: beginning with the societal trend or leading discourse, new narratives are created on the work floor, which are given shape by a leading group. These narratives may be strengthened by management if they emphasize (deliberately or inadvertently) new narratives over the old ones; as a result there is a greater likelihood that the new narratives will begin resonating through the organization. This imparts a symbolic charge (in retrospect) that leads to the creation of a trigger for change that can further strengthen the new narratives. As a result, new practices gradually develop and become stronger. These new practices will confirm these narratives and/or boost new ones. In this way the new practices ‘talk back’ and become the objects of new sensegiving. This is compatible with holistic thinking about projects and cooperation. The figure also shows that there are no discrete transitions from one situation to another, but that there is a continuous process which must be actively maintained through the interplay of sensemaking and sensegiving. The model presented here links up with other comparable models in the literature (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

The narratives can be seen as the *linking pin* between the *how* and the *what*. The *what* concerns the relationship between trust and resilience, in which the latter is related to the ambiguity of the process and finding a balance between contract and relationship – see the theory on this topic from Chapter 3 (Figure 3.2) and the right half of Figure 4.3. The *how*, shown on the left half of the figure, concerns the process of cultural change that is required to achieve the *what*. In Figure 4.3, this relationship between the *what* and the *how* is shown. Although they are shown schematically separate in the figure, in practice the *what* and the *how* are of course closely linked together. In this process, the narratives serve essentially as a source of inspiration for sensemaking, which then fuels sensegiving. Metaphors and symbolism can make the new narratives powerful, so they can become dominant. As the symbolism or the metaphor becomes more powerful, the sensemaking in the organization becomes more

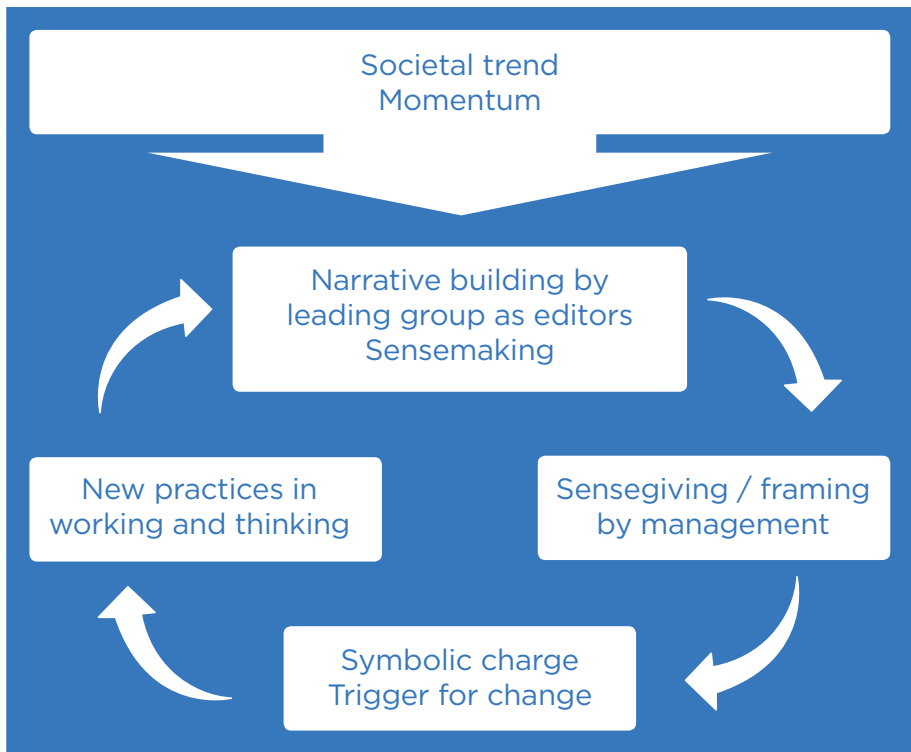


Figure 4.2 Conceptual model for a changing cooperative relationship

effective, which increases the likelihood that this will in turn lead to new narratives. This can be exemplified with the machine metaphor of Morgan: if this is deployed in a sufficiently powerful way, it will automatically lead to an increase in narratives in the organization about machines, of which the gears may or may not mesh effectively.

Consequently, Figure 4.3 can be seen as a conceptual model for the present study. The essence, through improved understanding and application of action research, is therefore how you can create a turning point in cooperation through an interaction between sensemaking and sensegiving with the aid of narratives. This process is explained in more detail in the following chapter.

#### 4.5 Summary

In this chapter I have addressed how the partnering discussed in Chapter

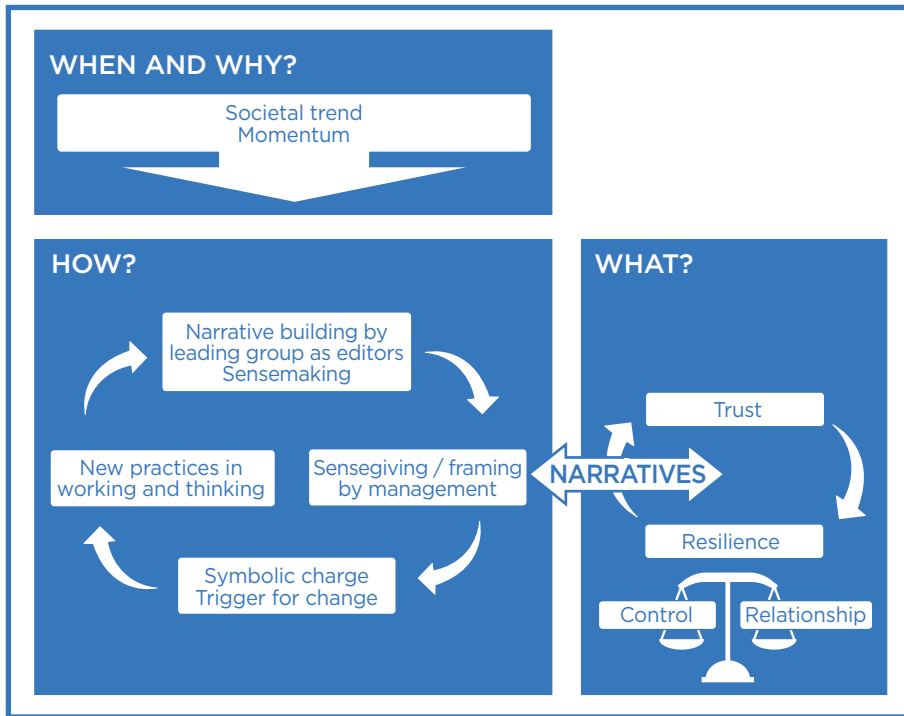


Figure 4.3 Conceptual model for a changing cooperative relationship

3 can be achieved and how and resilience and trust can be built. Based on the social constructivist approach, I showed that this can be done both bottom-up and top-down through narrative building and a process of sensemaking and sensegiving. Management-directed sensegiving in an organization focuses on and enlarges new narratives on the work floor to replace the old ones. Employees respond to this with sensemaking, which in turn leads to a 'modified' sensemaking for management based on new practices. This creates a process of interaction between sensegiving and sensemaking involving the entire organization, management and employees. Narratives, and the replacement of old narratives by new ones, is therefore central to this approach towards resilient partnering; these narratives can thus be seen as the air with which the *shock absorbing cushion*, introduced in the previous chapter, can be filled.

In Section 4.3 I discussed the role of emotions in the process of sensemaking and sensegiving and the possibilities of using symbolism and metaphors in this process, and how these can help one to view cooperation and partnering between the commissioning authority and contractor from various perspectives.

Effective use of symbolism and metaphors can contribute to enhancing the collective understanding within an organization about the objective of a new practice, which in this study concerns achieving resilience by building mutual trust between the commissioning authority and contractor.

Finally, in Section 4.4, a conceptual model is used to make a link between finding a balance between contract and relationship while on the one hand working towards a process of building trust and resilience (the *what*), and on the other hand the process of sensemaking and sensegiving in the organizations of the commissioning authority and contractor to achieve this balance (the *how*). In this context, the narratives are seen as the linking pin between the *how* and the *what* because they function in this process as both a source of inspiration for sensemaking and as the fuel for sensegiving. Metaphors and symbolism can make the new narratives powerful, so they can become dominant. As the symbolism or the metaphor becomes more powerful, the sensemaking in the organization becomes more effective, which increases the likelihood that this will in turn lead to new narratives. The essence of my study is thus: through better understanding and application of action research, how you can create a turning point in cooperation through an interaction between sensemaking and sensegiving with the aid of narratives. In this study, Figure 4.3 will be used as a heuristic model; in subsequent chapters this model will be elaborated, supplemented and enhanced.

In summary, based on the foregoing, the last two research sub-questions from Chapter 1 can be specified as follows (illustrated in Figure 4.3):

- How do the commissioning authority and contractor, by finding a good balance in daily practice between contract-based management and control on the one hand and providing room to maneuver and cooperate on the other, work on building mutual trust and resilience so they are better prepared to deal with the unexpected situations and setbacks that occur in all projects? (the *what*)
- How can a process of sensemaking and sensegiving within the respective organizations of the commissioning authority and contractor be initiated through narratives, so this process can trigger the further expansion of this new form of partnership? (the *how*)



# Chapter 5

Engaged Scholarship:  
From theory to practice and from practice to theory

## 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the research design in greater detail. This starts in Section 5.2 with an explanation of the epistemological and ontological positions taken in this study. This substantiates the interpretive approach that was used. This substantiation is important because, especially in the infrastructure sector with its predominantly technical orientation, a positivist perspective is generally used as the common ontological approach. An interpretive approach is based on the assumption that events in organizations cannot be objectively described, but their meaning comes about through the formation of social constructs and narratives. This narrative approach was discussed in previous chapters, and its specific application in the present study is explained in more detail in this section.

In Section 5.3 the specifics of the research approach are explained, involving a combination of auto-ethnographic organization research and action research. This approach, which combines scientific research and application in practice, also referred to as 'engaged scholarship' (Van de Ven, 2007), was a natural fit with my own dual role as an interpretive researcher and as Program Director of the Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere infrastructure program (SAA). In this section, I reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of this double role for my study.

In essence, the present study involves the generation and collection of narratives as building blocks for my conceptual model from Chapter 4: the relationship between resilience and trust and the trade-off between contract-based management on one hand, and flexibility and joint reflection on the other. Within the SAA infrastructure program, this is referred to as 'resilient partnership'. The corresponding methods and the way in which narratives within the organization were collected or generated is explained in Section 5.4.

The practical execution of the study and the collection and generation of narratives from the SAA program is discussed in Section 5.5. Finally, Section 5.6 describes the process of classifying and organizing the narratives and the meaning that can be given to the narratives in the context of a change process initiated within SAA with the aim of attaining a different form of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor. This was intended to initiate a process of mutual sensemaking and sensegiving, focusing on trust and resilience, based on the trade-off between contract-based management on one side and flexibility and mutual reflection on the other.



## 5.2 Methodological context

As discussed in previous chapters, in this study I chose to take an interpretive approach. Within this approach I took an ontological perspective based on the assumption that organizational reality cannot be described objectively. This is because this reality is created through social construction as a product of interaction and sensemaking between the individuals involved in these organizations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2010; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Smircich, 1983; Weick, 1979). This is reiterated here because in general, and certainly in the infrastructure sector with its predominantly technical orientation, the standard approach used in organizational research is positivism, with 'unambiguous reality' as its ontological perspective (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2010; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). In a technical context especially, the word 'construction' in the term 'social construction' may be confusing. The term 'construction' is used there to denote a deliberately planned activity, while the term social constructivism refers to something that occurs naturally during interactions between people (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2010; Smits, 2013).

The positivist approach assumes that social events in organizations can be objectively ascertained and therefore lend themselves to predictive purposes. The task of researchers from the positivist school is to measure and record events in organizations and make them accessible through statistical analysis. Social constructivist researchers, on the other hand, endeavor to give meaning to what is actually taking place on the work floor in organizations during the daily interactions between people. In this type of interpretive research, 'empirical evidence' can take various forms such as observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, audiovisual materials, myths and folklore (Denzin, 1999; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The relative importance of this data is not ranked. For example, 'hard' data is not assumed to be better than 'soft' data. This data is generated by the interaction between the researcher and the employees of the organization being studied and by the language that is used during this interaction. Consequently, in social constructivist research the data is generated, while in positivistic research it is collected (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

As a result of this approach, in an interpretive study 'truth' cannot be 'measured' or objectified. There is no unambiguous truth. 'Truth' will be determined not only by how, at what time, within which context and by which observer a specific event or social interaction is viewed, but also by how the subjects respond to the researcher (Czarniawska, 2004; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Interpretive research is therefore not limited to what is seen or heard, but also

takes account of the possibility that information is missing or is subject to multiple interpretations from various perspectives. In the process of sensemaking, that which is not seen or heard is deliberately sought. For example, silence during an interview can be an important moment in the sensemaking process in interpretive research, and may even have more value than what is actually said. In summary, interpretive research is not about 'truth'; it is about 'meaning' (Merkus, 2014).

Unlike positivist research methods, in which 'the truth' can be ascertained regardless of whoever conducts the research, interpretive research is concerned with collecting multiple 'truths' as they are experienced and understood by the people concerned, even if these truths are contradictory. In fact, contradictory truths are especially interesting for interpretive research. From an epistemological perspective, the interpretive researcher endeavors to explain and understand events in organizations from the perspective of the employees and their everyday behaviors in those organizations. Because human behavior never occurs in isolation, but is always part of social relationships in a larger context, it is important to consider events from various approaches (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Yanow, 2006; Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). How a person looks at the world, defines issues and interacts is determined by his or her position and the power they possess; this is because people generally do not take account, at least not deliberately, of the basic assumptions of their own perception of 'reality', let alone test this perception against the interpretations of others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Van Dongen, De Laat, & Maas, 1996). The fact that different actors produce different interpretations of reality does not have to be problematic. On the contrary, investigating and playing with difference is the engine of development. It only becomes problematic if the interaction and development is blocked or disrupted because some actors and/or views are explicitly or implicitly excluded, which eliminates or destroys variety (W. F. Verweij, 2011).

To illustrate the idea that the same event can be viewed from different perspectives and explained in various ways, an incident from my own experience in the SAA infrastructure program is described below. One of the components of this program was the A9 Gaasperdammer Tunnel project. In this project, the existing A9 motorway is widened over a length of approximately 3 km and placed in a tunnel to eliminate the barrier effect between two boroughs in the southeast of Amsterdam, which are now physically separated by the motorway. An important aspect of the project



Figure 5.1: De Gaasperdammer Tunnel under construction (Photo: IXAS)

is that traffic must continue to flow while the tunnel and new section of motorway are being built. This is a complex logistical challenge for the contractor. To ensure access for construction traffic to the construction site, the contractor set up various 'gates' that shift as the work progresses. The contractor monitors these gates with cameras to ensure traffic safety and the safety of construction workers. One day, these cameras recorded a truck that was going to the worksite, but drove past its designated access gate. The cameras showed the truck stopping on the public road, reversing and then entering the designated gate. During this maneuver, the traffic overtaking the truck from behind had to slow down and swerve out of the way. No accidents occurred. The contractor took the event seriously and informed the commissioning authority, revoked the truck driver's access privileges and tightened its policy on using the access gates.

These are the essential facts about this incident. Now the following questions arose: What is the meaning of this incident for the position of the commissioning authority, Rijkswaterstaat, with respect to its contractor? What is the correct response from Rijkswaterstaat to this notification

by the contractor, given the terms of the contract? For Rijkswaterstaat as the public road authority, it is unacceptable to allow vehicles to reverse on a public motorway being used by other traffic. For the Contract Manager of the project, the situation was clear: according to the contract, a penalty can be imposed in response to such safety incidents, and this should clearly be done. After all, if such incidents are allowed to occur without penalty, why is there a penalty clause in the contract at all? However, the safety manager of the project explained the situation in an entirely different way: the contractor should be complimented for dealing with the incident in such an excellent fashion. After all, the contractor could have failed to report the incident (the camera images were not publicly available). According to this view, imposing a penalty would only lead to greater reluctance to report future safety incidents to the commissioning authority. In the end a decision was made not to impose a penalty on the contractor, but to send a formal notification that such situations should always be prevented, while simultaneously complimenting him on the transparent way he handled the incident.

With this example, I want to show the interpretive flexibility that is available to actors despite strict contractual obligations. From the perspective of sensegiving, the final decision about how to deal with the incident (and the corresponding contractual obligations) is actually not the most relevant aspect of this example; all other decisions could also have been defended based on the perspective from which the incident was viewed. The essential aspect is that the same situation or contract can be interpreted differently, i.e. can be given a different meaning, from different perspectives. In an organizational culture with a tight focus on contract-based management and control, the strict contract-based solution would probably have been chosen: a penalty should be imposed. And besides, the decision would possibly have been different if the incident had been one in a series of safety incidents on the project. And another commissioning authority, which had previously experienced a similar incident that did result in an accident, could also have arrived at a different decision. The context therefore determines the meaning that can be ascribed to a situation or contract.

From the foregoing it is clear that, by placing specific events in a meaningful whole, interpretive researchers essentially create a narrative or plot with the

aim of persuading their readership – in a transparent fashion – that their argumentation is valid (Czarniawska, 2004; T. J. Kaplan, 1993; Merkus, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1987). This correlates with the finding in Chapter 2 that social interaction occurs mainly through narratives, and that changes in an organization's culture come about because new narratives prevail over old ones, and that these new narratives lead to a change in the sensemaking of the employees of the organization (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Bate, 2004; Brown et al., 2009; Bruner, 1990; Finstad, 1998). In the same chapter, it was stated that the power of these narratives is not the result of their truthfulness, but of the degree with which they make sense to those involved. In other words, the plausibility of the narrative is more important than its accuracy; this stands in contrast to the positivistic approach in which the narrative is true only if it can be objectively 'proven' based on facts and arguments (Bruner, 1986; Czarniawska, 2004; Merkus, 2014). As shown before, in the interpretive approach multiple narratives can exist simultaneously; which of these narratives is 'correct' cannot be 'measured'. Instead, this research approach focuses on the fact that the narratives can give meaning to events, and that this ultimately leads to a specific choice or action.

This narrative approach was discussed extensively in the previous chapters, explaining how narratives can provide a framework for giving meaning to events in daily practice in organizations. As such, the narratives are the building blocks which are used to describe the interaction between sensemaking and sensegiving in my conceptual model (Figures 4.2. and 4.3) (Abolafia (2010), Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) and Weick (1979), among others). Together with texts, artifacts and other sources, narratives give shape to the culture within an organization and orient the changes effectuated in that organization (Czarniawska & Gagliardi, 2003; Mumby & Clair, 1997). Narratives are an outstanding means to illustrate the multi-vocal significance of events (Boje, 2001). After all, multiple and contradictory truths will always co-exist. People will always have their own frame of reference from which they assess specific situations; they are simply incapable of stepping outside this frame of reference in order to try and discover some kind of objective truth. It appears to be more productive to try to discover how people describe their world, and from there to discover how they can change this world (Rorty, Schneewind, & Skinner, 1984). In this respect, there is an added value in staging joint narrative-building and sensemaking during an event by multiple stakeholders with different backgrounds. In this way 'co-creation' can give meaning to everyone's role in a joint change process (Geiger, 2009; Pelkman & Veenswijk, 2008).

In interpretive research an important role is played by the researcher and the perspective from which he looks at and gives meaning to a specific situation and context<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, the researcher explains what he sees, deliberately or otherwise, from his own frame of reference (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Van Dongen et al., 1996). Typical positivist criteria such as validity, reliability, generalizability<sup>10</sup> and replicability cannot be used in this way as part of an interpretive approach. Replication of a specific study by a different researcher will not always generate the same data (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). As argued previously, the interpretive researcher is not really looking for objective truth, but is trying to make sense of what is happening in an organization. During this process, he will search for as many dimensions, ambiguities and contradictions as possible. For sensemaking, he will then be interested primarily in the origin of these ambiguities and contradictions and how they are dealt with. This would not be possible if the organization is studied from a distance. To understand what is actually happening, the researcher must be 'submerged' in the organization.

The following question emerges logically from the above: when giving meaning to what he observes, is this type of researcher not merely seeking confirmation of his own ideas (reasoning to justify his own results), and if so: what impact does this have on the value of his research? It goes without saying that interpretive research must also comply with the requirements of reliability and integrity, whereby two elements are crucial: reflexivity and transparency (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Reflexivity is important because knowledge generated interpretively does not necessarily lead to generic knowledge. Reflexivity focuses primarily on the context of the situation and provides other lenses with which to look at a specific situation and from there to work towards alternative solutions. In regard to this, it is also important to determine which role the researcher had, or could have had. To ensure well-supported judgments, the researcher needs transparency, documentation and multiple sources. Findings based on multiple sources must be consistent and the researcher must decide how to approach conflicts between these sources in order to arrive at a logical argument. The aim of looking for inconsistencies, to use a cinematic metaphor, is to acquire a more refined understanding of the entire motion picture, instead of only a few frames, and in this way to acquire a representation of

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9) This would also apply to a positivist researcher, but when thinking interpretively, he would erroneously assume that he can look objectively at a specific situation and context.

10) While the results of positivist research are assumed to be generalizable to the population being studied, the results of interpretive research are generalizable to the scope of the concept being studied.

	Positivist research	Interpretive research
<b>Orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeks fact-finding (measurable facts).</li> <li>- Mechanical causality (cause-effect relationships).</li> <li>- Answering the question “<i>what caused this?</i>”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeks shared understanding.</li> <li>- Constitutive (formative) causality.</li> <li>- Answering the question “<i>why?</i>”.</li> </ul>
<b>Nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collects data.</li> <li>- Focuses on what is seen and heard.</li> <li>- Reduces complexity and ambiguity.</li> <li>- Generalizable.</li> <li>- Fixed, predetermined research method.</li> <li>- Deductive, reductionist.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generates or co-generates data.</li> <li>- Focuses especially on what is not seen/heard.</li> <li>- Embraces complexity and ambiguity.</li> <li>- Context-dependent.</li> <li>- Flexible research method.</li> <li>- Abductive, iterative.</li> </ul>
<b>Analysis and evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focuses on objectivity and replicability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focuses on credibility through reflexivity and transparency.</li> </ul>

Table 5.1: Comparison between positivist and interpretive research  
(based on Schwarz-Shea & Yanow (2012))

all its complexity and diversity (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). It should again be emphasized that the ultimate aim is not to determine what ‘really’ happened. Indeed, this would be a reductionist approach, which is more compatible with the positivist school of research.

Table 5.1 briefly summarizes the specific differences between the positivist research approach and the social constructivist interpretive approach.

### 5.3 Research design

Research into the emergence of narratives in organizations, with their dimensions, versatility and ambiguity, and the process of giving meaning to one’s experiences through these narratives, lends itself well to an interpretive organizational ethnographic approach (Bate, 1997; Berendse, 2013; Van de Ven, 2007; van Marrewijk, Ybema, Smits, Clegg, & Pitsis, 2016; Ybema et al., 2009). Ethnographic research focuses on how people, or groups of people, behave in everyday life and interact with each other. It does so in part by looking at what

happens, listening to what is being said and asking questions, so that a rich and multifaceted picture can emerge (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; O'Reilly, 2005). Ethnographic research focuses mainly on how processes in organizations develop over a longer period of time; instead of taking snapshots of organizations at a specific time, it can effectively show what actually happens in an organization when new narratives become dominant over old ones, and what meaning can be given to these narratives (Bate, 2005; Ybema et al., 2009). In addition, Bate (1997, p. 1165) argues the following: *"There is no other way to study 'process' and 'change' than by paying close attention to the mundanity and everydayness of organizational life. Organizational behavior should stop seeing organizational change as a 'parade that can be watched as it passes' in favor of a more processual understanding of organizational change."* (Bate, 1997, p. 1159 citing Geertz; Berendse, 2013, p. 71).

Typical organizational issues such as process improvement, organizational learning and change management are also very suitable for practical research and action research. This is because they are about 'real' problems that need to be managed in the here and now, because they can increase the effectiveness of organizational steering and because they can contribute to the development of theory about what actually happens in organizations (Coghlan, 2007). In this way, by generating knowledge that is also relevant in practice, the practice of daily management in organizations and the academic world of the organizational sciences are brought closer together (engaged scholarship) (Bartunek, 2004; Bate & Robert, 2007; Coghlan, 2007; G. Johnson et al., 2007; Maclean & Macintosh, 2002; Schön, 1992; Van de Ven, 2007; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2007; van Marrewijk, Veenswijk, & Clegg, 2010). Action research or intervention research is essentially reflexive, cooperative and interventional (Cooke & Wolfram Cox, 2005; Riordan, 1995).

Ethnographic research traditionally takes the role of observer; the developments within organizations are perceived from the sidelines, as it were, and in principle the researcher does not intervene in the process. In contrast, the intention of action or intervention research is to do something with the researcher's observations, and then see what happens in a longer-term context. This involves merging, as it were, into the organization, which is then studied according to the idea that 'knowing is inseparable from doing' (Eden & Huxham, 1996; Sykes & Treleaven, 2009). Despite this clear difference, ethnographic research and action research also have many similarities, and both approaches look for sensemaking about events in organizations. In recent years, more and more combinations of these approaches have been seen, such as Bate's 'action



ethnography' (2000) and the 'ethnovention' of Van Marrewijk, Veenswijk and Clegg (2010). The latter approach, a combination of the terms 'ethnography' and 'intervention', involves the use of organizational ethnography to facilitate interventions with the aim of improving the functioning of an organization. An example of this combination of ethnography and action research is Bate's study (1994) of the cultural change process at British Rail. An ethnographic analysis showed that the way in which cultural change was deployed within the organization was counterproductive and impeding for the various divisions within the company. By changing the organizational perspective, by means of an action intervention, the management of British Railways was enabled to transform the organization more effectively. Other examples are Zell's contribution (1997) to the reorganization of Hewlett Packard and that of Pitsis et al. (2003), using ethnographic methods to encourage the project management of the Sydney Harbor Northside Storage Tunnel to reflect on their project culture and on the cooperation between the various project partners. At the core of these studies and this approach is the combination of studying what actually happens on the work floor of an organization and, by giving meaning to those events, bringing about changes through interventions at both the workplace level and management level. In order to gain deeper insight into what happens within an organization, it is not only important to look at what is immediately visible, but also at what is below the surface. This is because there can be contradictions between what is formally propagated by the management of an organization and what actually happens and how that is perceived on the work floor (van Marrewijk et al., 2010).

If the ethnographic researcher is part of the organization he is investigating, or if he is an employee of that organization, and is therefore part of the object of research, this is known as auto-ethnographic research (Denzin, 1989; Ellis, 2004; Hayano, 1979; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Van Maanen, 1988). This involves a merger of ethnography (in this case the ethnography of one's own organization or culture) and autobiography (in this case with an ethnographic perspective) (Reed-Danahay, 1997). The auto-ethnographic research method makes it possible for the researcher to reflect on events in practice from two perspectives: from his role as researcher and from his role as an employee in that organization (Van Marrewijk, 2011). The advantage of this method is that the auto-ethnographic researcher, based on his own experience and knowledge of the context, can give meaning to what happens in practice from a personal perspective in an autobiographical style (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Van Maanen, 1995). As a result, the researcher is not an objective outsider, but someone who helps to create the

narrative (Denzin, 1989). In the previous section it was explained that this also has disadvantages in terms of reliability and integrity. Reed-Danahay (1997) stated that auto-ethnography is usually seen as more 'authentic' than 'normal' ethnography; in most cases, the insider's image is seen as more 'truthful' than that of the outsider. According to Ellis (2004), while it is not the intention of this approach to misrepresent the facts, its ultimate purpose is to convey the meaning behind a story to the reader as accurately as possible. Or, as Plummer (2001, p. 401) puts it: "*What matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller - to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world doesn't 'match reality'.*" Later in this section, where my own position is concerned, I will reflect more on this dual role.

Anderson (2006) introduced the term 'analytical auto-ethnography' to distinguish this approach from the more expressive 'evocative auto-ethnography' (for an example, see Ellis (2004)). In his analytical approach, Anderson described five characteristics:

- The researcher is part of the organization being studied. In addition to the role duality discussed earlier, Anderson emphasizes that even though the researcher is part of the organization being studied, a complete picture of all events still cannot be obtained. After all, these events will be experienced differently by everyone within that organization. Anderson therefore prefers to see the auto-ethnographer in this context as an actor who helps to create the social constructs in an organization.
- The researcher must have analytical reflexive awareness. This ties in with the previously discussed reflexivity that must be present to compensate for the disadvantages associated with the researcher's role duality. In this context, reflexivity arises from self-aware introspection and the desire to study events in an organization in order to better understand both one's own behavior and that of others.
- The researcher himself must be actively visible in the texts. His role is therefore different from that of the traditional ethnographer, who will generally be invisible. By making subjective experience part of the research, it can offer the reader more insight into the meaning of events. However, excess subjectivity, which could lead to self-absorption, must be prevented (Geertz, 1988).
- To prevent this self-absorption and tunnel vision, it is important that the researcher not only records his own subjective experiences, but also regularly engages in dialogue with colleagues. This can also create a richer picture of the events.

- Capturing personal experiences and providing an ‘insider’s perspective’ on events in an organization is not an end in itself. Ultimately, it should be about increasing the understanding of events and giving them meaning, while providing broader insight into the underlying social phenomena.

The present study is based on a combination of auto-ethnography and intervention research. Referring to the aforementioned ‘ethnovention’ approach of Van Marrewijk, Veenswijk & Clegg (2010), my research method could be labeled as ‘auto-ethnoventionalist’. This approach, in which scientific research and application in practice were indeed combined, fits in an almost natural way with my own dual role as interpretive researcher and Program Director of the Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere infrastructure program (SAA). Besides being a researcher, I am not only part of the SAA organization, I am also in charge of it and therefore provide direction to the changes within the organization and the cooperative relationship with other parties. With regard to the before-mentioned distinction between evocative and analytical auto-ethnography, I follow the analytical approach, although evocative elements will not be lacking. Precisely because of my double role, it is important to me that my dissertation should also be accessible for the practitioner public, my colleagues at Rijkswaterstaat and the private sector players. An evocative approach with lively descriptions of events will increase the recognizability for this target group.

As explained in previous chapters, my research focus is on the relationship between resilience and trust, i.e. finding a balance in the cooperative relationship with project partners. This means finding a balance between contract-based management and control on the one hand, and flexibility and mutual reflection on the other, and seeking to achieve this balance through an interaction between sensemaking and sensegiving within the SAA program (Figure 4.3). Although my position in this interplay seems naturally suitable, my double role clearly has both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is that from my position in the SAA program organization, within Rijkswaterstaat and within the Dutch infrastructure sector, I have easy access to all levels of the organizations, in both the public and private sectors. As a result, I have had the opportunity to conduct enriching interviews with all possibly relevant actors. In addition, due to my years of experience at Rijkswaterstaat and SAA, I have firsthand knowledge of the norms and values, the operational methods and the general ‘ups and downs’ within the organization. This has given me an excellent vantage point from which to interpret and give meaning to the observations made during the study.

As stated previously, these advantages simultaneously presented the disadvantages - or challenges - that I faced as a researcher (Karra & Phillips, 2007; Natifu, 2016). Because of my position and experience, I also had to be aware of my own frame of reference and idiosyncratic characteristics. By assessing the observations, unconsciously, from my own frame of reference, I ran the risk of tunnel vision; I could give preference to a certain explanation (from my own point of view or that of others) of events above an alternative explanation, possibly because I did not even perceive this alternative (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). Ethical dilemmas may also have played a role here, not only on my part, but also, for example, on the part of my interviewees, who saw themselves not only facing a researcher but also a director at Rijkswaterstaat, and who therefore might give their answers a different nuance (Natifu, 2016). I also ran the ethical risk of reasoning in terms of my own position or vision, not least because, as a Program Director, I am also responsible for the successful operation of the program. In summary, one could refer to these risks or challenges as a kind of 'cultural nearsightedness'.

To ensure that these disadvantages did not interfere with the aforementioned advantages, I had to be aware of this role conflict, both from my position as Program Director and from my position as a researcher. In addition, as described in the previous section, transparency and reflexivity, i.e. explicitly aiming for and requesting feedback and reflection from my environment, have been of great importance (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Shehata, 2006; Smits, 2013; Ybema et al., 2009). I therefore deliberately shared my findings with others and asked them to reflect on these findings. In doing so I was continually forced to make my own points of view explicit, which enabled me to avoid an overly biased perspective. The actual implementation of this approach is discussed in a subsequent chapter. Reflexivity has given me, as a researcher, the opportunity to explicitly and extensively discuss the influence that my position, experience and possible conflicting interests could have had on the observations that I made during the study, the meaning I have given to these observations and the conclusions that I have attached to them. Thus, transparency and reflexivity have indeed enhanced my personal responsibility for this study and its results (Humphreys, 2005; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

## 5.4 Methodology

As explained in the sections above, I opted for a narrative approach in this study, i.e. using narratives to give meaning to what actually happens within the SAA project environment, both within the Rijkswaterstaat teams and in the

cooperative relationships with the various contractors and other stakeholders of the program. The present study therefore centers on the generation and collection of narratives as illustrations and building blocks for my conceptual model: the relationship between resilience and trust, and the trade-off between contract-based management on one hand, and flexibility and joint reflection on the other. Within the SAA infrastructure program, this is referred to as 'resilient partnership'. In literature, the term 'vignettes' is also used for these illustrative texts (Friesl & Silberzahn, 2012; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2014; Merkus, De Heer, & Veenswijk, 2014; Whittle & Mueller, 2010; Wright, 2014).

My years of experience with large infrastructure projects have shown that a large proportion of the work on such projects is predictable and can be done in accordance with the corresponding standards and the contract between the commissioning authority and the contractor. As shown in previous chapters, a part of the work will be unpredictable and it is therefore impossible to take account of everything with standard operational methods and contracts<sup>11</sup>. The latter component becomes larger as the work, or context in which the work is to be carried out, becomes more complex, innovative, dynamic or ambiguous. It becomes smaller if a standard, 'off-the-shelf' project is being implemented. The contract is not always suitable for the unpredictable component; therefore the stakeholders in the project must act appropriately in view of the circumstances. My experience is that the success or failure of such a project depends mainly on how the parties involved deal with this unpredictable component and the flexibility that is given to employees of the commissioning authority and the contractor to do so (see also Van Marrewijk et al. (2008)). The primary focus of my research has therefore been on collecting narratives that relate to this part of the work: that which falls outside the planned course of events. Because every situation and context is different, I did not focus primarily on the outcome of the narratives, i.e. which decisions were ultimately made in unpredictable situations; instead I looked especially at the tensions and dilemmas with which the employees concerned struggled and how they made judgments. The narratives should help the researcher understand these dilemmas, show where they come from and identify the various perspectives from which an event can be viewed. The latter can be done with a single narrative, but also with multiple, sometimes contrasting, narratives that can be equally 'true' or plausible for those who tell them from their

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11) Based on my own experience, I estimate that the predictable component is approximately 90%, and the unpredictable component is therefore around 10%..

perspective. Narratives not only have a chronological dimension (placing events and actions on a timeline), but also provide a retrospective interpretation. The narrator places the events in a certain context or order, which gives the events a plot structure and meaning and explains them (Cheney, Christensen, Conrad, & Lair, 2004; Søderberg, 2006). In this way, the changing mode of cooperation can be given shape and emerges from the narratives. Alternatively, to use the metaphor from Chapters 3 and 4, the joint *shock absorbing cushion* of the commissioning authority and contractor, which can help protect them from unexpected situations or setbacks, can be filled by the narratives.

All the narratives have a similar structure (see Ellis (2004) and others). They begin with a situation sketch of an event with a description of the stakeholders and the narrator, followed by a description of the 'crisis' that caused tensions between the stakeholders, their respective action perspectives and considerations in dealing with these tensions, and then the end of the story. Finally, the event is reflected upon. For the sensegiving, the narratives are analyzed along three dimensions, based on Aristotle's *Rhetorica* (4<sup>th</sup> century BC): the intrinsic logic of the narrative, resulting in a plot structure (*logos*), the social-emotional tensions in the narrative (*pathos*) and the storytelling itself (*ethos*); see Table 5.2 (Toulmin, 2003; Van de Ven, 2007).

To obtain as broad and diverse a picture as possible of what is going on within the SAA program and within the cooperative relationships with other parties, narratives have been 'gathered' over a period of time from all parts of the SAA organization and from the contracting parties. This was done at the management level, at the work floor level and at all levels in between. This made it possible to illuminate the same event from various perspectives, which in turn enriched the corresponding narratives. The study itself lasted approximately three years, from 2015 through 2017. This longer period was chosen to acquire a good picture of the developments among employees at both Rijkswaterstaat and in the private sector regarding their thinking about and dealing with the above-mentioned topics, such as resilience, trust, contract-based management and reflection. This use of longitudinal intervals is compatible with the ethno-ventionistic research method of Van Marrewijk et al. (Bate, 1994; Czarniawska, 1992; van Marrewijk et al., 2010). A longer research period, during which the actual events on the work floor were examined, makes it possible to gain insight into the effect of management control on both the commissioning authority and the contractor. The development of narratives, my interpretation of these narratives and the interpretations of others also enabled me to acquire a broad picture of the operation of my conceptual model from Chapter 4 (Figure 4.2

Logic of the narrative ( <i>logos</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is the structure of the narrative?</li> <li>- Is there a logical plot structure?</li> <li>- Are the events placed in a specific context or order?</li> <li>- What is the connection with other narratives?</li> </ul>
Emotion of the narrative ( <i>pathos</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the dominant values in the narrative and are these values clearly visible?</li> <li>- Are the tensions between the values and the dilemmas visible?</li> <li>- Does the narrative appeal to you, can you connect with it?</li> </ul>
The storytelling itself ( <i>ethos</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are the narrative and the narrator authentic and believable?</li> <li>- Are the interpretations of practice sufficiently catchy and appealing?</li> <li>- Is the context clearly drawn?</li> </ul>

Table 5.2: Levels of sensegiving in narratives; based on Aristotle's *Rhetorica*

and Figure 4.3) with the interaction between the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving in the organization, including the connotation and deployment of 'resilient partnership' within SAA.

Narratives were collected in various ways (Van de Ven, 2007; Van Marrewijk, 2011; Ybema et al., 2009), such as observations, interviews, interactive workshops with employees of the commissioning authority or jointly with employees of the commissioning authority and contractor, and during the twice-yearly organization-wide employee meetings of the SAA program. In my role as director and initiator of the change process, I took a steering role while recording the first narratives during the initial phase of the process. Indeed, since I held the final responsibility as director of the program, I was also an 'actor' in most of the narratives, and due to my daily presence in the organization I helped to build the narratives. In these situations, instead of retrieving and collecting narratives, it is more accurate to refer to generating/co-generating the narratives or constructing/co-constructing them, as discussed in previous sections (O'Reilly, 2005; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Silverman, 2007; Ybema et al., 2009). However, to ensure reflexivity I shared my own experience with the other 'actors' in the narratives ("*did they see something differently than I did?*"). In this way I could avoid tunnel vision and 'cultural nearsightedness' and acquire a richer coloration of the events and people's considerations (perceptions) in dealing with them. I tried to give as little direction as possible to the narratives, and by asking 'why' questions, I tried to obtain the clearest possible picture of the narratives and their context. Moreover, from the beginning of the research

process, the executive management of the program actively encouraged employees from all levels of the organization to become storytellers. For example, workshops on storytelling were held, and halfway through the process an external consultant was engaged to help make the narratives even more focused. Indeed, an external party could ask 'why' questions more often and without being substantively responsible. As a result, the previously mentioned pitfall of 'cultural nearsightedness' could be avoided. In addition, employees of SAA were encouraged to share their story with their co-workers, for example, during the employee meetings. For some people this was obviously an obstacle, so it was decided to let employees who already had experience with storytelling lead the way. Afterwards, it was very rewarding to see employees spontaneously offering to share their story with the others, even though they previously thought they would never dare to do so in public. In this way, the 'art of storytelling' spread through the organization in a natural way, resulting in a rich harvest of stories.

## 5.5 Implementation of the study in practice

One of the most important characteristics of interpretive research is flexibility. After all, what happens in organizations is largely determined by the continuously changing and ambiguous context. So why make a detailed research design in advance (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012)? In contrast to positivist research, which is based on a strictly defined research design and its meticulous implementation, interpretive research must be planned to take account of changing circumstances and to progressively elaborate on findings. This requires improvisational capacity, an eye for ambiguity and a flexible approach if adjustments are required by the circumstances. A research design is essential for interpretive research as much as for any type of research, but flexibility should be its most important characteristic (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). As a result, in this type of research the actual research steps can be defined and justified only in retrospect. I will reflect on this topic in a later chapter.

In 2014, I started with two workshops with the SAA Contract Managers, during which I shared my ideas as SAA Program Director regarding a culture shift towards a different type of cooperation with our contractors in the private sector: resilient partnership. I selected these managers specifically because they held key roles due to their position relative to their counterparts in the private sector. Subsequently, these ideas were shared more widely within SAA during the twice-yearly employee meetings. During the first such meeting, the initia-



tive was taken primarily by management: sharing their vision about this other form of cooperation. The subsequent meetings had a more interactive character, during which storytelling was practiced, the first stories were shared, and employees were encouraged to start writing and sharing their own stories, also outside the meetings. During this process they were aided by internal and external experts in storytelling. Finally, twice-yearly interactive shops were held for the ongoing projects with key officials from both Rijkswaterstaat and the contractors. These sessions led to narratives in which events during various project phases were illuminated from various perspectives. Appendix B provides a summary of all activities in the research period.

It should be reiterated that a large part of the storytelling, interpretations and sensegiving obviously took place due to my daily presence on the work floor as Program Director of SAA. One could refer to this as implicit action research, in contrast to the organized meetings and workshops mentioned above, during which more explicit action research took place.

## 5.6 Analysis of the data and presentation of the findings

The analysis of the partly collected and partly generated data – the vignettes – took place in three steps. The first step involved organizing/classifying and clustering the data (the narratives). As explained previously, both the choice of narratives and the organizing/classifying process are idiosyncratic: my own frame of reference as a researcher certainly played a decisive role in the choices made in organizing and classifying the narratives (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Duijnhoven, 2010; Merkus, 2014). A different researcher would probably have made different choices. For reasons of transparency and reflexivity, this activity took place in consultation with other managers of SAA. This process will be explained in more detail in the subsequent chapters. The second step was giving meaning to the narratives. This was done by myself as Program Director and by the other SAA managers. This also concerned the way in which this meaning was given back to the organization in order to become a source of inspiration and a trigger for new narratives. These in turn served as inputs to the cycle of sensemaking and sensegiving from Chapter 4 (see Figures 4.2 and 5.2). With the third step in the analysis, the cycle was complete and the following question was addressed: to what extent has the intended change process within SAA truly gotten started and has it led to new narratives on the work floor about increased effectiveness in the partnership between the commissioning authority and contractor? The steps are summarized in an analysis model (Figure 5.2).

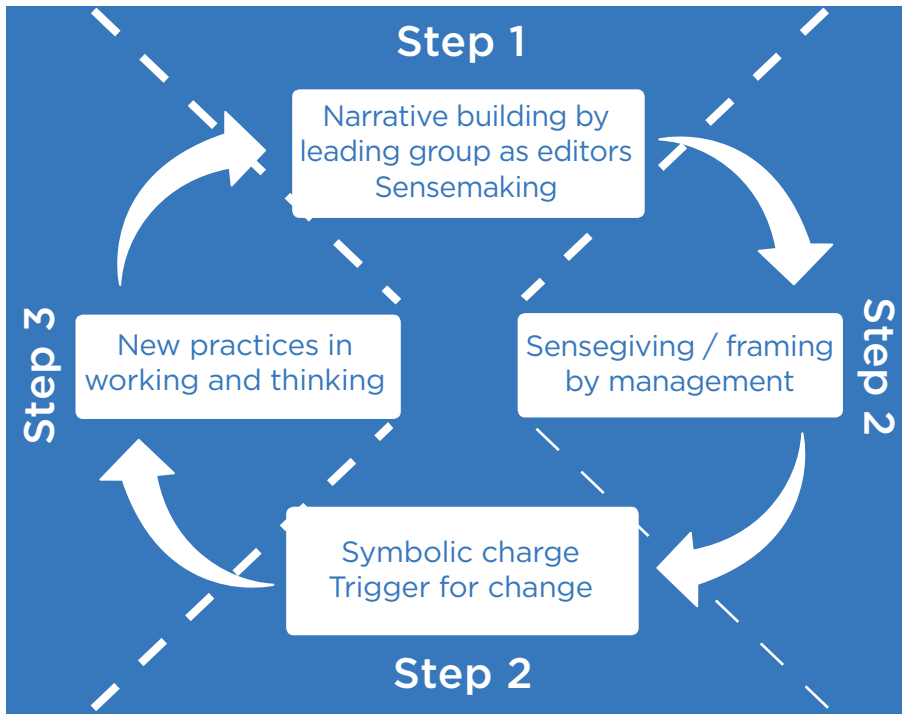


Figure 5.2: Analysis steps in the cycle of sensemaking and sensegiving

### Step 1: sensemaking - organizing/classifying and clustering the narratives

As explained in Section 5.4 the narratives were viewed at three levels of sensegiving: logic, emotion and storytelling (see Table 5.2). The aim was to make these elements as visible as possible in the narratives in order to subsequently link the sensegiving to the narratives as effectively as possible. Based on my conceptual model from Chapter 3 (Figure 3.2), I thoroughly searched the narratives for dilemmas and tensions that have arisen in practice between two approaches: strictly complying with the contract-based solution and looking for room for interpretation in the contract. I then looked at the consequences of the dilemmas and choices for the resilience and adaptive capacity and for the mutual trust in the relationship between commissioning authority and contractor. Core values such as transparency, predictability and the willingness to understand each other and invest in each other each also played a role in this process. This enabled me to establish the foundation for the second step: giv-

ing meaning to the narrative, thus creating triggers for change and initiating the cycle of sensemaking and sensegiving.

To ensure clarity, the stories were later clustered into a number of substantive themes. These themes were also linked to the sensegiving in the second step.

- The extent to which the commissioning authority and contractor jointly create societal value with respect to achieving the project aims.
- The way in which tensions are dealt with in the triangular relationship between the commissioning authority, contractor and participating and licensing authorities, such as municipalities.
- The way in which unexpected circumstances or ambiguities in the contract are dealt with.
- The way in which tensions between planning, traffic nuisance and environmental nuisance are dealt with.
- The way in which the imposition of contract-based penalties following safety incidents are dealt with.
- The way in which contract-based risks for the contractor can turn into political risks for the commissioning authority.

## Step 2: sensegiving as a trigger for change - giving meaning to the narratives

The second step involves the process of giving meaning (sensegiving) to the narratives: which elements are highlighted and which are not? How are these elements placed in the context of the process of shifting to a different mode of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor, with a greater focus on trust and resilience, and based on a balance between contract-based management on one side and flexibility and joint reflection on the other? And how can these elements in the organization function as a trigger for change and a source of inspiration for new narratives that can replace the old ones? As discussed in the previous chapter, this sensegiving can take place in various ways: through metaphors, images, caricatures, audiovisual aids and other means. An example of an image is shown in Figure 5.3 - the drawing on the cover of the first SAA story collection - symbolizing the cooperative relationship in the before-mentioned triangle. This image gives meaning to the triangular cooperative relationship, which enables it to serve as a breeding ground for new narratives. At SAA, a combination of the above means was chosen.

## SAA Verhalenbundel Dienend Opdrachtgeverschap Wat betekent dat in de praktijk?



Figure 5.3: Cooperation in the triangular relationship between the municipality, contractor and Rijkswaterstaat (Illustration: Frans de Lorme van Rossem, 2016)

As explained in Sections 5.2 and 5.4, the essential meaning of the narratives lies not so much in their outcomes, but primarily in the struggles and dilemmas that the employees in the narrative experienced when deciding how to deal with an unexpected event. An important caution, therefore, is not to place too much normative or prescriptive value on the meaning of narratives or, in other words, not to jump to conclusions with regard to new contractual agreements. Indeed, this would limit the flexibility that the employees at the commissioning authority and contractor need to deal adequately with unpredictable circumstances. At first glance, covering all conceivable risks in the contract would appear to be a good risk management strategy. However, this would shift the balance between contract-based management and flexibility too far in the direction of the contract and ultimately exacerbate the risks. The intended security would become false security.

To illustrate the above notion, I can refer to a situation from the more distant past: around 1995. At that time I was project leader at the civil engineering department of Rijkswaterstaat. It was during this period when Rijkswaterstaat started requesting quality assurance certificates from all contractors in accordance with NEN-ISO 9001, a standard that was implemented at the end of the 1980s. The director of the civil engineering department at that time stated the following: “If we require this certification from our contractors, we should at least become certified ourselves”. As a result, a certification process was initiated within the civil engineering department, and work began on a new operational method to achieve this. This new operational method, called Elementair, turned out to be ahead of its time. The operational method was set down in a relatively concise handbook, and consisted of three main components: 1) three ‘commandments’ that each employee had to obey at all times, such as ‘never commission work unless funding for this work is available’, 2) a number of ‘strict guidelines’, i.e. rules which were obligatory in principle, but from which employees could deviate if this choice was well-considered, and 3) a number of ‘pointers’ that were intended to help employees in performing their work. The basic idea behind this structure was that employees were given the flexibility to make choices on their own initiative and responsibility, and that they would be called to account by their manager if there was reason to do so. By appealing to the individual responsibility of employees, the intention was to initiate a self-learning process within the organization. The new operational method was initially successful, and in 1996 the desired quality assurance certification was obtained. Subsequently, the operational method was implemented and almost everything went well, with the inevitable exception of occasional problems. However, what happened regularly in those problematic situations was that the employees concerned were not called to account, but new rules and instructions were added to the handbook to prevent such situations in the future. The number of ‘commandments’ and ‘strict guidelines’ therefore increased steadily, so that in four years the handbook quadrupled in size. As a result, it became increasingly difficult for employees to obey the rules, and this led to problems with the quality assurance audit, which was obviously embarrassing for the entire organization of Rijkswaterstaat. Intervention was required. Since the regulations were experienced as too restrictive, and this was seen as the most important cause of the problem, it was decided

to abolish the Elementair handbook and the operational method it stood for and make the transition to a new method. After this time, as far as I can determine, quality assurance certification was no longer discussed at Rijkswaterstaat.

Seen in retrospect, this incident can be given meaning in various ways. For example, in retrospect it could be concluded that too much flexibility was given to employees too soon. Another interpretation could be that this is what can happen if the operational methods become too rigid, which actually increases the likelihood of problems. This incident and these interpretations are in my opinion still relevant today in the process towards resilient partnership.

### Step 3: Sensemaking - new narratives and practices

The third and final step involves reflection on the following question: To what extent has the commitment to resilient partnership actually led to increased effectiveness in the cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor? Are the old narratives indeed being replaced by new ones? At the same time, are the old practices increasingly being replaced by a new mode of cooperation? And what observations can be made to support that claim? The way in which people deal with the sensegiving by the management is also discussed. Are there people or organizational units at Rijkswaterstaat or the relevant market players that are forestalling the new operational method, or are indeed moving ahead too quickly? And finally: How is resilient partnership perceived as a new operational method by Rijkswaterstaat and the market players? Is it actually experienced as effective, and therefore as successful, or is this not the case? To answer these questions, besides utilizing my own observations, I interviewed various key persons at various levels within Rijkswaterstaat SAA and the contracting consortia. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

### Summary of the analysis model

The steps discussed before are summarized in an analysis model, see Table 5.3. In this model a link is made between the project practice of the SAA infrastructure program (vertical axis), and the theory about triggers for change and the circle of sensemaking and sensegiving from previous chapters (horizontal

Steps ( <i>theory</i> ) → Narratives ( <i>practice</i> )	Step 1	Step 2		Step 3
	Sensemaking Dominant narratives and dilemmas	Sensegiving Contribution to resilience and trust	Triggers for change Symbolism, framing aimed at the organisation(s)	Sensemaking New narratives and practices
The extent to which societal value is jointly created.				
The way in which tensions are dealt with in the triangular relationship between commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder.				
The way in which unexpected circumstances or ambiguities in the contract are dealt with.				
The way in which tensions between planning, traffic nuisance and environmental nuisance are dealt with.				
The way in which the imposition of contract-based penalties following incidents are dealt with.				
The way in which contract-based risks for the contractor can turn into political risks for the commissioning authority.				

Table 5.3: Analytical model narrative building SAA

axis). With regard to the latter, the steps from the conceptual model for changing the cooperative relationship are visible, see Figures 4.2 and 5.2. Although this model indicates cyclical motion, for presentation reasons the table below shows the steps in linear sequence on the horizontal axis. The cyclical motion is shown by the *sensemaking* of the first step appearing in another form in the third step. In the following chapters the table will be filled with the aforementioned dilemmas and tensions that have arisen in practice between two approaches: strictly following the contract-based solution and seeking space for interpretation in the contracts. The meaning that has been given to these dilemmas and tensions by management will be linked in the columns under step 2 and it will be shown how this meaning has been 'returned' to the organization as a *trigger for change*. The last column will show how the practices on the various themes have actually changed over time and whether or not they have led to new narratives and have strengthened the resilience, adaptive capacity and mutual trust in the relationship between the commissioning authority and contractor.



# Chapter 6

Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere:  
through partnership to project success

## 6.1 The infrastructure program Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere (SAA)

To provide an effective interpretation of all the stories and events described in this and the following chapter within the context in which they took place, this section provides insight into the object of my research: the infrastructure program Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere (SAA) of Rijkswaterstaat and the relationship with its stakeholders, in particular the various contractors.

At the time of this study, SAA was the largest infrastructure program in the Netherlands; the construction costs alone were capitalized at about 4.5 billion euros<sup>12</sup>. This project, which was still ongoing when this study was published, involves a large-scale reconstruction and upgrading of the main road network between Schiphol, Amsterdam and Almere, with the aim of improving the accessibility and quality of life in this densely populated region of the Netherlands. The program has a long history. Since the 1960s, discussions have been held about the various possibilities for improving the logistics between the urban areas of Amsterdam and Almere. Various alternative solutions were investigated until a decision was finally made in 2007 to build the *Stroomlijnalternatief* [Streamline Alternative], which entailed a widening of the existing road infrastructure (A1, A6, A9 and A10-East motorways), see Figure 6.1. In that same year an agreement was also concluded between the national government and the most important administrative *Stroomlijnpartners* [Streamline Partners] in the region: the provinces of North Holland and Flevoland, the municipalities of Amsterdam, Almere and Amstelveen and the Amsterdam city region (*Bestuursvereenkomst Stroomlijnalternatief Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere* [the Management Agreement Streamline Alternative Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere]). This agreement also stipulated, among other things, that a number of the partners would contribute financially to the realization of the program. In return, it was agreed that the national government would implement a number of local measures to improve accessibility and quality of life in the respective areas. These measures included the construction of an aqueduct under the river Vecht near Muiden, the construction of a 3 km long land tunnel for the motorway in

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12) The majority of the SAA program has been contracted through 'DBFM' contracts. Besides the realization and design, these contracts also involve some 20 years of maintenance and the financing for the entire project (more details further in this section). The total capitalization of the program is therefore considerably greater than the amount stated here.



Figure 6.1: The infrastructure program Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere (SAA)

southeast Amsterdam covered by park to eliminate the barrier effect between two urban districts (Bijlmer and Gaasperdam), and excavating a below-grade motorway near Amstelveen. After 2007 the details of the *Stroomlijnalternatief* were gradually finalized, ultimately resulting in an *Onherroepelijk Tracébesluit* [Irrevocable Route Decision] in 2012. The realization of the SAA program also began in that year.

Due to their financial involvement, the aforementioned *Stroomlijnpartners* have played an important role in the realization of the SAA program, but because parts of the infrastructure are built on their jurisdiction, they have also played a role as competent authority (licensing and enforcement). In addition, other stakeholders are (or were) involved in the realization of the program in various ways, such as other municipalities along the route, water boards, utilities and other private and public organizations and institutions. Road users and residents along the routes have also been affected by, and/or exerted influence on, the execution of the work.

The implementation of the infrastructure program would require more than 10 years. The impact of all this construction work is enormous, especially on

residents near the routes and on road users. With regard to the latter, it is important that the region would not be 'locked in' during the implementation of the program. The accessibility of this densely populated and economically important part of the Netherlands has to be safeguarded during construction. For this reason, and for reasons of manageability, the program was therefore divided into five projects, see Figure 6.1.

These projects have been realized in 'roof-tile' fashion: in succession and partly overlapping in time. At the time of this study the projects were therefore at various stages of completion (numbered in order of implementation):

- **Project 1 (A10 East):** reconstruction of 9 km of motorway to 2x4 lanes, construction of 12 km of noise barriers and reconstruction of 13 viaducts. The work began in 2012 and was completed in 2014.
- **Project 2 (A1/A6):** widening the motorway to 2x5 lanes with a reversible lane (the traffic direction reverses during the morning and evening rush hour), construction of 60 new viaducts and bridges, a new railway bridge over the A1 and a new aqueduct under the river Vecht. The implementation of this project began in 2014 and was finished in 2018. The road was opened for traffic in October 2017.
- **Project 3 (A9 Gaasperdammerweg):** widening of 7 km of motorway to 2x5 lanes with a reversible lane, of which 3 km will be built in a traffic tunnel with a park on the roof. Implementation began in 2015 and is expected to be opened to traffic in 2020.
- **Project 4 (A6 Almere):** widening of 13 km of motorway with 4 lanes in each direction. In Almere, the motorway will go through the grounds of the Floriade world horticultural exhibition, which will be held in Almere in 2022. The implementation of Project 4 started in 2017 and completion is expected in 2019.
- **Project 5 (A9 Badhoevedorp-Holendrecht):** widening of 11 km of roadway to 2x4 lanes, reconstruction of various viaducts and construction of noise barriers. Near Amstelveen the roadway will be lowered below grade for approximately 1.3 km. At the time of this study, this project was still being prepared for implementation, which is expected to start in 2019, with completion between 2024 and 2026.

This study focuses on the cooperative relationship between the client, the program organization SAA and the various contractors of the projects listed above. Where relevant, the relationship with the above-mentioned stakehold-

ers, such as municipalities, is also discussed. To elucidate the cooperative relationship with the contractors, I will address two aspects below in greater detail. This is because these aspects regularly appear in the narratives that emerged in this study and are therefore relevant to giving meaning to the narratives. The first concerns the type of contract used between Rijkswaterstaat and the contractors consortia, and the second concerns the internal Rijkswaterstaat organization of the SAA program and the corresponding allocation of tasks and responsibilities.

During the study, projects 2, 3 and 4 were realized by the contractors consortia SAAone<sup>13</sup>, IXAS<sup>14</sup> and Parkway6<sup>15</sup>, respectively. The focus of this research has been on the cooperative relationships in these three projects. The DBFM (Design, Build, Finance and Maintain) contract form was used for these projects. This means that the contractor is responsible for the design of the project, its construction, its maintenance for a period of approximately 20 years and for the pre-financing of the whole. With this form of contract, Rijkswaterstaat does not pay for a product, but during the entire duration of the contract (the design period, the construction period and the maintenance period) it pays for a service: the availability of a piece of infrastructure for the road user. Since most of the investments are required during the design and construction phases, the contractors are expected to conclude an agreement with a financier for the pre-financing. This pre-financing will be repaid during the term of the contract from the periodic payments made by Rijkswaterstaat. Without going into details, due to this financial construction and the associated repayment regime, the construction planning is generally very tight. Consequently, the contractors will do everything possible to comply with this planning so they can continue to meet their obligations to the financial institutions. The decisive factor here is the one-off payment that the contractors receive at the end of the construction phase<sup>16</sup>.

At the time of the study, the SAA program organization consisted of approximately 130 employees, of which about half were employed by Rijkswa-

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13) SAAone is a consortium of the companies Hochtief, Volker Wessels, Boskalis and DIF.

14) IXAS is a consortium of the companies Ballast Nedam, Heijmans, Fluor and 3i.

15) Parkway6 is a consortium of the companies Dura Vermeer, Besix, RebelValley and John Laing Investments Ltd.

16) It should be noted that due to this one-off payment, the DBFM contract also has some characteristics of a product contract.

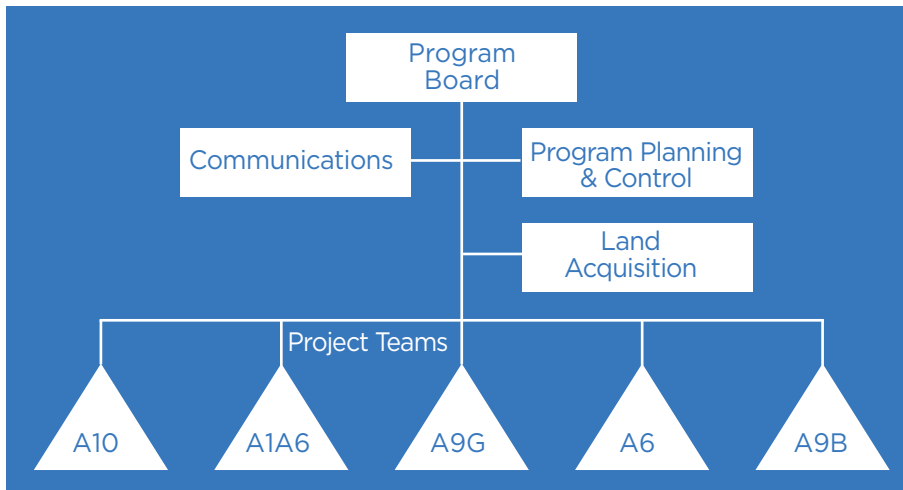


Figure 6.2: Organizational chart of the SAA program organization

terstaat and the other half were from the private sector. Five project teams operated under the auspices of the central program management and a central planning & control unit. These teams were structured in the same way - which is customary for Rijkswaterstaat - in accordance with the IPM model (Integral Project Management Model), see Figures 6.2 and 6.3. The Program Director of SAA reports to the Director General of Rijkswaterstaat.

After completing the planning phase, the most important task of the project teams is the preparation and management of the implementation by the various contractors. Of course, this takes place in close coordination with the many other public and private parties involved in the project, such as municipalities, provinces, road users, local residents and companies and agencies in the vicinity that are affected directly (e.g. noise nuisance) or indirectly (e.g. road traffic). The Stakeholder Manager is responsible for the coordination with these parties, the Contract Manager is responsible for managing the contracting parties, the Technical Manager is responsible for formulating the substantive specifications for these parties and assessing whether the specifications have actually been realized, and the Planning & Control Manager is responsible for the operational management of the project and for identifying and controlling the various risks that can occur during the course of the project. Finally, the Project Manager is responsible for the project as a whole and ensures coordination between the above managers.

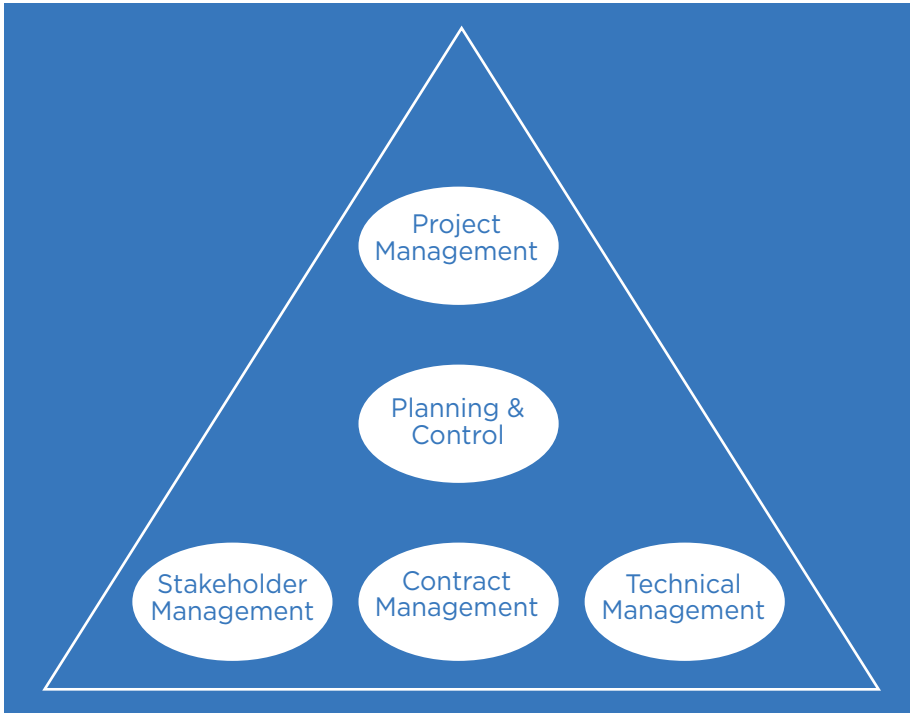


Figure 6.3: The Integral Project Management (IPM) Model

## 6.2 Positioning myself in the context

At the end of 2012, I was appointed Program Director at the SAA infrastructure program. As stated before, this was the largest infrastructure project in the Netherlands, and it was initiated at a time when various infrastructure projects were contending with substantial overruns of schedules and budgets, often resulting in legal proceedings. In previous chapters it was discussed how this led to an increasing sense of unease in both the public and private sectors, as evidenced by the later initiative of large public contracting authorities and market parties in the Netherlands to draw up a new joint Market Strategy, aimed at a different approach to cooperation. When a project was faced with low or extremely low bids during the tender phase, the primary response from the central government was a tightly controlled contract to prevent the contractor from seeking compensation by submitting claims or charging extra for unplanned work. At that time I felt very strongly that this strategy would not achieve the intended goal. Based on what I saw happening in other projects, I

was convinced that cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor would be an important, if not the most important, factor ensuring the success of a complex infrastructure program like SAA. All large and complex projects obviously need an effective and solid contractual basis, but a contract can never take every possibility into account. I therefore started looking for a balance between contract management on the one hand and a more collaborative approach on the other: *“Even with an excellent contract, reality is unruly, and then it ultimately comes down to people who have to work together to find a solution.”*, said a member of the Board of SAA. Or, in the words of an employee of one of the contractors involved with SAA: *“Some aspects simply do not lend themselves to upfront development, then you have to work your way through the hard part together, get through the stress and finally come out of it better than before.”*

Although I had been fascinated by the phenomenon of cooperation for some time, my thinking on this topic really gained momentum in January 2014 during a design workshop as part of the procurement process for one of the SAA projects. Before I go into that, I will first explain the concept of a design workshop. As explained in the previous section, four of the five SAA projects were procured on the basis of DBFM contracts. This procurement process takes place via ‘competitive dialogue’. During this dialogue, which is held over a number of months in parallel with various candidate contractors (often three) for a project, information is exchanged about the content of the project and the contract, about the approach of the bidding contractor, about the risks and the appropriate control measures, and other matters.

The competitive dialogue always includes a design workshop: the commissioning authority is invited to the workshop by the bidder, who explains its envisioned approach to the project with the aim of getting the commissioning authority interested in its proposal. In January 2014, I attended the design workshop of one of the bidding contractors for the A9 Gaasperdammerweg project. Despite my years of experience as an engineer at Rijkswaterstaat, I was surprised by the simplicity of their construction logistics approach. In its logistics plan, the consortium had implemented in detail the principle of avoiding double work or provisional work as much as possible, while making optimum use of the special character of the project.

The core of the A9 Gaasperdammerweg project involved the construction of a 3 km traffic tunnel, exactly on the route of the current A9. The challenge for the project and for the bidding parties was to come up with a plan that would allow traffic to continue as unobstructed as possible during the construction



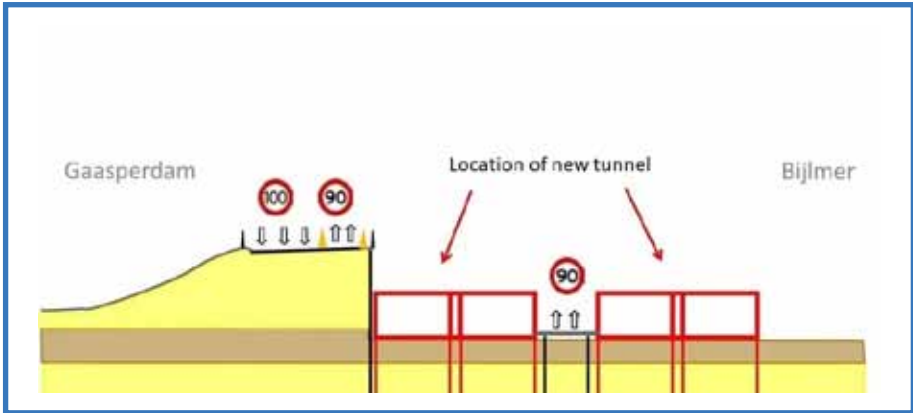


Figure 6.4: Construction proposal for the Gaasperdammer Tunnel (Illustration: IXAS)

phase. The accessibility of this economically important region should not be endangered. Before the start of the procurement, the original idea at Rijkswaterstaat was to build a detour: a temporary road to the south of the A9, with 2 x 3 lanes. The tunnel could then be built on the route of the A9. The central tube of the tunnel would be used as a reversible lane: the direction would reverse depending on the direction of the rush-hour traffic. However, this reversible lane would not be taken into use until several years after the completion of the final SAA project, A9 Badhoevedorp-Holendrecht, because the western entrance and exit to the reversible lane would be situated on that route. As part of the workshop, the bidding party made clever use of this situation. The underlying idea of their proposal was to complete the reversible lane as quickly as possible and use it for traffic during construction, so that the temporary A9 on the south side of the current route would require fewer lanes, see Figure 6.4. As a result, the costs would be significantly lower and the construction process would cause less inconvenience for the surroundings.

In this plan, the adjacent tubes of the tunnel could be built on either side of the reversible lane. After completion traffic could then be diverted through the tunnel and the temporary A9 could be demolished. Finally, the tunnel accommodating the reversible lane could be completed. The approach presented at the workshop was creative, and the bidding party was the only one who included the reversible lane as part of the temporary A9 in its proposal. During the workshop, I realized that this creative solution was exactly what Rijkswaterstaat had been looking for years before, by shifting design responsibilities to the

private sector (see Chapter 2). I also realized that, should this consortium win the contract, it would be inappropriate for us to closely monitor the contractor to ensure correct implementation. My thought was: “*Would it not be better for Rijkswaterstaat to take a facilitating role, to enable this contractor to implement its plans as efficiently as possible?*” This is how the term *dienend opdrachtgeverschap* [resilient partnership]<sup>17</sup> came about. Several months later, the consortium that sponsored the workshop was indeed awarded the contract for the A9 Gaasperdammerweg project, and began implementing its plans. Somewhat later, reality would again show itself to be unruly, and the plans for the route were again modified. More about this in a subsequent chapter.

Following the design workshop, I began working with the concept of resilient partnership as a new mode of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor, and in March 2014 I entered into discussions with the Contract Managers of SAA. At the time, I deliberately opted to discuss this idea with these colleagues for two reasons: 1) as Contract Managers they are in the ‘front line’ of cooperation with our contractors and, 2) I knew most of them personally and I felt that they would be enthusiastic about working on this idea with me. My intuition turned out to be correct, and my ideas were met with enthusiasm. At this time I started taking the concept seriously and working out the details within the SAA organization, first with the Board and the Project Managers, and later on with all employees and stakeholders of SAA. Simultaneously, I decided to make a scientific study of the theme as part of a PhD project to give it a stronger and more fundamental basis in the daily practice of SAA.

### 6.3 The narratives of SAA

This chapter deals with the search for that new type of cooperation and its implementation within the organizations of both the commissioning authority and the contractors. It concerns narratives from practice to illustrate the dilemmas that employees encountered in the process and how they dealt with them. These narratives, or vignettes, primarily help us understand what actually happens in practice. During the years of my research, many of these narratives have been collected and documented, and some of these will be discussed in this chapter<sup>18</sup>. The methods used to collect these narratives were discussed

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17) Because this term cannot be translated literally into English, the term *resilient partnership* was conceived, which I believe expresses the content more accurately.

in Section 5.4. These narratives originated from all parts of the SAA program organization and the contractor consortia that were involved with SAA. I was involved in some of these narratives in the role of Program Director. The narratives concern the tensions and dilemmas that employees encounter in practice while making trade-offs between strict compliance with the contract solution on the one hand and seeking flexibility in the contracts and endeavoring for a more cooperation-oriented approach on the other. The narratives have been placed in chronological order and will be discussed in relation to the themes listed in Section 5.6, such as jointly creating societal value, dealing with tensions in the triangular relationship between commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholders, dealing with the imposition of penalties during incidents and the transformation of contract-based risks for contractors into political risks for the commissioning authority. The narratives (vignettes) have a similar structure (*logos*), as discussed in Chapter 5. First, a sketch of the situation according to the narrator will be provided (the sensemaking). In some cases, the same situation is narrated by different people. As a result, the various perceptions, dilemmas and emotions with which a specific situation is experienced will become clearly visible (*pathos*). After this, the various action perspectives will be visualized (*ethos*), during which the traditional approach, falling back on the contract, will often be contrasted with a resilient partnership approach. Finally, the event will be reflected upon and the trade-offs and mode of action will be placed in the perspective of the new mode of cooperation.

This chapter therefore concerns how meaning was given to the narratives within the professional practice of SAA (sensegiving) by means of theme sessions and employee meetings at SAA and through interactive workshops with the various contractors on the SAA projects. In this respect, this chapter and the subsequent one are actually narratives or vignettes themselves: the chronological story of how shape was given to a process of changing to a different mode of cooperation with the contracting parties within the SAA infrastructure program by means of a process of sensemaking and sensegiving. In Section 6.11, and in Chapter 8, I will return to this topic.

In the previous chapter I discussed my unique position in this development process, in which I simultaneously held two roles, Program Director and re-

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18) The SAA narratives and quotations have been derived from a number of story collections, which were documented between 2015 and 2018 in the SAA program organization (Rijkswaterstaat SAA, 2016, 2017, 2018).

searcher. For this and the following chapter, this means that my role as Program Director will be addressed not only as an actor in narratives from practice, but also as a director who is trying to give meaning to the events and simultaneously give direction to a process of change to a different mode of cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor. In addition, my role as researcher will also be apparent by my reflections on the events from a more distant perspective. These reflections are indicated explicitly in the text. At the end of each narrative, the core – the plot – will be summarized in a table, including the dilemmas and struggles, the narrators and a number of characteristic quotations from participants in the narratives.

## 6.4 Building trust by empathizing with each other's interests at an early stage

### The situation in brief

Three consortia are bidding for the contract for the fourth SAA project: widening the A6 motorway near Almere. As described before, the bidding is preceded by dialogues in which priorities, problems and questions in the proposed contract are discussed. During the discussions, aspects can be clarified if necessary, so that all parties understand the intention of the proposed project. Tendering is very costly for the contractors, and the commissioning authority must therefore do everything possible to prevent the tendering process from being delayed, for example because contractors have to wait for answers to their questions. Rijkswaterstaat held talks with the construction branch organization Bouwend Nederland to negotiate how long such a dialogue should be for each project, and how many discussions would be required for a contractor to make well-supported bid on the project. The agreement reached led to a shorter turnaround time for the dialogue and a tightly controlled process. On this topic, the SAA Contract Manager for the A6 Almere project said the following: *“It is an illusion to assume that every possibility has been taken nailed down in the contract. Consequently, one question market parties are bound to ask during the dialogue is: how does the commissioning authority deal with certain issues in the contract? This is because the contract does not specify how the commissioning authority and contractor can cooperate. This question taught the commissioning authority that the project, the SAA program and Rijkswaterstaat, operating as a single unit, should continue to invest energy in being predictable for the private sector. The private sector parties must understand how SAA deals with issues. That is a major challenge for a program with five projects,*



Figure 6.5: The new A6 and the Floriade grounds near Almere (Illustration: Floriade Almere 2022)

*all of which have different issues. If one project team deals differently with an issue than another, this confuses the consortia who are bidding on the contract. The private sector must be confident that SAA's behavior is predictable. This has consequences for the SAA teams' behavior in the dialogues. As dialogue team we conducted open and transparent discussions with the candidates. We did not avoid any questions. If we did not know how something would work, then we said so. We made ourselves vulnerable without being naïve. We were prepared to make changes, not only in the allocation of risks but also in restrictive requirements. The aim of this pragmatic attitude was to bring more flexibility into the implementation process."*

C 6

Much of the scope of the project concerns the outskirts of the municipality of Almere. In fact, the A6 is part of the Almere ring road, and is therefore also important for local city traffic. In addition, the municipality financed the rebuilding of part of the municipal road network, which was part of the scope of the A6 project, and it granted permits for many project activities. The municipality of Almere therefore held an important stake in ensuring that the new motorway was well integrated and linked with the local road network. Moreover, the project planning had to take account of the Floriade, an international horticulture exhibition that is held every 10 years in the Netherlands, and is planned for 2022 in Almere. The A6 will bisect the edge of the exhibition grounds (see Figure 6.5).

## Action perspectives

As stated previously, the dialogue procedure is a tightly organized process. On account of legal considerations, it was extremely important that the dialogue team of the commissioning authority, which conducted separate discussions in parallel with three contracting consortia, correctly formulated the answers to their questions and ensured that no information accidentally leaked out of the discussions to a different consortium. Indeed, this would have invalidated the entire tender procedure. In the past, the pressure to conduct these tightly organized dialogues as correctly as possible had sometimes resulted in Rijkswaterstaat limiting itself to giving formal responses to questions and 'legally safe' answers. For these reasons as well, Rijkswaterstaat declined to involve third parties, such as stakeholders, in the dialogues for fear of a legally uncontrolled process.

The resulting dilemma was formulated as follows: as an important stakeholder in the projects, should the municipality of Almere be involved in the dialogue process or not? Would the prevailing approach at Rijkswaterstaat - the safe legal strategy - be chosen, which meant that the municipality would not be directly involved in the process? Or would a new approach be chosen, which would improve the quality of the dialogue and could limit future disagreements between the contractor and stakeholder? The new approach was ultimately chosen. This was primarily because experience in other projects had shown that if stakeholders had to wait until the implementation stage to discuss issues that arose in the triparty relationship, this would lead to problems and unplanned work. These discussions frequently concerned aspects such as the method of implementation, the exact definitions of scope and design, and often resulted in delays in permit approval by the stakeholders. By substantively involving the stakeholders at an earlier stage - during the dialogues - and communicating directly with the bidding contractors, these discussions could be largely avoided; this was the idea. Regarding this decision, the financial advisor of SAA said the following: *"Because the most important stakeholder is substantively involved during the pre-contract phase in the dialogues, the project itself becomes the focus. By communicating during the dialogue - and not avoiding difficult matters - the project objectives acquire depth and clarity. In this way, the commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder really communicate with each other, and the future contractor understands what is expected of him. The parties all invest in the relationship in which trust in each other's expertise plays an important role. In this way they all contribute to a better contract at*

*an early stage of the process.” The Contract Manager of the A6 project made the following comments: “During the dialogues for the A6 project Almere, the most important stakeholder was also sitting at the table. This contributed to the realization of the project. The municipality was actually not participating as a stakeholder, but as a partner. The commissioning authority noted that the candidate contractors had a clear need to pose questions directly to the stakeholder as permit authority. During the dialogue, the parties were allowed to say anything they wished without legal commitment. Parties who wanted a formal answer submitted the question in writing. This created an open and transparent atmosphere in which there was real room for productive discussion. The bidding contractors, the stakeholder and the commissioning authority were all satisfied with the new form of dialogue. This approach has meanwhile been extended to the relationship with the road authority of Rijkswaterstaat (another component of the organization), which now also takes part in the dialogue.”*

## Reflection

Reflecting on the situation discussed here, it appears that two narratives were combined and ultimately reinforced each other in the process of arriving at an appropriate course of action. First of all, there was the trade-off that had to be made between opting for the ‘safe’ legal approach during the dialogue discussions, which was usually the choice until then, or opting for the potentially risky ‘open’ discussion. This process can be impeded by various human characteristics: risk aversion versus opportunism, making assumptions about the other the other party’s views and dealing with one’s own uncertainties and fear of showing vulnerability. Ultimately, a combined form emerged, in which the open discussion predominated. However, if there was a need for a formal standpoint, this was also provided, which comforted the other party. In this way, aspects such as the multi-interpretability of the contract, which is inevitable, were effectively addressed and the candidates were enabled to make the most suitable bid. This required additional effort from the dialogue team of Rijkswaterstaat because they had to be very alert during the discussions about not inadvertently leaking information about the competitive bidders.

The second narrative concerns the trade-off about whether or not to involve the municipality of Almere in the dialogue process. Similar considerations applied to this trade-off: whether to follow the prevailing procedure at Rijkswaterstaat or take a risk by deviating from this procedure, and whether to see the municipality as a partner in the dialogue instead of making assumptions about them? The involvement of an important stakeholder such as Almere was cru-

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles / dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
Choosing the legalistic approach to the dialogues or going for the 'open' discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Risk aversion versus opportunism</li> <li>- Making assumptions about the other party versus seeing them as a partner</li> </ul>	Contract Manager SAA	<p><i>As dialogue team we conducted open and transparent discussions with the candidates. We did not avoid any questions. If we did not know how something works, then we said so. We were vulnerable, but not naïve.</i></p> <p><i>During the dialogue, the parties were allowed to say anything that they wished without legal commitment. Parties who wanted a formal answer submitted the question in writing. This created an open and transparent atmosphere in which there was room for productive discussion.</i></p>
Involvement of third parties, such as stakeholders, in the dialogues.		Financial Advisor SAA	<p><i>Because the most important stakeholder is substantively involved during the pre-contract phase in the dialogues, the project itself becomes the focus. By communicating during the dialogue - and not avoiding difficult matters - the project objectives acquire depth and clarity. In this way, the commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder really communicate with each other, and the future contractor understands what is expected of him.</i></p>

Table 6.1: Building trust by empathizing with each other's interests at an early stage

cial for the success of the project. Ensuring this involvement at an early stage, during the dialogue phase, helped to generate mutual trust. Tensions in the triangular relationship between commissioning authority, contractor and participating and licensing authority such as municipalities cannot be prevented entirely, but this approach can be expected to avoid some of them. An additional consideration was that greater involvement of the municipality would also result in more political support in the municipality for the solution being offered. The idea was that the municipality, as co-owner of the project, would feel more engaged with the project. In retrospect, members of the dialogue team were surprised that this approach had not been used previously; it has meanwhile been used in other projects and for other stakeholders. The foregoing is summarized in Table 6.1.



Finally, another important aspect is the awareness that during the dialogue phase the commissioning authority and the contractors have differing interests. The commissioning authority wants to know as much as possible about the design, the approach and the risks in the planning, while the bidding contractors want to acquire the best possible position with respect to their competitors. In this situation questions emerge such as: what is important for the surroundings, who are the stakeholders, what are their interests and how much environmental and traffic nuisance is acceptable? Consequently, the dialogue has different aims for different parties – all the more reason why it is important to understand ‘the question behind the question’, or why some questions may not be asked at all. If these differing interests are not made explicit during the dialogue phase, the parties can talk past each other, which can frustrate later cooperation during the implementation phase.

## 6.5 The contractor takes stock

### The situation in brief

To utilize the creativity in the market as effectively as possible, the contract of the commissioning authority – in the case of SAA this is often a DBFM contract – must provide room for optimization by the market. To this end, the contract must be specific where required, but leave things open where possible. This optimization space for bidders is important because they can use this to distinguish themselves from their competitors and still make a competitive bid. Since these optimizations involve uncertainties, bidders must also include a risk provision in their proposal. This is required because the bidder understands that it will not be able to realize all possible optimizations later on (during the design process); moreover, a provision must be available for unforeseen circumstances that always occur during a project. This risk provision must not be too small, since this would increase the likelihood of incurring a loss on the project. However, the provision should also not be too large, because that would make the bid uncompetitive. This is a dilemma that is inherent to business risk in the private sector. At a certain point during the implementation of the project, usually around the end of the design phase, the contractor will take stock: was the risk provision big enough, will the project be profitable or will it incur a loss?

### Action perspectives

Although this point in time is crucial for the contractor and is often impor-

tant in a personal sense for the contractor's project management, it does not play a formal role in the standard approach used for projects at Rijkswaterstaat. The commissioning authority has no formal position in this process. However, the outcome can have major consequences for the type of cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor during the remainder of the project. If the project is heading towards a loss, it is quite conceivable that the responsible project director will be instructed by his Board of Directors to change strategies to ensure that the loss is minimized. And this can put the cooperative relationship between the commissioning authority and contractor under severe pressure. After thinking about this situation, I was faced with a dilemma in my role as commissioning authority. My thoughts on the one hand were: *"This is not my problem. The contractor is an entrepreneur and therefore incurs a risk. If I interfere with this process, I take the chance of becoming involved and taking on some of the risk myself."* But on the other hand, I also thought: *"The project still has a long way to go, and we need to ensure effective cooperation. If I do not bring this up for discussion now, it will be too late, and then at the end of the project the contractor may try to compensate for the loss by submitting a claim. And in that situation, everyone would lose."*

Following coordination with the Program Board of SAA, as commissioning authority I chose the second option and decided to use this approach for all SAA projects: at the end of the design phase of a project, I would explicitly address this topic with the contractor, and if I received signals that the risk provision was inadequate, we would have a frank discussion about this. The SAA Project Manager of the A9 Gaasperdammerweg project, who was present at one of these discussions, said the following: *"By listening to understand instead of listening to react, the counterparty does not feel attacked and a real discussion ensues. You have to realize that personal interests can also play a role with the counterparty; as result it may be difficult for him to open up."* These types of discussions are obviously not intended to compensate for the loss that has been incurred, but they are intended to encourage the parties to work together to find possibilities in the margins of the contract that can save money for the contractor without creating additional costs for the commissioning authority. Indeed, such possibilities for cutting costs can still be present during the early stages of a project. For example, with the largest SAA project, the A1/A6, which incurred substantial setbacks at the beginning of the realization, we decided to refinance the project. As explained in the previous chapter, with a DBFM contract the project is pre-financed by a bank; this is a financial construction that is somewhat comparable to a home mortgage. And similar to a private mortgage, if interest rates are low,

then it becomes interesting to refinance even if there are penalty clauses. At that time, the interest rate was extremely low, and a joint decision was made to refinance the project. The initial contract only had a refinancing provision for the exploitation phase, much later in the project, and not during the realization phase. The two parties came to the additional agreement to amend the contract, and the project was refinanced successfully. Due to this flexible approach, a win-win situation was created that was financially beneficial to both parties.

## Reflection

The situation is also characterized by two narratives, which are summarized in Table 6.2. The first storyline is about thinking proactively together, which actually began early in the project phase, even before the contract was signed. During the tendering phase for a contract, the bidding party has to distinguish itself from its competitors using the flexibility that is available in the contract. The bidding party needs this flexibility in order to implement optimizations at a later phase that ensure a profitable project. In this case it is important that the commissioning authority does not specify everything in the contract to the smallest detail. But at the same time, the commissioning authority must provide clarity. For example, if the commissioning authority has made concrete agreements with a stakeholder about the design of a structure, then it is important to include these agreements as part of explicit contract specifications. Then the contractor will have clarity, i.e. that there is no room for optimization on these aspects. The strategy that is being used throughout the project is therefore: specify where required and allow flexibility where possible.

The second narrative concerns whether or not to raise the financial situation of the contractor. On the Program Board of SAA, we weighed all the pros and cons and ultimately decided to take a proactive approach. The first time I brought this topic up for discussion with the contractor, I realized that I was also sticking out my own neck: *“If you initiate this discussion with the contractor, you may create expectations and it may not be possible to fulfill these expectations. It is important to be completely transparent about this, also towards the parent organization, so as to avert any accusation afterwards about being too generous to the contractor.”* Up to now, my experience as commissioning authority with this approach has been positive. By proactively discussing such issues, you enhance the mutual trust in the relationship, and even if some of the loss is unavoidable, the willingness to discuss it will benefit the partnership with the contractor, limit any claims at the end of the project and possibly avoid them entirely.

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles / dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
Thinking deliberately about what and what not to specify in the contract so the bidder has sufficient flexibility to distinguish itself from competitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offering clarity versus providing flexibility.</li> <li>- Waiting to see or sticking your neck out.</li> <li>- Thinking and acting proactively versus the danger of creating expectations you cannot fulfill later on.</li> </ul>	Program Director SAA (me)	<i>On the one hand my thoughts were: 'This is not my problem. The contractor is an entrepreneur and therefore incurs a risk. If I interfere with this process, I will run the risk of becoming involved and taking on some of the risk myself.' But on the other hand, I also thought: 'The project still has a long way to go, and we will continue to need effective cooperation. If I do not bring this up for discussion now, it will be too late, and then at the end of the project the contractor may try to compensate for this loss by submitting a claim. And in that situation, everyone would lose.'</i>
Show that you want to think proactively with the other party by bringing up the financial situation for discussion.		Program Director SAA (me)	<i>If you initiate this discussion with the contractor, you may create expectations, and depending on the estimated loss, it may not be possible to fulfill these expectations. It is important to be completely transparent about this, also towards the parent organization, so as to avert the accusation afterwards about being too generous to the contractor.</i>

Table 6.2: The contractor takes stock

## 6.6 Cooperating in the triangular relationship from the perspective of the contractor

### The situation in brief

The A9 Gaasperdammerweg project entered the realization phase in the summer of 2015. The most important component of this project is the construction of a 3 km long traffic tunnel. Before the contractor could begin the actual construction, a number of preparatory activities had to be completed. One of the first of these activities was a modification of the metro track that crosses the A9. To minimize any obstruction of the metro trains during the construc-

tion of the tunnel, the contractor built a new support for the metro track above the current A9 motorway and above the roof of the new tunnel. The coordination and progress of the work was discussed in 'scenario discussions' between the commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder, in this case the public transport authority of Amsterdam. The intention of these discussions was to ensure that agreements made in the past would also be complied with in the present. During one of these discussions, the stakeholder indicated that there was an opportunity to improve the metro track. These construction activities could then take place in parallel with those of the contractor. However, this was not part of the original contract, which stated that the metro tracks were to be returned to their original condition. The proposal of the stakeholder deviated substantially from this provision and resulted in much discussion and unrest on the part of the contractor. As a result, the scenario discussion deviated from the envisioned topic: the contractor's presentation of the current state of the project and the progress on the planned construction activities.

### Action perspectives

The success of a large infrastructure program like SAA is determined not only by completing the technical construction process on time and on budget, but also by the satisfaction of the stakeholders with the final result and the corresponding process. Because the progression of a complex and dynamic project can never be predicted exactly in advance, this requires navigating between strict compliance with the planning and the contract on one side, and occasionally deviating from these plans in accordance with the wishes of the various actors in the process on the other. In the A9 Gaasperdammerweg example, the dilemma was the following: going along with the stakeholder who saw an opportunity to take advantage of the construction for a different aim, or keeping to the original provision in the contract. It was clear that the latter choice would offer predictability and security for the contractor, enabling him to complete the support structure for the metro track with as little disturbance as possible. Ultimately, it was decided to remove the stakeholder's proposal from the agenda for the scenario discussion and to address it elsewhere. The representative of the contractor was pleased: *"The stakeholder's proposal was based primarily on his own interests, and there was less attention to my interests as a contractor. By indicating that the scenario discussion was not intended to bring personal wishes to the table, but in fact to discuss the progress of the work, the commissioning authority brought the discussion back into balance. In this case, the contract was indeed paramount. If the stakeholder has additional*

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles / dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
Ensure balance in the triangular relationship between the commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder by considering the situational aspects of the discussions.	- Keeping rigidly to the contract versus moving flexibly with the dynamics of the environment.	Contractor representative (IXAS)	<i>The proposal of the stakeholder was primarily based on his own interests, and there was less attention to my interests as a contractor. By indicating that the scenario discussion was not intended for bringing personal wishes to the table, but in fact to discuss the progress of the work, the commissioning authority brought the discussion back into balance. In this case, the contract was indeed paramount. If stakeholder has additional wishes that deviate from the contract, this should first be discussed with the commissioning authority.</i>

Table 6.3: Cooperation in the triangular relationship from the perspective of the contractor

wishes that deviate from the contract, this should first be discussed with the commissioning authority.” The stakeholder was also satisfied because he was given an opportunity to discuss the issue. He ultimately decided to waive his proposal. But if that had not been the case then the idea was to offer comfort to the contractor by formally requesting him to map out the impact of the proposal in terms of time, money and risks. Based on this information, a formal request to amend the contract could have been submitted.

## Reflection

In retrospect, this incident can be seen as a good example of striking a balance between the contract-driven approach and a more cooperation-oriented approach, see Table 6.3. The contract-based approach offered stability and security for contractor, which was important during the hectic start-up phase of the project. This need could be met by conducting the discussions in separate arenas. Moreover, this enhanced the cooperative relationship and trust between the commissioning authority and contractor. At the same time, a good relationship with the stakeholder was maintained by addressing his wishes in a different setting and by not making an issue of them during the scenario discussion. This approach ensured real cooperation in the triangular relationship. The example

also shows that mutual discussion is not always the best way to ensure effective cooperation. In this case, with a contractor who was comfortable with a contract-based approach and a stakeholder who wanted to create additional societal value in the project, separating the parties in the triangular relationship was ultimately beneficial. This emphasizes the importance of context when making such trade-offs.

## 6.7 Potholes

### The situation in brief

With a DBFM contract, the contractor assumes responsibility for the accessibility of the contracted road section from Rijkswaterstaat. This shift in responsibility happens fairly soon after the contract is awarded<sup>19</sup>. In return for assuming this responsibility, the contractor receives a reimbursement that is proportional to the availability of the road section: the Gross Availability Payment (Dutch abbreviation BBV). If the road is not available, for example due to maintenance activities or damage, the commissioning authority makes an availability correction and reduces the BBV. When the new section of road is finished and the road capacity has increased permanently, the BBV also increases. In that case, the higher BBV, again subject to possible corrections, will be paid to the contractor through the entire exploitation period. By taking over management of the road section from the commissioning authority, the contractor also assumes responsibility for the condition of the road. At a certain point in time, potholes in the road surface were found on the Muiderbrug – the bridge over the Amsterdam-Rhine Canal that is part of the A1/A6 contract (Figure 6.6). Because this is a DBFM contract, the contractor was responsible for the costs of repairs and for the time that the bridge is unavailable for traffic. For an important and heavily traveled route such as the A1, the availability correction could be very high. An unusual aspect was that the bridge had recently been renovated with high-strength concrete. This renovation work had been done by a different contractor outside the SAA program. The guarantee period for this work had not yet expired.

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<sup>19</sup>) Formally after receiving the Aanvangscertificaat [Commencement of work Certificate].



Figure 6.6: The Muiderbrug on the A1 motorway over the Amsterdam-Rijnkanaal  
(Photo: Rijkswaterstaat)

## Action perspectives

The mutual objective of both the commissioning authority and the contractor was to maintain the road section, thus ensuring availability of the road. At the time the contractor took over the management of the road section from the commissioning authority, he also assumed complete responsibility for that part of the road, including the risk for any substandard work done by a previous contractor. This is an explicit provision in a DBFM contract. The Contract Manager of SAA said the following: *“Based on the DBFM philosophy, my first thought was, ‘You get the road in the condition in which it is delivered’, but I also understood of course that the contractor was not to blame in this particular case. It could have happened to us as well.”* The commissioning authority realized that the potholes in the road surface were a severe setback for the contractor. Despite the clear contract provision, the commissioning authority also understood that the contractor felt that strict adherence to the contract would not be entirely fair in this situation. Could the commissioning authority have



prevented this situation if it was still responsible for the bridge? And could the commissioning authority have foreseen that the bridge surface had been poorly installed several years before? Based on a strict contractual interpretation, however, it appeared that the risk was entirely for the DBFM contractor.

It was decided to postpone the contractual discussion and initially focus on the societal interest. The road surface had to be repaired as quickly as possible, and that had to take place on an extremely busy route, which meant keeping traffic obstruction to a minimum. Safety also played an important role. Together with his colleagues from the contract team, the Technical Manager of SAA decided to look for the solution in cooperation with the contractor: *“The first discussions between the parties were difficult because the contractor was worried about being made liable for the repair costs, and we could not yet make any commitments on this aspect. However, the joint approach was not to seek a contractual solution, but a technical one.”* To do justice to both the contract and the relationship, the idea was to temporarily remove the Muiderbrug from the DBFM contract. The bridge would be repaired by the contractor who had originally laid the high-strength concrete, and it was agreed with the DBFM contractor that he would then resume full responsibility for the bridge under the terms of the DBFM contract. If it nevertheless turned out that the DBFM contractor could have prevented the damage, then the damage repair would be charged to the contractor and an availability correction would be imposed. If the contractor was unable to foresee the problems and was unable to prevent the damage, no financial consequences for him would result. An important aspect of these trade-offs was that the high-strength concrete had been installed very recently by a different contractor, and the DBFM contractor should have been able to assume that the road surface would remain in good condition for a number of years. In the meantime, the damage has been repaired, and it turned out that the damage was caused from within the concrete road surface. This meant that the DBFM contractor could not have foreseen that something would go wrong with the road surface, and therefore could not have undertaken preventive measures. Consequently, no availability correction was imposed on the DBFM contractor.

## Reflection

This incident is a good example of situations that can occur in the course of a complex project which no one could have been reasonably expected to foresee. In this case, strict compliance with the contract would have been unrealistic and would have been unfair for the contractor. By addressing these aspects ex-

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles / dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
How to deal with situations that have not been foreseen in the contract?	- Strictly following the letter of the contract versus thinking creatively, daring to let go of the contract and being willing to work together on a solution.	Contract Manager SAA  Technical Manager SAA	<i>Based on the DBFM philosophy, my first thought was, 'You get the road in the condition in which it is delivered', but I also understood of course that the contractor was not to blame in this particular case. It could have happened to us as well.</i>  <i>The first discussions between the parties were difficult because the contractor was worried about becoming liable for the repair costs, and we could not yet make any commitments. However, the joint approach was not to seek a contractual solution, but a technical one.</i>

Table 6.4: Potholes

Explicitly and showing its willingness to consider other possibilities, the commissioning authority cooperated proactively with the contractor to find a solution. This solution contributed to the mutual objective: maintaining the road section and ensuring safe traffic flow on the Muiderbrug. The fact that the contractor was also prepared to stick out his neck and let go of his legal position in order to find a mutual solution also helped to enhance mutual trust, which would be very useful during the remainder of the project. The foregoing is summarized in Table 6.4.

## 6.8 On train-free periods and conditional penalties

### The situation in brief

The SAA project A1/A6 crosses the busy railway line between Amsterdam and Almere. Due to the widening of the road under the railway crossing, the railway bridge at Muiderberg had to be rebuilt. The railway infrastructure in the Netherlands is managed by ProRail, which is also responsible for implementing modifications or expansions to the rail system. In the past, when work was required at locations where roadways and railways intersect, the usual approach was essentially to divide the work into two projects with two separate com-



*Figure 6.7: Temporary auxiliary bridge on the Amsterdam-Almere rail line  
(Photo: Rijkswaterstaat)*

missioning authorities, Rijkswaterstaat for the roadway project and ProRail for the railway project. Two separate contractors were also involved, who had to coordinate their activities. In practice, however, this frequently led to problems at the interface between the two systems. For the A1/A6 project, a different approach was therefore chosen. In a cooperation agreement, ProRail and Rijkswaterstaat agreed to choose not only a single commissioning authority, in this case Rijkswaterstaat (because the motivation for the project was the widening of the motorway), but also a single contractor. ProRail would of course remain involved in the project, for example by including a Project Manager for ‘railway matters’ on the project team of Rijkswaterstaat. Rijkswaterstaat would bear the final responsibility for the project.

The rebuilding of the railway bridge at Muiderberg was one of the largest and riskiest components of the entire SAA program. A wide range of construction activities were involved, during which the roadway and/or railway was periodically closed to traffic. If the railway needs to be closed, a train-free period (abbreviated as TVP in Dutch) has to be requested from ProRail. The TVP is the time window for the construction activities. Because these TVPs impact the train schedule, they must be requested long in advance, and it is crucial that all construction work is completed within the allotted time so the rail line can

be reopened on schedule. The first TVP was requested for the construction of a temporary auxiliary bridge (Figure 6.7). In coordination with the parties involved, ProRail (infrastructure) and NS (passenger train operator), this TVP was scheduled for a weekend. As a result, no train traffic was possible on the line between Amsterdam and Almere for the entire weekend. However, on Sunday evening it turned out that the activities could not be completed as planned. This was a major setback, not only for the contractor and commissioning authority, but also for ProRail and NS. If no trains were allowed to travel on such a busy line during the Monday morning rush hour, this would cause major damage to the reputation of ProRail and NS.

### Action perspectives

The commissioning authority and contractor did everything possible to finish the work so train traffic could resume. This was also the theme of joint news releases for the media. First solve the problem, and then evaluate the causes and responsibilities. When the bridge was reopened to train traffic on Tuesday, the evaluation was the next step. What caused the delay in the completion of the planned work? The contractor was very cooperative and assumed full responsibility, thus becoming vulnerable, even though Rijkswaterstaat and ProRail were partly to blame for the problem. Based on the contract, the commissioning authority was entitled to impose a severe financial penalty on the contractor. This was also expected by the societal environment, ProRail and NS, and by the contractor as well. Nevertheless, as commissioning authority I was faced with a dilemma: *“On the one hand, I felt that I was being put under pressure to impose a penalty to signify the seriousness of the situation. For me, this would also be the easiest option, because it was clearly formulated in the contract. On the other hand, the penalty would not change the events of the past weekend. In addition, imposing a penalty would probably result in the contractor being less open during a subsequent incident and being less cooperative with the evaluation. He would probably reason that this would only cost him money. And if that was the case, we would learn nothing more from our mistakes, and neither would he of course. The most important aspect for me was to minimize the chance of something like this happening again. After all, many more TVPs were planned during this project, and we could not afford another such incident.”* Ultimately, I decided in favor of the societal interest: ensuring the predictability of the construction activities. During a meeting of the project board with the contractor, who had prepared himself for a penalty, I announced that the penalty would be conditional. No penalty would be imposed now, but in case of

future delays, it would be doubled. The contractor was relieved, but was also determined to accept the challenge to prevent a future penalty. In addition, I did something which in retrospect turned out to be even more crucial: *“After the meeting, I held a one-on-one discussion with the Director of the contractors consortium, with whom I had become acquainted during other projects, and told him that I was sticking my neck out for him by proposing the solution, and that I expected him not to disappoint me. He assured me that he would not.”* The Director of the contractors consortium confirmed this in a later statement: *“The fact that the Director of the commissioning authority was prepared to stick his neck out for us meant much more to me than the decision to make the penalty conditional. I felt that this was a personal appeal, and I didn’t want to disappoint him. I also felt an enhanced sense of personal responsibility for the timely completion of future TVPs.”* By being open and vulnerable, I showed my trust in the contractor, and that trust would turn out to be crucial during the further course of the project. Later on, during subsequent TVPs, I received a personal message from the consortium director that the construction activities were going smoothly and everything was on schedule. Meanwhile, the project has been completed and all the TVPs took place as planned. As a result, the penalty was never imposed on the contractor. In this way, both parties worked together on predictability and shared interest.

## Reflection

When colleagues or employees ask me as director to explain exactly what I mean by this new mode of cooperation, i.e. resilient partnership, I often use the above incident as an illustration. In my view, this incident clearly illustrates the dilemmas that you can encounter by strictly following the contract, but also that if you think more deeply about the situation and consider the common interest, then you can make a different trade-off. The narrative also shows that the ultimate decision about a course of action is also context-dependent (see Table 6.5). This was the first TVP during this project, and many more would follow. Up to that point the construction activities and cooperation had actually gone very smoothly. If the cooperation and construction activities had not been going smoothly at this point, then a different solution would possibly have been chosen. The crux is that no recipe can be given in advance. The fact that this uncertainty is not accepted by everyone is illustrated by a later conversation that I had about this incident with a representative of the accountants department of Rijkswaterstaat. He asked me why I had not imposed a penalty; after all, the project was delayed and the contract was very clear on this aspect. After I





Figure 6.8: Water in the excavation site for the aqueduct near Muiden (Photo: Rijkswaterstaat)

## 6.9 “There is water in the aqueduct, but that does not matter”

### The situation in brief

*“It was also a mystery for the contractor why the excavation for the new aqueduct under the Vecht, which is lined with sheet piles, suddenly started leaking, but they decided to flood the building site to prevent further damage. It is only a minor problem with few consequences, said the contractor.”* This text, and the title of this section, were taken from an article in the *Muidernieuws* of April 15, 2015, following a major leak in the excavation for the largest aqueduct in Europe, part of the A1/A6 project (see Figure 6.8).

In reality, it was much more than a minor problem, especially for the contractor. To work in an excavated building site, a water-impervious layer must be applied to the soil or underneath to stop the inflow of groundwater. For this purpose, the contractor had chosen to inject a layer of impervious gel in the subsoil, a relatively inexpensive and innovative method, but one that had been used previously. However, as the work proceeded, groundwater began to flow into the excavation. To prevent this flow of groundwater from eroding the soil surrounding the excavation, which could have undermined the structure later

on, the excavation was flooded preventively to the level of the water table with the aim of avoiding further damage. As a result, the building activities came to a halt and a delay would become inevitable, with corresponding financial consequences. It was therefore crucial to find a solution as quickly as possible. But the cause of the leakage was difficult to determine. Was the leakage caused by the use of the innovative gel layer, or by a sheet piling that had come loose? Even after the contractor conducted a long investigation into the structure of the subsoil, the cause was still a mystery. Two engineering solutions were possible: apply another impervious gel and if necessary drain the water with powerful pumps, which would have consequences for the groundwater level near the aqueduct, or take no chances and use the well-proven, but more costly, method of underwater concrete?

### Action perspectives

In view of the magnitude and impact of the incident, the issue was soon taken up at the board level, and the dilemmas posed by the various solutions were discussed. Should we spend much more money on underwater concrete, or try a new layer of impervious gel? If the latter option failed, and leakage recurred, that would result in additional delays in the construction and substantial additional costs. The risk was severe because the cause of the leakage had still not been identified. There were also risks for the surroundings due to vibration and subsidence if more groundwater had to be pumped out. In that case, the commissioning authority would incur additional costs for installing piezometer tubes to monitor the water table in the surrounding area. Based on the contract, the responsibility for dealing with the leakage in the aqueduct and the associated costs would be borne by the contractor. The responsibility for monitoring the water table and other activities related to damage management was shared by Rijkswaterstaat and the contractor. As the commissioning authority, I was faced with a dilemma: *“Should I comply strictly with the contract and therefore not interfere with an implementation aspect that is the responsibility of the contractor, and wait to see what he comes up with? On the other hand, I was concerned about damage to the surroundings and to our reputation. Furthermore, the piezometers would be expensive.”* The contractor tried to obtain more certainty by conducting another study and was unsure about what to do. These doubts resulted in further delays. *“I was finally able to make a decision when the commissioning authority notified me that he was prepared to pay part of the additional costs for underwater concrete.”* Although the contractor was formally obligated to pay all these costs, this was a feasible solution for



Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles / dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
Continue to think creatively with the contractor, because contractual risks for the contractor can become political risks for the commissioning authority.	- Allow the contract to take its course versus intervening based on risk considerations.	Program Director SAA (me)	<p><i>Should I adhere to the contract and therefore not interfere with an implementation aspect that is the responsibility of the contractor, and wait to see what he comes up with? On the other hand, I was concerned about damage to the surroundings and to our reputation. Furthermore, the piezometers would be expensive.</i></p> <p><i>Due to these savings, I was able to help the contractor with the costs of the underwater concrete, and the reputation of the commissioning authority was not damaged. Indeed, a second leakage with corresponding delays would have been disastrous for all parties and would have led to very different newspaper headlines.</i></p>

Table 6.6: “There is water in the aqueduct, but that does not matter”

me as commissioning authority because Rijkswaterstaat would not have to pay for the piezometers and would not have to bear the risks for subsidence in the surroundings: *“Due to these savings, I was able to help the contractor with the costs of the underwater concrete, and the reputation of the commissioning authority was not damaged. Indeed, a second leakage with corresponding delays would have been disastrous for all parties and would have led to very different newspaper headlines.”*

## Reflection

The above incident is an example of the possible conversion of a contractual business risk into a political risk for the commissioning authority. The question is then: how long do you adhere to the contract, and when do you decide to intervene, whereby you must also realize that you are accepting part of the contractual responsibility? Although the contractor held the formal contractual responsibility in this case, if leakage occurred a second time this would also have severe consequences for the commissioning authority. If things had gone

wrong a second time, then the damage would have been so severe that I very probably would have been unable to hide behind a clause in the contract. I therefore decided to intervene. By thinking creatively with the contractor and showing my willingness to assist him financially, I not only reduced the risks of further delays, but also prevented potential environmental problems and damage to our reputation. In this way I could help to restore a smooth construction process (see Table 6.6).

## 6.10 A shared quest for a different mode of cooperation

In this section, the 'book of stories' from the project will be closed for the time being and I will return to the 'meta-narrative' about the quest at SAA for a different mode of cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor. Following the discussion with the Contract Managers of SAA in March 2014, the conversations about a different mode of cooperation and the concept of resilient partnership have become much more frequent within the SAA organization and later on outside the organization as well. Besides enthusiasm for the concept, initially there was also some skepticism: *"Aren't we doing this already?"* Several contractors were also reluctant at the beginning: *"If the commissioning authority wants this, then we will go along"*. However, the response was largely positive, as shown by a number of quotations from discussions with the Contract Managers and Project Managers of SAA: *"During the implementation of other projects, we often see behavior that is intended to ensure that the risk is borne as long as possible by another party. Instead of shifting the risks, we should focus more on jointly reducing the risks"*, or the question: *"Is it ethically responsible to make the contractor responsible for risks that are not manageable, not even by ourselves?"* One of the Project Managers saw resilient partnership as an attitude that not only concerns the relationship with the contractor, but also applies for acting within one's own organization and the societal and physical environment: *"It is not just a switch that you can turn on or off"*. Another Project Manager emphasized the importance of early involvement of stakeholders impacted by the project in order to prevent later problems in the relationship between commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder: *"It is important that stakeholders also feel engaged with the project"*. And: *"Resilient partnership also involves being clear about what we want, what we don't want and what is possible and what is impossible. It's no use if we come across as accommodating and end up not getting what we want."*

The managers emphasized that resilient partnership is not a panacea: *"It should not become an ideology; things can still go wrong during projects"*. They

- Content-based expertise - *'understanding what is happening; craftsmanship'*.
- Empathy- *'awareness of the concerns of the other person'*.
- Predictability - *'don't surprise each other'*.
- Flexibility- *'acting pragmatically; daring to deviate from the contract'*.
- Decisive action - *'making difficult decisions on time'*.
- Wanting/being able to give each other something - *'if we give someone a job to do, then we should also enable them to do this successfully'*.

Table 6.7: Competences and core values for resilient partnership

referred to the importance of bringing up doubts and dilemmas for discussion, the courage and the space that employees need to do this: *"We can set a good example, but we can't tell employees how they should do this. They have to master the concept themselves and have to experience it themselves. In cases where it is 'best for project', we may deviate from the current rules, guidelines and procedures. This can lead to resistance within the permanent organization and from line managers. In that case it is important that we, as Project Managers, provide a safe environment for employees and also ensure broader support within the organization. The top management of Rijkswaterstaat will support the concept of resilient partnership, but the organization as a whole is slow to change."*

In April 2015, in my role as Program Director, I introduced the concept of resilient partnership for the first time at one of the half-year employee meetings of SAA. Following a plenary discussion – during which points were addressed such as what does it mean for the existing frameworks and guidelines, what resilient partnership means for the mutuality from the perspective of the contractor and what is the role of our stakeholders in this process – the discussion about various dilemmas continued in smaller groups. The conclusion was that resilient partnership requires expertise and daring, as well as a safe and transparent organizational culture from which narratives and examples can emerge. The meeting also resulted in a set of competences and core values that the employees of SAA thought were important for resilient partnership (see Table 6.7). These competences and core values can be seen in the narratives from practice in this chapter and the following one.

In mid-2015, the first workshops were held with the contractors consortia, such as SAAone and IXAS, and the engineering firm Witteveen+Bos<sup>20</sup>. These workshops, more or less detached from the day-to-day reality of the project, focused on dilemmas such as following the strict line of the contract versus acting according to circumstances, the traditions of the parent organization versus the ambitions of one's own project team, shared responsibilities versus separated responsibilities, tunnel vision versus critical capacity, and thinking together versus staying aloof and not getting your hands dirty. During the discussion about resilient partnership, a number of associations emerged from both the commissioning authority (CA) and the contractor (C):

- *"I am engaged with this personally; we are here to work on a public project, funded with tax revenues; this entails a service-based orientation with respect to society and politics." (CA)*
- *"The approach should not imply a subordinate position with respect to the contractor; instead, it should be about equality and partnership, I firmly believe in that." CA)*
- *"With a project, we put our signature on the landscape; ultimately, we do this based on our mandate from society, and we should always be aware of this; this is what resilient partnership is about." (C)*
- *"You see that we are increasingly discovering resilient partnership as a new mode of cooperation; however, deploying this concept in practice is still a struggle because it also concerns fundamental interests of people and organizations." (C)*
- *"There are many opportunities when we really start thinking based on the underlying mandate of the project; from the beginning of the project you can then become more involved with the social benefits; the current attitude is still very much 'what is best for the project'." (C)*

## 6.11 Sensegiving and reflection

During the workshops, various examples from projects were discussed by the commissioning authority and contractor. These examples from practice, which provide nuance to the concept of resilient partnership, have been documented as narratives. The narratives or vignettes in this chapter originated in part from these documents. Reflecting on the narratives from this chapter, we

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20) At that time, the Witteveen+Bos engineering firm was involved in the planning for the A9 Badhoevedorp-Holendrecht project

see recurring struggles among employees of both the commissioning authority and the contractor. The struggles concern the search for a balance between a contract-driven approach and a more cooperation-oriented approach. The competences that were identified during one of the employee meetings of SAA are also present in the narratives: the necessity for content-based expertise, the capacity to empathize with the position and interests of the other party, being predictable and daring to deviate promptly from the standard approach if the situation and the context require this.

We also see these discussions recurring in the management and employee meetings of SAA and in the workshops with the contractors. In these situations, the role of the parent organization becomes apparent, along with the flexibility that employees experience to act as circumstances require. The quotation in the previous section about the exemplary function of management and offering a safe environment for employees to deal with their dilemmas is, in this context, illustrative in terms of sensegiving.

This chapter is about the discovery of the phenomenon of story making or narrative building as a carrier of the change process within SAA and the relationship with its partners. The following chapter, which elaborates on these aspects, is about a further professionalization of this approach. To illustrate the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving, and the interaction between them (described previously in the conceptual model), they have been placed in Table 6.8 according to the format from Section 5.6 (Table 5.3).

Reflecting on my own position, I have previously indicated my own involvement in a number of narratives from this chapter. However, many of these narratives were narrated by other people that were involved. By having multiple individuals describe and discuss an incident, it was possible to acquire a richer understanding of the circumstances surrounding the corresponding incident. From my position as Program Director, it was indeed difficult to position myself discretely among the employees in order to perceive all their tensions and emotions. I will return to this topic in greater detail in Chapter 8. With regard to sensegiving, I indeed held an important role as director. As initiator of the new practice of resilient partnership, I regularly stood on the 'soapbox' during various sessions to emphasize the importance and essential aspects of this practice. During the sessions I was also able to emphasize that the corresponding narratives are primarily about dilemmas and the discussion about these dilemmas, and not so much about the chosen solutions. In this process, I therefore had an influential role, for example due to the examples and narratives that I chose to highlight or not, which also applies to the narratives in this chapter. I

<p>Steps (theory) </p> <p> Narratives (practice)</p>	Step 1	Step 2		Step 3
	<p><i>Sensemaking</i> Dominant narratives and dilemmas</p>	<p><i>Sensegiving</i> Contribution to resilience and trust</p>	<p><i>Triggers for change</i> Symbolism, framing in the context of the organization(s)</p>	<p><i>Sensemaking</i> New narratives and practices</p>
<p>The extent to which societal value is jointly created.</p>	<p>Building trust by empathizing with each other's interests at an early stage. (6.4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage in real discussions and do not hide behind legal façades; discover the question behind the question.</li> <li>- Be aware of the interests and expectations of the other party and make them explicit and negotiable.</li> <li>- Involve relevant stakeholders in the process at an early stage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discuss challenges and dilemmas during various meetings.</li> <li>- Illuminate and amplify the success of the approach (during employee meetings, on intranet, in the media, etc.).</li> </ul>	<p>Chapter 7</p>
	<p>The contractor takes stock. (6.5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Give contractors the room to distinguish themselves from their competitors: be specific where required and be flexible where possible.</li> <li>- Ask about the status of the other party and try to help them at an early stage if needed; this builds trust.</li> </ul>		

<p>The way in which tensions are dealt with in the triangular relationship between commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder.</p>	<p>Cooperation in the triangular relationship. (6.6)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be aware of the interests of all parties concerned and create added value through a personalized approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compile a collection of narratives as a source of inspiration for dealing with new dilemmas and for jointly creating new narratives.</li> </ul>
<p>The way in which unexpected circumstances or ambiguities in the contract are dealt with.</p>	<p>Potholes. (6.7)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contracts, no matter how good, can never anticipate every situation.</li> <li>- In unexpected situations, be prepared to deviate from the contract.</li> <li>- Be proactive; avoid a wait-and-see attitude.</li> </ul>	
<p>The way in which tensions between planning, traffic nuisance and environmental nuisance are dealt with.</p>			
<p>The way in which the imposition of contract-based penalties following incidents are dealt with.</p>	<p>On train-free periods and conditional penalties. (6.8)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Try to reason according to the underlying intention of the contract.</li> <li>- Invest in the relationship by making personal agreements.</li> </ul>	
<p>The way in which contract-based risks for the contractor can turn into political risks for the commissioning authority.</p>	<p>There is water in the aqueduct, but that does not matter. (6.9)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understand the risks of the other party.</li> <li>- Escalate at an early stage.</li> <li>- Dare to act pragmatically.</li> </ul>	

Table 6.8: Analysemodel narrative building SAA

chose these specific narratives because I believe that they effectively illustrate the tensions and dilemmas that employees can experience during their work, and that on this basis the intention behind resilient partnership can be clarified.

Because resilient partnership is not a new 'cookbook', but a framework for thought and action that must be filled in during day-to-day professional practice, I decided to continue with the concept of 'story making'. Story making is intended to be a creative process in the organization and to give an impulse to the cooperative relationship with others, with the aim of supplementing or disrupting standard procedures or methods. During this process, people are encouraged to think first with their hearts and only then to seek a confrontation with their heads instead of other way around, as people in the technical world of infrastructure were often accustomed to doing. By highlighting the narratives, the corresponding dilemmas and by reflecting on them, meaning could be given to events in daily practice and to the intentions behind the new practice. From the beginning, it has been made clear to employees that choices must not lead to new frameworks or dogmas, and that in new situations, or after acquiring greater insight, the choices could also lead to other decisions. The discussion with the accountant after the aforementioned incident with the TVP (Train Free Period) and the conditional penalty (Section 6.8) is illustrative in this respect. In terms of sensegiving, it is therefore about the struggle and dilemmas in the narratives and not about the course of action that is ultimately chosen. Regarding the latter, moreover, in retrospect one cannot refer to a good or bad course of action. The narratives only indicate how events occurred in practice. The choices that were made, within the context of the past, seemed sensible, explicable and defensible. But we will never know how things would have turned out if we had chosen differently. In retrospect, the narratives presented in this chapter may all look like success stories, but this is also a question of framing. For example, the narrative about the flooded excavation (Section 6.9) could also have been framed as unnecessary interference by the commissioning authority with something that was the responsibility of the contractor, and this interference ended up costing society more money. After all, we do not know how things would have turned out if a different course of action had been chosen. However, a decision had to be made on the basis of the information that was available at that time. Because the risks of further delays, the costs of failure and possible environmental and reputational damage were considered to be high, the course of action was chosen in that context. The sensegiving is also not about the chosen course of action. The aim of the narrative was to illustrate the intentions at that time as clearly as possible. It was intended show that dif-



ferent courses of action can be chosen, and that it is important to think about this and discuss this explicitly with those involved. Encouraging this process is the intention behind resilient partnership, rather than ensuring a happy ending. It is not a 'trick' that by definition will lead to good results.

By documenting the stories of employees, collecting the stories and discussing them during employee meetings and workshops with contractors, more and more experience was gained with story making within the SAA organization. This is true not only at the management level, but also throughout the organization. It was shown that people began to recognize their experiences as stories more easily and that they also became better at telling them. As a result, storytelling spread throughout the organization and led to an ever-richer harvest of stories. More about this in the next chapter.



## Chapter 7

Resilient partnership in practice:  
from exploration to professionalization

## 7.1 The Chair' at SAA

As stated in the previous chapter, the current chapter addresses the further professionalization of the narrative approach in the change process towards a new mode of cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor: resilient partnership. The stories that were previously collected and described in the last chapter and the meaning that was given to them during various employee meetings, and by means of the first story collection, have in turn yielded new narratives and practices. This provides additional detail to step 3 in my analytical model (see Figure 5.2 and Table 6.8). Some of these new narratives are discussed later in this chapter. Preceding this discussion, I address two new program components that were introduced during SAA employee meetings and which have contributed to the continued sensegiving of resilient partnership: 'The Chair' and the 'role-play'.

The program component 'The Chair' was introduced during the employee meetings in October 2015 and April 2016.<sup>21</sup> The intention of this component was to encourage employees of SAA to share their stories and dilemmas with the rest of the group. The initiator – a member of the SAA Board – explained this as follows: *"We had noticed that people were shy at the beginning and afraid to be vulnerable. By creating a relaxed, living room-like atmosphere, we thought that it would be easier for people to share their dilemmas openly with others."* Below I address a number of fragments from stories that employees told while sitting in 'The Chair'.

The first speaker was a lead auditor; in daily practice his job was to audit the work of the contractor. He discussed the interplay between the auditors working for Rijkswaterstaat and the superintendents of the contractor. He explained that by investing in the preliminary phase and jointly drafting the auditing program, the work became more open and transparent than before, when the auditors kept their distance. The speaker indicated that this also made the work more enjoyable. This was confirmed by another auditor, who emphasized that the

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21) This was based roughly on the Dutch television program 'De Stoel', hosted by Rik Felderhof, which was broadcast between 1990 and 2004. In the program, Felderhof spoke with prominent individuals with unusual lifestyles, which made them 'different' and not part of the crowd. Felderhof interviewed these people while they were sitting in a chair, which he transported to the interview location on the roof of his car. During the program they were given every opportunity – while sitting in the chair – to discuss their lifestyle.



Figure 7.1: 'The Chair' at SAA (Photo: Rijkswaterstaat SAA)

commissioning authority and contractor often interpret the contract differently. According to the speaker, this is also the main challenge for the auditors: talking to each other about the contract and enhancing cooperation on this basis. His statement *“empathetic but firm”* was popular with the employees of SAA: you are empathetic but firm with each other; you do not shirk your responsibilities.

A Stakeholder Manager of SAA stressed the importance of informal consultation with the contractor. This made it possible to first have an open conversation before referring to specifications in the contract. During this informal consultation, question should be asked such as: what are the bottlenecks for the contractor and what does the commissioning authority really want? According to the speaker, it is crucial to be clear about this with each other.

A member of the dialogue team for the procurements discussed the success factors for a successful dialogue process. He first referred to the availability of sufficient expertise, which is essential to have conversations that are sufficiently in-depth and worthwhile. In this context, he also referred to decisiveness: *“Dare to make decisions, not only as a dialogue team, but also in the back-office organization.”* Both elements are in line with the previously formulated competences and core values for resilient partnership (Table 6.7). He also shared his positive experiences with involving the municipality of Almere as a stakeholder

in the dialogue discussions (Section 6.3). This enabled richer discussions, which meant not only that the contractors could make a better offer, but also that the connection with the stakeholder could be strengthened.

A Contract Manager of SAA talked about the similarity between resilient partnership and kite flying. He used a steerable kite with two strings as a metaphor. You can fly a kite with only a single string, but to steer it you need two. This is also true for the relationship between the commissioning authority and contractor: one string for steering the relationship according to the contract and one string for steering towards cooperation.

The program component 'The Chair' made it possible to discuss cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor throughout the organization. As a result it became a source of inspiration for new stories. The issue was not so much the outcome of the stories, but especially the dilemmas and struggles that people experienced. By giving people the space to share their dilemmas in this way and not reacting judgmentally, we aimed to create a safe environment in which people can learn from each other and each other's experiences. To help get this process started, we began by asking several experienced speakers to tell their stories, but during subsequent meetings it became easier to find people to sit on 'The Chair'. The SAA Board member responsible for organizing the employee meetings explained the situation: *"For the employee meeting in October 2015, I had to coax employees to tell their stories. But for the subsequent meeting in April 2016, employees spontaneously volunteered!"* At that time it felt more natural and was less tense, both for the narrators and the listeners. This was noticeable in the more relaxed atmosphere and the more open discussions relative to the first meeting. Not only were the stories significant in themselves, this part of the program was powerful especially because people volunteered whom you would not normally expect to do, and shared their stories with the group. This aspect was probably more valuable than the impact of the stories themselves. Since not only the 'usual' storytellers spoke, but others were also given the opportunity to tell their stories, more people began to feel that it was safe to share their dilemmas with the group. In this way, sharing experiences through storytelling began to take shape within SAA, and 'The Chair' catalyzed the cyclical movement between sensemaking and sensegiving. At the end of the employee meetings, employees were requested to share their stories and have them documented. They were aided in this process by specially appointed 'story collectors'. This resulted in a bountiful harvest of new stories, which were richer and had more depth than the previous ones. In the following sections, I will discuss a number of stories from this harvest.

Preconditions	Benefits
Openness and willingness to delve into the organization and lifeworld of the other person.	More mutual understanding and awareness: implicit aspects become explicit.
Focus on things that are really important.	Efficiency and cost savings.
Dare to prioritize.	A orderly, and therefore more flexible, planning process.
Stable staffing on both sides.	Building trust and jointly developing the relationship.
Dare to step back if you feel that you are not the right discussion partner and take account of your parent organization at an early stage.	Respect for each other's expertise and predictability.

*Table 7.1: Preconditions for resilient partnership and the resulting benefits (source: SAA employee meeting October 15, 2015)*

The preconditions and potential benefits of resilient partnership were also discussed in a workshop format at the end of the employee meetings. This helped to strengthen the significance and foundation of the concept of resilient partnership, see Table 7.1. Compared to a previous employee meeting (Table 6.7), the results show a development in the significance that is attributed to resilient partnership within the SAA organization. This is primarily due to the greater depth of the formulations than those in Table 6.7 and the fact that they were based more on actual experience with this mode of practice. The formulations in Table 7.1 also have more significance for the change process because they originate from the employees themselves (bottom-up) and therefore connect more effectively with stories that emerge from this process. Most of the formulations from Table 6.7 originated from SAA management. I will return to this topic in my reflection in Chapter 8.

This sharing of experiences and dilemmas through storymaking was also continued in the workshops with the contractors: with SAAone and IXAS in the spring of 2016 and with Parkway6 (the contractors consortium for the A6 project) in 2017. While the SAA employees already had some experience with storymaking and with this type of workshop, this was of course entirely new for Parkway6. Some effort was needed to get people to reflect openly on their

experiences and dilemmas, and sometimes specific arrangements were needed. In the case of Parkway6, it was particularly helpful to hold the workshop at a location that was convenient for the contractor. The added value of working together in this way was confirmed afterwards by one of the managers of Parkway6 who was present at the workshop: *“Before the workshop I thought, ‘this is going to be a drama, getting through such a full program in so little time.’ But the workshop went very well. It was interesting and fascinating to get away from our day-to-day work and talk about different perspectives with each other.”* As in the dialogue discussions during the procurement phase, the municipality of Almere also took part. The Contract Manager of SAA said the following about this aspect: *“It is not some kind of trick. It is not a question of ‘we will bring the municipality to the table, and then everything will automatically go smoothly’. It is about openness, transparency and the right atmosphere. Will they dare to say what they really want?”* And the representative of the municipality said the following: *“Because we were also part of the dialogue discussion, the predictability was enhanced and the discussion was more effective.”* In effect, the discussions focused on doing away with a culture of ‘adversarial contracts’ and finding joint solutions. A Board member of SAA said: *“If the parties trust each other and you look for a solution together, then you will find one”*, and his colleague at Parkway6 said: *“I think that our people prefer to work in this way, it helps us all to achieve our objectives more effectively. The contract is primarily a means, highly relevant of course, but not an objective in itself.”*

The workshops with the contractors again underscored the importance of sharing stories and jointly reflecting on the struggles people go through when considering various action perspectives. The workshops were an important source for the stories further on in this chapter.

## 7.2 Standing in the shoes of the other person

Early in 2017, the management of SAA held a meeting to discuss the impending completion of the first major DBFM project, the A1/A6. Until that time, the cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor had proceeded smoothly, but the question was now what would happen if the contractor determined that they had incurred a loss on the project? How would that impact the cooperation? If they had indeed incurred a loss, how could a claim situation be prevented without simply paying the contractor more? Ultimately, all payments had to be accounted for with the Director General of Rijkswaterstaat. A decision was made to practice the ‘endgame’ between the commissioning authority and



contractor by simulating it in a role-play. Because the members of the team had sufficient experience, they could quickly put themselves into the position of the other party. This resulted in fruitful discussions, and it was interesting to see how people responded to the behavior that was displayed. For example, when one party used the term 'trust' ("*you can trust me*"), this was likely to be interpreted by the other party as 'distrust' ("*yeah, sure*"). This is comparable with the famous statement made on November 17, 1973 by the former President of the United States Richard Nixon following the Watergate affair: "*I'm not a crook*". This statement had the opposite effect of what Nixon had intended. It was concluded that you cannot build trust by just using words; you have to show trust. Practicing the endgame in this way turned out to be a useful dress rehearsal for the actual event. By that time, the relationship had already become more resilient. Due to the way in which issues that had arisen during the implementation period were dealt with jointly, mutual trust was enhanced and more adaptive capacity developed in the relationship. Returning to the theory from Chapter 3, in this way the *shock-absorbing cushion* was filled sufficiently to withstand the final phase of the project. Ultimately, the project was completed on time and on budget – and without claims – to the satisfaction of both parties. This is remarkable for a project of this magnitude (with construction costs of approximately 1 billion euros), especially in view of recent experiences at that time with the completion of large infrastructural projects in the Netherlands.

Due to the success of this game situation, it was decided to continue this in a broader context. Specifically for this purpose, a role-play was developed with a number of settings that had actually occurred in practice and were very similar to several of the narratives addressed in this chapter. The role-play was first played during an employee meeting at SAA in April 2017. For the role-play, the participants were taken out of their comfort zone by putting them in different roles. Thus, a Contract Manager was given the role of Technical Manager, the Stakeholder Manager was given the role of Project Manager, and so forth. The leaders of the role-play also intervened several times with unexpected events, which is exactly what happens in real life. In addition, the individual participants were given a 'secret' personal agenda, with the aim of simulating the personal interests that individuals usually have. After completing the role-play, the teams shared their experiences and dilemmas. The session turned out to not only be very enjoyable, but also very educational and helpful in acquiring more insight into the concerns of the other party and the tensions that can emerge in this process.

A month later, the role-play was also used in one of the workshops with a contractor (IXAS). In order to experience what was happening with the other party, the players took the role of this party. The project team members of Rijkswaterstaat were assigned various roles of IXAS, and the other way around. This role-play was also successful. At the beginning, the players were given a standpoint they had to defend; as a result, they soon tried to convince each other of their standpoints. This led primarily to annoyance with the other party, not to listening to each other and the parties did not come closer together. The power of this role-play was especially due to the fact that the players, probably because they were placed in unaccustomed roles, exaggerated their positions more than they would have done in reality. As a result, the various interests of parties could be expressed more effectively, and due to the exaggeration of the behavior in a game situation the insight of the participants could be amplified into action/reaction principles. Similar to 'The Chair', in this way the role-play functioned as a vignette in the change process towards resilient partnership.

As in Chapter 6, six narratives from practice will be addressed below that illustrate the cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor during the SAA projects. The same structure will be followed in presenting and reflecting on these narratives as that in Chapter 6.

### **7.3 “This is the first time I have wished that we were not so proactive”**

#### **The situation in brief**

The first narrative in this chapter is about the A1/A6 project. As discussed in the previous chapter, with a DBFM contract the contractor assumes responsibility for the accessibility of the contracted road section from Rijkswaterstaat. This shift in responsibility happens fairly soon after the contract is awarded. One part of the A1/A6 project was a road section on the A1 near the bridge over the river Vecht (Vechtbrug). This road section would remain operational for about five months, after which the traffic on the A1 would cross the river through the new aqueduct instead of going over the bridge. The original road section would then be taken out of operation. However, that section was in such poor condition that its continued availability for five months was unlikely. The contractor was therefore confronted with a dilemma: should I repair the road section and accept the additional costs, or hope for the best and leave it unrepaired for the last five months? Deciding not to take action could lead to road closure and the

imposition of a costly availability correction. The contractor therefore opted to repair the road section by applying a new asphalt layer.

However, something went wrong during the road repair. The new asphalt did not adhere well. Gravel was released onto the road, resulting in an unsafe traffic situation with severe hindrance for road users. *“This is the first time that I wished we had not been so proactive”*, said the contractor afterwards. He did what the project required: taking preventive action to ensure the availability of the road, but ended up achieving the opposite.

## Action perspectives

Following the incident, I discussed our options as commissioning authority with the SAA project team. On the one hand, the contractor had acted proactively, which we indeed expected him to do, but the repair process went wrong. On the other hand, this created an unsafe traffic situation, which meant that the road had to be closed for new repairs. The question was, could the contractor have foreseen this setback and how would Rijkswaterstaat itself have acted in this situation? The Contract Manager of the A1/A6 project described the resulting choices: *“I saw that action could be taken from two perspectives: either impose an availability correction (after all, the road was unavailable), or take a lenient approach in view of the proactive approach of the contractor. Had we still kept the responsibility for road maintenance ourselves, we would probably not have done the repair, but our explicit intention with the DBFM contract was to have the contractor do road repair proactively. Based on this reasoning, imposing the availability correction would not be credible. At the same time I realized that if a decision was made to deviate from this provision in the contract, this would also have consequences beyond the scope of the project. It could set a precedent that would apply to other projects.”*

The commissioning authority and contractor decided to consult with each other on a strategy to deal with the situation. Both parties quickly agreed that it was important to learn from the incident and to create conditions that would help prevent this situation in the future. This was thought to be necessary especially because many more construction activities were still planned for the project. The commissioning authority understood that imposing an availability correction on top of the repair costs would be a double burden for the contractor. And the contractor understood that Rijkswaterstaat had to do something to ensure that a precedent was not established. Because of the latter point, both parties decided to take a strictly legal approach based on the definition in the contract of ‘pothole’. According to the contract, the availability of the road is

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles/ dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
Entering into discussion if well-intended provisions in the contract work out differently than foreseen.t	- Following the letter of the contract versus acting on the basis of reasonableness and fairness.	Contract Manager SAA	<p>Contractor: <i>This is the first time I have wished that we were not so proactive.</i></p> <p>Contract Manager SAA: <i>I saw that action could be taken from two perspectives: either impose an availability correction (the road was indeed unavailable), or take a lenient approach in view of the proactive approach of the contractor... our explicit intention with the DBFM contract was to have the contractor do the road repair proactively. Based on this reasoning, imposing the availability correction would not be credible. I realized that this could set a precedent that would apply to other projects.</i></p>

Table 7.2: “This is the first time I have wished that we were not so proactive”

compromised only if a hole in the road surface is deeper than 5 cm. According to the contract, shallower holes are defined as ‘fraying’ of the road. In this case, the specific damage could be placed – just barely – in the latter category. This offered a solution for both parties; instead of a costly availability correction, a much smaller penalty could be imposed. After all, the failed repair resulted in an unsafe traffic situation, and a penalty was appropriate. By not having to impose the availability correction, with severe financial consequences, the lesson from the incident could be emphasized instead of penalizing the contractor.

## Reflection

Looking back on this incident, we see one of the preconditions from Table 7.1: openness and willingness to delve into the organization and lifeworld of the other party. We also see the proactive approach of the contractor, which can be considered to be a good example of resilient partnership on his part. When this approach – making an investment in preventive maintenance – turned out to be counterproductive, it was a severe blow for the contractor. Nevertheless, the contractor made himself more vulnerable by not protesting in advance against



*Figure 7.2: The reversible lane on the construction site of the Gaasperdammer Tunnel  
(Photo: IXAS)*

an availability correction and by showing understanding for the issue of setting a precedent for the commissioning authority. Consequently, it was not appropriate to respond in a strictly contractual fashion without consultation. The power of this narrative lies in the decision to sit down together and opt for an approach in which both sides would learn from this incident. Because a mutually acceptable solution was achieved, one that could be judicially supported as well, both sides could be accountable to their respective constituencies without further problems. A crucial aspect was that both parties explicitly revealed their interests. The foregoing is summarized in Table 7.2.

## 7.4 An unfortunate turn of events

### The situation in brief

This narrative is another example of resilient partnership on the part of the contractor. As stated previously (in Section 6.1), for the A9 Gaasperdammer-

weg project the contractor IXAS opted for an approach in which the planned reversible lane would be constructed first, after which the flanking tunnels would be completed. According to the contractor's planning, the reversible lane would be opened to traffic on 1 May 2016. However, before this lane could be opened to traffic, the electronic control installations on the reversible lane and the connections with the traffic control center of Rijkswaterstaat would have to be tested. At one point in time, the contractor anticipated problems with these tests. To avoid the risk of test failure, he proposed postponing the tests for one week. However, the contractor for the subsequent SAA project, the A1/A6, had planned to transport the railway bridge at Muiderberg (see Section 7.5) during the night of 6-7 May. In technical terms, this was the riskiest part of the entire SAA program. An unfortunate combination of circumstances appeared imminent.

### Action perspectives

The opening of the reversible lane was a crucial point in the contractor's planning. Many subsequent activities were dependent on this step, and the corresponding personnel had already been scheduled. When he anticipated a greater risk of a failed test, the contractor envisioned the following alternatives:

1. Keep the original opening date of May 1, with the associated risk of incomplete implementation of the test protocol. This could potentially cause the traffic control center of the road authority to cancel the opening of the reversible lane;
2. Postpone the opening of the reversible lane until the weekend of May 7;
3. Postpone to a later weekend.

The weekend opening of the reversible lane originated from a policy of the road authority. Opening a new road section to traffic always leads to a period of accustomization for road users and a greater probability of traffic jams. It is therefore advisable to schedule such openings when lighter traffic is expected, such as during the weekend. The contractor considered the first option too risky. The likelihood of completing all the work on time, followed by successful tests, was thought to be too small. The second option was impossible for both the commissioning authority and the road authority. Transporting and installing the huge railway bridge during that weekend was a high-risk operation, and would be the focus of much media attention. The combination with the opening of a nearby road section with a high probability of extra traffic congestion was seen as an irresponsible risk. The third option was also seen as undesirable.

because it would cause too many conflicts with the subsequent planning of the project. For the commissioning authority, this option was unattractive as well. This was because the transport of the railroad bridge might also have to be postponed due to weather conditions, and the activities could still conflict with each other at a later time.

The project director of the contractor preferred the second option: *“In this way we would have the best control over the risks, and our planning would not be disrupted as much. But the commissioning authority rejected this option. We actually did not want to compromise, but we also understood that this would put the commissioning authority in a difficult situation.”*

This was a difficult dilemma for the contractor, and the tensions therefore increased. After much discussion and accusations from both sides about who caused the situation, the contractor finally broke the impasse by showing his understanding of the impossible situation with which the commissioning authority would be faced if the opening of the reversible lane was postponed to May 7 or later. He promised that he would appeal to his own organization to make every effort to implement the required tests in a shorter time, while maintaining quality. At the same time, the commissioning authority consulted with the traffic control center so that in this exceptional situation the opening of the reversible lane would not have to take place in the weekend. Following intensive consultation, a compromise was reached and a mutual decision was made to conduct all tests and to open the reversible lane on Thursday May 5, which is a holiday for many people in the Netherlands.

## Reflection

The foregoing incident was a good test to determine whether the trust that had been developed to that point was sufficient to achieve a mutually satisfactory solution. Although tensions ran high, both parties still managed to reach an acceptable compromise that was ultimately successful in practice. An additional advantage was that this process further enhanced the trust between the parties. To achieve this, both parties had to put themselves in each other's position and take account of each other's interests. Both parties, but especially the contractor, also dared to deviate from previous agreements. During this process, trust in each other's expertise was crucial, and the mutual *shock-absorbing cushion* was now filled sufficiently to achieve a mutually acceptable solution. The positive result, in turn, helped to fill the cushion even further and enhanced mutual trust and adaptive capacity.

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles/dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
Working together on a solution in case of unforeseen events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Showing empathy.</li> <li>- Daring to deviate from previous agreements.</li> </ul>	Projectdirector Contractor (IXAS)	<i>In this way we would have the best control over the risks, and our planning would not be disrupted as much. But the commissioning authority rejected any postponement. We actually did not want to compromise, but we also understood that this would put the commissioning authority in a difficult situation.</i>

Table 7.3: An unfortunate combination of circumstances

## 7.5 “Dutch Glory at the highest level”

### The situation in brief

*“Dutch Glory at the highest level”* was the headline above a major article in the Dutch daily newspaper *De Telegraaf* on May 6, 2016. The article continued: *“This has never been seen before anywhere in the world: a 255 meter arch bridge weighing as much as 7600 passenger cars being moved several hundred meters. This is going to happen tonight at Muiderberg, where a railroad bridge – which was built during the past several months alongside the motorway – will be moved to its final location above the A1. This is an example of Dutch ingenuity and daring, conducted with military precision and minute-by-minute planning and implementation.”*

This article described one of the largest and most complex components of the SAA A1/A6 project: the new railroad bridge above the widened A1 at Muiderberg. The steel bridge was manufactured in modules in Belgium, after which the modules were transported to a location alongside the A1 motorway, several hundred meters from the final destination. The bridge, with a total weight of 8.4 million kilograms, was then assembled next to the A1. According to the planning of the contractor, the bridge would then be moved on special transport wagons (976 wheels in total) on the A1 and placed on temporary abutments, after which the work on the bridge could be completed. Later on, after the old railroad bridge was demolished, the new bridge would be pushed into its final position and opened for train traffic. During the transport of the bridge, which would





Figure 7.3: The railroad bridge over the A1 at Muiderberg: in assembly alongside the A1 (upper left), ready for transport (upper right), some of the 976 wheels under the bridge (lower left), and its final location (lower right) (Photo's: Rijkswaterstaat)

take approximately 8 hours, the A1 would obviously have to be closed for traffic. The transport was planned for the night of May 6-7, 2016. In the article, the responsible director of the contractor explained the decision to use this type of construction: *“The A1 is one of the busiest roads in our country, and there is no way you can close it for several months. Nevertheless, the new railroad bridge had to be built in this way because a span of several hundred meters was required, and this was the only option. The question was whether or not we would be capable of moving such an immense structure afterwards to its final location. This had never been done before. We thought about it for months, planning, calculating and recalculating.”* The transport of the bridge would be the focus of much media attention and would be broadcast live on the Internet.

Despite all the preparatory measures taken by the contractor, the risks entailed by this transport caused me to feel anxious in my role as commissioning authority. Never before had such a massive bridge been moved in this way. If something went wrong and in the worst case the bridge fell off the transport wagons in the middle of the A1, this would have consequences not only in a technical sense, but also for politics and society. In that case, the bridge could

no longer be moved and could only be taken off the roadway by cutting it into pieces. The busy A1 would then be closed to traffic for months and the damage would run into the tens of millions of euros, not to mention the damage to the reputation of all parties involved. Moreover, shortly before this, something had gone wrong with the transport of a bridge deck elsewhere in the Netherlands. This concerned a totally different situation, but it was still worrying. I remember the day that I saw it on television and thought to myself: *“This won’t happen to me...or will it?”*

## Action perspectives

Due to my concerns, I was faced with a dilemma in my role as commissioning authority. In contractual terms, the transport of the railroad bridge was entirely the responsibility of the contractor. Therefore if I, in my position at Rijkswaterstaat, begin interfering, then at the very least I would make myself co-responsible. On the other hand, I realized that if something went wrong with the transport, I would be completely unable to hide behind the contract. In that case, I would have a serious problem. At the same time, the contractor was also worried; according to the director<sup>22</sup>: *“During the tender phase, we planned solid precautionary measures, but when I saw that huge structure alongside the road, ready for transport, I still became a little nervous. However, if you take your doubts to the client at such a time, then at best it’s a bit of a failure, or worse, you’re asked if you’re trying to create more work.”*

The trade-off that I had to make as commissioning authority concerned the following: when do contract-based risks for the contractor become transformed into political risks for the commissioning authority? On one hand, these activities were the contractual responsibility of the contractor. Intervening in this situation could result in the commissioning authority becoming co-responsible and consequently liable for some of the costs, whether this part of the project was successful or not. On the other hand, a stronger guarantee for society was also important for the commissioning authority. After coordinating within Rijkswaterstaat and the ministry, the choice was made for a stronger societal

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22) This quotation and others in this section are from the whiteboard animation “Er was eens een spoorbrug bij Muiderberg” [“Once upon a time, there was a railroad bridge at Muiderberg”], which was made to document this transport. The director of the contractors consortium and I (as commissioning authority) appear in this film. The quotations used in the animation are based on interviews with the ‘actors’. For the purpose of sensegiving, these quotations were strengthened somewhat.



Figure 7.4: Second opinion on the transport (Illustration: whiteboard animation “Once upon a time there was a railroad bridge at Muiderberg”; P&P Regisseurs 2017)

guarantee. The consequences of failure would be so great that no risk at all could be incurred. However, assuming complete responsibility by having the commissioning authority instruct the contractor on how to transport to bridge was not a good option either. After all, there was no reason to doubt the expertise of the contractor, and it was questionable whether Rijkswaterstaat would know better, especially considering the unusual type of transport that was involved. To maintain the division of roles between commissioning authority and contractor, it was decided to propose that the contractor should acquire a second opinion on the bridge transport, specifically concerning the stability of the subsoil along the transport route. It was not difficult to imagine the first response of the contractor to this proposal: “Don’t you trust us? We also had our doubts, but still: if there is one party who doesn’t understand how to deal with such an issue, then it’s Rijkswaterstaat! And not only that, but asking professors for help! How am I supposed to communicate internally and to our subcontractors that these bookworms are going to be interfering with our project? Of course, they are going to make all kinds of additional demands - they

*will not make the transport safer at all and will only be burdensome to us, but this will enable Rijkswaterstaat to expunge itself of any responsibility. There will soon be a fist-thick report with the conclusion: the safest option is not to move the bridge at all! On the other hand ... I of course understood that the commissioning authority stuck his neck out with that second opinion. By doing so, he made himself co-responsible for the good outcome, while this was entirely our responsibility according to the contract.”* Ultimately, a joint decision was made to request a second opinion to determine how the risk of the transport could be minimized. After all, this was in everyone’s interest. We would look at the consequences for both parties afterwards.

The outcome of the second opinion was that the subsoil could not bear the weight of the transport under all conditions, especially if the transport had to be stopped temporarily due to weather. This can be compared with a skater on thin ice. As long as he keeps skating, there is no hazard, but if he stops he can fall through the ice. To minimize the risk, the contractor decided to reinforce the subsoil with a ‘driving strip’. *“Even a Boeing 747 can land on that driving strip”*, explained the contractor. Ultimately, the transport took place as planned, even slightly ahead of schedule, and without problems.

## Reflection

The bridge transport was successful, with many positive reactions in the media. However, we will never know if the second opinion, and the corresponding measures, were really necessary and/or whether the job would have also gone well according to the original plan. In retrospect, as commissioning authority, I think that during the tender phase both parties had underestimated the complexity of the operation. Looking back, I am happy that I took the initiative to request a second opinion. This feeling was shared by the contractor. Sometimes these types of trade-offs have to be made based on intuition or engineering judgment. This was possible because a trusting relationship had been developed during the project between the commissioning authority and contractor. As a result, the commissioning authority could take his concerns to the contractor without being afraid that the contractor would take advantage by making financial claims because the commissioning authority deviated from the contractual division of responsibility. However, the commissioning authority was not the only party who stuck his neck out. The contractor also did so by taking the concerns of the commissioning authority seriously and defending them to his own organization. The professional pride of the contractor’s engineers could

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles/dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
<p>Continue to think creatively with the contractor, because contractual risks for the contractor can become political risks for the commissioning authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opportunism versus risk aversion.</li> <li>- Pragmatic versus contract-based.</li> <li>- Daring to trust the other.</li> <li>- Uncertainty and daring to show this to the other.</li> <li>- Professional pride.</li> </ul>	<p>Program Director SAA (me)</p> <p>Director of contractors consortium (SAAone)</p>	<p>Commissioning authority: <i>This won't happen to me...or will it? I realized that if something went wrong with the transport, I would be completely unable to hide behind the contract. In that case we would have a serious problem.</i></p> <p>Contractor: <i>When I saw that huge structure alongside the road, ready for transport, I still became a little nervous. However, if you take your doubts to the client at such a time, then at best it's a bit of a failure, or worse, you're asked if you're trying to create more work. Don't you trust us? We also had our doubts, but still: if there is one party who doesn't understand how to deal with such an issue, then it's Rijkswaterstaat! On the other hand ... I of course understood that the commissioning authority stuck his neck out with that second opinion. By doing so, he made himself co-responsible for the good outcome, while this was entirely our responsibility according to the contract. Four years ago this would have been unthinkable in our relationship.</i></p>

Table 7.4: "Dutch Glory at the highest level"

have been injured, and they might have been reluctant to admit that their own plans for the transport were possibly inadequate and that supplementary measures were necessary. But the opposite happened: the findings of the professors and their proposed supplementary measures were accepted without discussion by the contractor and implemented on a tight schedule. The latter is often difficult because discussions about the allocation of the financial consequences can obstruct progress. Both parties were confident that an acceptable agreement would be reached on this allocation after the transport was completed. This meant that they remained focused on minimizing the risks and implementing

the corresponding measures. *“Four years ago, this would have been unthinkable in our relationship”*, said the contractor (see Table 7.4).

## 7.6 If you want make sure that the plug will fit into the socket, then you make the socket yourself

### The situation in brief

The following narrative is a good example of jointly creating added societal value. The narrator, from whose perspective the story is told, is an asset manager at the contractor’s consortium for the A9 Gaasperdammerweg project. The most critical component of this project is the construction of the Gaasperdammer Tunnel. The asset manager knows from experience that opening the tunnel to traffic, when the technical installations in the tunnel have to be connected to the traffic control center of Rijkswaterstaat, is always a risky moment: *“It is similar to purchasing a new printer. Before you can start printing, you have to connect the printer to your computer and install it. As everyone has experienced, this installation procedure often fails to work the first time, and the same thing often happens when commissioning a tunnel. What usually happens is that the tunnel and all the technical installations are ready, and when you ‘insert the plug into the socket’ of the traffic control center, it doesn’t fit, it doesn’t work. This means that the tunnel cannot be opened for traffic, even though everyone is waiting for this, and then there’s a lot of hassle and accusations back-and-forth. As contractor, we then say that the IT service of Rijkswaterstaat has not correctly specified the ‘socket’, and then they say that the problem is with the ‘plug’. This does not help us to find a solution.”* The contractor wanted to prevent this from happening, so the question was how the connection with the traffic control center could be made differently.

### Action perspectives

To control the risk, the contractor proposed making the connection well in advance and testing it even before construction on the tunnel began. The contractor offered to specify the ‘socket’ for the IT service of Rijkswaterstaat, in order to be certain that the plug would fit correctly. That seemed simpler than it actually was: at that time there was no standard for specifying the connection with a traffic control center. For this purpose, clear agreements had to be made with the IT service.

Arriving at a uniform connection with the traffic control center in this way

was an innovative approach, and it was 'sold' as such to the project organization of SAA. The project organization was enthusiastic, and the approach received a lot of attention. The connection was demonstrated in front of many of those involved in the project by transmitting images back and forth between the future location of the tunnel and the office of Rijkswaterstaat in Utrecht. The asset manager of the contractor's consortium said the following about this demonstration: *"You have to realize that the tunnel in Amsterdam was nowhere to be found yet, but the electronic connection was already operational. In terms of image, this really made a big splash in the professional magazines, with headlines such as: the work on the tunnel has not even started, but the electronic connection is already operational!"*

## Reflection

Without resilient partnership, this innovative approach could never have happened. The contractor acted responsibly and proactively by taking on a risk that was usually borne by the commissioning authority. At the same time, the commissioning authority also took a responsible and proactive role, because people in the SAA project organization, together with the contractor, held discussions with the staff of the traffic control center and IT service of Rijkswaterstaat. These discussions were crucial because allowing the specification by the contractor was a sensitive aspect for the IT service. It meant that the IT service had to acknowledge that a failed connection could be at least partly the responsibility of Rijkswaterstaat. *"The IT service is obviously not part of the SAA project organization, so this relationship was also sensitive, but the commissioning authority played a mediating role: they really helped with selling the specification by the contractor to the IT service."* Both parties could also have waited until the final phase of the project, but the likelihood that the connection would have worked correctly straight away would have been much smaller. The contractor: *"Contractually, this was our risk, but also that of Rijkswaterstaat, because their reputation was also at stake."* This approach was attractive for the contractor because it would enable an important risk to be dealt with at an early stage, and not at the end of the project, when the time pressure would be higher. For the commissioning authority, it was important to facilitate this proactive approach of the contractor, because it benefited the entire project and increased the likelihood of a smooth opening process for the tunnel. In addition, Rijkswaterstaat was interested in a uniform interface, also for future projects. The commissioning authority therefore decided to pay for the solution without there being a contractual necessity to do so at that time.

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles/dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
By taking a proactive approach and looking beyond the contract, societal value can be jointly created	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dare to stick your neck out even though the potential benefits are uncertain.</li> <li>- Dare to acknowledge that you could also be responsible for the mistake.</li> </ul>	Asset Manager contractors consortium (IXAS)	<p><i>You have to realize that the tunnel in Amsterdam was nowhere to be found yet, but the electronic connection was already operational. In terms of image, this really made a big splash in the professional magazines, with headlines such as: the work on the tunnel has not even started, but the electronic connection is already operational!</i></p>

Table 7.5: *If you want make sure that the plug will fit into the socket, then you make the socket yourself*

The cooperative and proactive attitude of both the commissioning authority and the contractor also turned out to be a trigger for innovation. The specification of the uniform interface between the tunnel and the traffic control center was not yet a part of the national standard for traffic tunnels that had recently been compiled. A uniform interface has now been included in the national standard, due to the ambition to tackle the challenge early in the project with a proactive and cooperative attitude.

## 7.7 From two different movies to a single joint image

### The situation in brief

This narrative is about the stagnating effect that changes can have on the progress of a project. It focuses on the A1/A6 project and is illuminated from two perspectives: that of the Contract Manager of the commissioning authority and that of the operational manager of the contractors consortium. The setting is a joint project session during which participants from both parties reflected on their cooperation, and especially on dealing with changes during the period under consideration.

*“In complex projects, changes are unavoidable but can be frustrating, especially if they stagnate and slow the realization process. Relatively small changes*



*often seem simple, but to deal effectively with them it is still necessary to define them clearly and unequivocally. Unfortunately, it is often an illusion that various participants really understand each other immediately.”* For the Contract Manager of SAA, this became clear during the joint project session when an issue was discussed in a ‘fishbowl setup’. In this situation several people conduct a discussion in the center of the room while the other participants sit around them and observe. One of the observers said: *“These people think they are talking about the same thing, but they are actually in different films and talking in parallel, without being aware of it.”* The Contract Manager of SAA said: *“This often involves minor issues that are important for a municipality, such as a culvert or a level crossing that must be changed slightly. In such cases, agreement appears to be reached, and the commissioning authority thinks ‘it is settled’, but the contractor thinks ‘let’s wait and see, a real decision has not yet been made’. In such a situation, everyone goes home with a different picture of the discussion: the stakeholder thinks ‘problem solved’, the commissioning authority thinks ‘now they can get started’ and the contractor thinks ‘wait until the change becomes official’. There is no check that enables everyone to see that the parties have interpreted this interaction much differently. In everyone’s mind, the next step is up to ‘the other one’, and that leads to frustration and repetition, while the clock ticks. At such times it does not help to convince the other party that they must take action, because you don’t know whether the message has come across as intended. It is important to really understand each other’s world: what do you actually hear in our message, how do you interpret it? It is like a relay race where you continually wonder: did I pass the baton, or did I drop it? The other party must know when it should grab the baton, so the first one can let go with confidence. This is a question of getting acquainted with each other.”*

The foregoing was also recognized by the contractor, but from a slightly different perspective. *“Although everyone has good intentions in principle, you see that you are working in isolation and sometimes getting frustrated. When you realize that you are actually in different movies and that it is an illusion that you understand each other, that’s a good start.”* The Stakeholder Managers on the side of the contractor experience the problem that the formulation of the change itself continues to change: *“Then we think we’ve made an agreement, and then for the umpteenth time it changes again. Another concrete beam is needed or it has to be in a different color.”* For the contractor, every change costs money, so they prefer to have a formal change of plan in which everything is specified and calculated before anything is done. *“Because later on it will be changed again anyway. If we get started before we have a formal*

*change of plan, then there are bound to be questions afterwards. Do you think it is outrageous that I want a formal change of plan first? In the meantime, the Stakeholder Managers of the commissioning authority are very relaxed: they say 'we're finished here', because they have made arrangements with the stakeholder, haven't they?"* At a certain point, everyone is waiting for the other party: due to the lack of a shared image, there is a stalemate that leads to delays and higher costs. *"For example, take a culvert that is supposed to be installed in a loop of the A1: this culvert, which would have cost €100,000 initially, ends up costing eight times that much after all that waiting because the road has already been built and the contractor has much more difficulty accessing the site."*

During the joint project session, it became clear for everyone that the participants were trying to communicate from very different perspectives, resulting in a stalemate. However, understanding this costly impasse does not lead immediately to a solution: someone has to take the first step to break through the impasse.

### Action perspectives

The follow-up to the joint session was about how the parties could deal with this problem and break through the resulting impasse. The Contract Manager of the commissioning authority said the following: *"Normally, this kind of misunderstanding can lead to 'trench warfare', and the participants in the session were already digging trenches. They say 'okay, I will explain it one more time', and the more often you do this, the deeper you dig your trench: first you explain it, and then you take opposing positions. Getting into the trenches is simple but getting out of them is a different task entirely. And everyone has to realize: the other party did not push you into the trenches, you got into them yourself."*

After the situation with the different films became clear, it was decided to tackle the impasse by taking a different approach, no longer seating the negotiators of the contractor and commissioning authority across from each other, but asking for clarification from within their respective organizations. This was done by asking questions to the parent organization such as: *"Are you sure he understands? Have you verified this? Are you certain? Because I still don't understand it."* Asking difficult questions internally creates a type of 'common enemy' for the project teams of the contractor and commissioning authority, which compels them to communicate more clearly with each other: *"What is this change really about? Do we really agree on the same thing? You can send a message, but it is important to determine whether the message has really arrived."*

Initially, this was not even about the content, but about communication and in-depth understanding. The Contract Manager of the commissioning authority said the following: *“They need to understand how frustrating it is for us to continually hear ‘I want to receive a formal change of plan before I do anything’, but we also need to understand how much pressure the contractor is under to stay within budget and make enough profit to survive.”* The contractor ultimately took a step to change the default position of his Stakeholder Managers (a formal change of plan before we do anything): *“I said, don’t worry about the money, you look for a technical solution and get to work. We will handle the contractual deviation and the financial consequences later.”* When the contractor broke through the impasse, the commissioning authority also took a different position. The manager of the contractor’s consortium said: *“You saw the Stakeholder Managers of Rijkswaterstaat literally sighing in relief. But I was sticking my neck out in my own organization, so I would expect some accommodation in coming to a reasonable financial agreement. We took a proactive and cooperative position with respect to the task at hand, and Rijkswaterstaat should do the same. As a contractor we committed ourselves to solving an issue, but we did not take over the responsibility of the commissioning authority. This is an important aspect to emphasize in order to ‘sell’ resilient partnership within your own organization.”*

## Reflection

The most important step taken by the contractor and commissioning authority in the joint session is that both parties said: *“We have to do something about this”* and did not say *“It is your problem, you solve it”*. The traditional stalemate between commissioning authority and contractor was broken primarily by conducting the discussion first within the respective organizations. This provided clarity, not only between the respective Contract Managers, but at all levels of both organizations. *“The result was a type of zip-fastener between commissioning authority and contractor that prevented them from standing in opposition to each other: This benefited rapid progress on the project”*, said the Contract Manager of SAA. Expertise and understanding of the issues being discussed are essential: *“As Contract Manager, you are primarily a manager, not a bookkeeper that ascertains that the contract has been complied with perfectly, but the project has failed. You have to understand the contract, then you can transcend the contract and manage by utilizing the space between the ‘letter and spirit’: You must understand the interests underlying specific demands, then you can think more effectively about suitable solutions.”*

Ultimately, breaking through the impasse is about open communication, wanting to really understand each other and daring to take the first step. The commissioning authority said: *“Meaningful communication is not the constant repetition of standpoints without them being accepted by the other party: get to know your counterpart, understand his or her reality and interests and in this way create space within the contractual framework to think about alternative, joint solutions. The contractor also has to survive: understand his world and see if you can do something for him if he repeats a point, because then he apparently has a problem; it ultimately benefits the project as a whole if the contractor can do his work successfully. The other way around, the contractor can be expected to understand the urgency or the importance of a change and to implement the change as smoothly as possible.”*

And the contractor: *“If there is an issue, we are often opposed to each other, and that takes a lot of energy. So it is really a choice for a position that initially appears to be more vulnerable, but is ultimately beneficial for the progress of the project as a whole. Therefore, it is better to look at yourself in the mirror than to point at the other party, because you can change yourself but not the other person. The challenge, then, is to really understand the other person and then to see what steps you can take to create a different dynamic. We recently held another joint session and it was very relaxed, even though the surroundings were very hectic. Despite the hectic atmosphere, we sat down and expressed our views and concerns. This openness is remarkable and certainly benefits the project: for the sake of the project you have to ask for and offer help, as well as accept help. If you show that you are doing your very best and something still goes wrong, then you have a different conversation with Rijkswaterstaat than if you had not shown them anything. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, but being open about this and receiving a suitable response from Rijkswaterstaat can result in an upward spiral, generating more and more trust and resilience. A large and complex project can simply not be based on watertight agreement beforehand. Essentially, the back office in your own organization has to give you the room to stick your neck out. If something still goes wrong and someone gets fired as a result, then the stalemate will continue. The conditions must be created so that the people on both sides of the project have protection and support from within their parent organization.”*

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles/dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
<p>Truly engaging in discussion by breaking through the formal positions and seeing the issue from each other's perspective.</p> <p>The importance of not only sending a message, but also making sure that it is truly understood by the other party.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dare to take the first step and trust in the other party, versus waiting until the other party takes a step.</li> <li>- Really listen and try to understand the position of the other party versus us/them thinking.</li> <li>- See yourself in the mirror versus pointing at the other party.</li> <li>- Provide backing from the parent organization.</li> </ul>	<p>Group session A1/A6 project with participants from contractor and commissioning authority (SAAone)</p>	<p>Observer: <i>These people think they are talking about the same thing, but they are actually in different films and talking in parallel without being aware of it.</i></p> <p>Commissioning authority: <i>In everyone's mind, the next step is up to 'the other one', and that leads to frustration and repetition, while the clock ticks. At such times it does not help to convince the other party that they must take action, because you don't know if the message comes across as intended. It is important to really understand each other's world: what do you actually hear in our message, how do you interpret it?</i></p> <p>Contractor: <i>When you realize that you are actually in different movies and that it is an illusion that you understand each other, that's a start.</i></p> <p>Contractor: <i>But I was sticking my neck out in my own organization, so I would expect some accommodation in coming to a reasonable financial agreement. We took a proactive and cooperative position with respect to the task at hand, and Rijkswaterstaat should do the same. As a contractor we committed to solving an issue, but we did not take over the responsibility of the commissioning authority. This is an important aspect to emphasize in order to 'sell' resilient partnership within your own organization.</i></p> <p>Contractor: <i>So it is really a choice for a position that initially appears to be more vulnerable, but is ultimately beneficial for the progress of the project as a whole. Therefore, it is better to look at yourself in the mirror than to point at the other party, because you can change yourself but not the other person.</i></p>

Table 7.6: From two different movies to a single joint image



*Figure 7.5: The construction of the Gaasperdammer Tunnel in full swing (Photo: IXAS)*

## **7.8 The trade-off between traffic disruption and negative effects on the surroundings**

### **The situation in brief**

The final narrative is about the construction of the Gaasperdammer Tunnel on the A9. At that location of the planned tunnel, the A9 is one of the busiest roads in the Netherlands in an economically crucial region. About 50,000 people have jobs in the immediate vicinity of the project, and the Amsterdam Arena, IKEA and the AMC, one of the largest hospitals in the Netherlands, have many visitors. Good traffic flow in the region is therefore essential and specific contractual agreements have been made to ensure it. With approximately 87,000 residents it is also a densely populated area, with most housing concentrated in two districts, De Bijlmer on the north side of the motorway and Gaasperdam on the south. Some of the housing is located very close to the construction site. This means that construction nuisance, especially due to noise, would play an important role, especially since approximately 10,000 piles had to be driven into the ground as part of the construction process. The contractor optimized the construction method and took measures to limit the nuisance as much as



*Figure 7.6: The Gaasperdammer Tunnel under construction between the De Bijlmer and Gaasperdam districts; the reversible lane in the center and the temporary A9 on the right (Photo: Rijkswaterstaat)*

possible, but there was still a lot of noise. Moreover, the contractor was obliged to work regularly at night to meet the contractual requirements regarding the availability of the motorway. A number of the complaints about noise nuisance were very serious and, although you can't build a tunnel without some nuisance, the commissioning authority realized that something had to change. However, this resulted in a dilemma: the contractor (IXAS) was obligated to continue the work on the project, had already ordered the piles and was on a tight schedule, but the people in the surroundings were also becoming impatient.

### Action perspectives

IXAS, the contractor for the A9 Gaasperdammerweg project, was awarded the contract due to its creative cost-saving and timesaving design. As explained in Section 6.1, the contractor planned to build a reversible lane - which runs right through the middle of the construction site - and open it to traffic during the day. At night, this part of the roadway would be used for construction traffic, making preparations for resuming construction in the daytime. This beauti-

ful concept was even praised as an example of what a commissioning authority can achieve if you give the contractor room to innovate within the specifications. It was indeed a good concept, but reality proved intractable.

Soon after the construction of the tunnel began, the commissioning authority realized that the project was gradually falling behind schedule. More investment was needed to stay on schedule. The approach with the reversible lane and construction going on right next to the busy motorway did not work entirely as envisioned. At one point, the commissioning authority made a concession to the contractor: the road had to remain open during the rush-hour, but could be closed the rest of the day so the work could continue. An important consideration was that more work could be done during the day, thus limiting the necessity to work at night and reducing nuisance for the surroundings. This benefited the contractor somewhat, but did not solve all their problems: *“This decision accelerated the completion of the project, but it was very costly and time-consuming to open and close the road several times a day: the traffic barriers had to be installed and then removed, and during the course of 2017 we determined this method would no longer work. Lagging behind schedule would ultimately lead to postponing the completion date; besides being harmful to the image of the project, it would be a blow to the financial position of the contractor. With a DBFM contract, the time factor is crucial, because you have to pay the additional costs yourself if you are late. If we make a mistake in our bid, and need an additional 10 million Euro to complete the project, then Rijkswaterstaat is not going to pay.”*

During the autumn holiday the Asset Manager of the contractor kept thinking about the costly and time-consuming process of repeatedly opening and closing the reversible lane. This led to an idea: could the reversible lane not simply be closed for the entire construction period? This would be possible if six lanes could be fitted into the temporary bypass of the A9 instead of the four lanes that were in use. The Asset Manager: *“After some calculations, it appeared that this would indeed be possible. Had that not been the case, it would have cost much time and millions of euros to widen the roadway, but we now could add the extra lanes simply by painting the lane dividers differently: this would still require a whole weekend of work, but it appeared feasible and would have many benefits. Coincidentally, at that same time another decision had to be made about the reversible lane. Because the traffic would become busier after the holiday, the Program Director of SAA was on the verge of deciding to keep the reversible lane open for traffic longer during the day. I was still think-*



*ing about the idea of closing the reversible lane to traffic entirely when I heard that the extended daytime opening was up for discussion. The meeting to arrange this was already scheduled, but we were able to request a postponement: 'please wait on this decision, because I probably have a better plan'. If a decision had been made to increase the hours that the reversible lane was open to traffic, our idea would have been rejected. Luckily, the Program Director quickly decided against the proposal for longer opening hours and my plan was accepted."*

Since that time the entire reversible lane has been closed to traffic, but without causing more traffic problems on the A9 bypass. As a result, the building site has been continuously accessible for the contractor, which enabled more robust planning. The construction activities could also be concentrated in the daytime hours, which limited the nuisance for the surroundings. However, this was a sensitive - and rather painful - modification of the celebrated initial design. The contractor: *"Our entire story, which we had believed in and promoted for three years, ultimately turned out to not be the best option. We did implement it, and we worked for nine months to make the initial plan successful; otherwise the commissioning authority could never have said 'go back to the drawing board and come up with another plan', since that would have raised eyebrows among our competitors, but we did change course. The commissioning authority could also have said 'keep to your original design'. After all, the essence of our original design was using the reversible lane. It was therefore remarkable that the commissioning authority accommodated us, not in a financial sense, but by giving us permission to close the reversible lane and modify the plan. They were not obligated to do so in any way. They could also have said 'it is not our problem if the project is delayed'. On the other hand, if we were to incur a loss on the project, we would be inclined to start making claims and demand payment for unplanned work, which we did not have to do."*

## Reflection

The contractor was open about the state of the project with the commissioning authority, i.e. that they were falling behind schedule, that things were not going as expected and that the costs were higher than planned. The difficult financial situation of one of the partners in the consortium was also discussed. As commissioning authority I could have responded that it was not my concern that the contractor had fallen behind schedule. Indeed, this is not the contractual responsibility of the commissioning authority, and there was no legal basis for the contractor to claim the additional costs from the commissioning authority.

Core of the narrative (plot)	Struggles/ dilemmas	Narrator	Quotations
<p>Look beyond your own interests and dare to change a good approach if conditions require this.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vulnerability versus safety.</li> <li>- Daring to be flexible versus keeping to the original plan.</li> <li>- Daring to look beyond the plan and the contract, and thinking in terms of societal objectives.</li> </ul>	<p>Asset Manager contractors consortium (IXAS)</p>	<p>Contractor: <i>Our entire story, which we believed in and promoted for three years, ultimately turned out to not be the best option. But the commissioning authority could also have said 'keep to your original plan'. After all, the essence of our design was using the reversible lane. It was therefore remarkable that the commissioning authority accommodated us, not in a financial sense, but by giving us permission to close the reversible lane and modify the plan. They were not obligated to do so in any way. They could also have said, 'it is not our problem if the project is delayed'.</i></p> <p>Commissioning authority: <i>Obviously, we were not enthusiastic about deviating from the original plan. But this solution had dual benefits: by granting permission to close the reversible lane during daytime as well and use it for construction traffic, the nuisance caused by nighttime construction activities would be limited without this leading to additional traffic problems on the A9 bypass, and at the same time we could help the contractor avoid financial difficulties and make their planning more robust. This was in everyone's interest.</i></p> <p>Contractor: <i>It is still remarkable that the contractor and commissioning authority dared to acknowledge that the original plan did not work very well and a solution could be found within the framework of the contract. Both parties looked beyond their own interests.</i></p>

Table 7.7: The trade-off between traffic disruption and negative environmental effects

But this attitude would not have benefited the project in the long-term. A delay would have resulted in damage to the reputation of both parties, would hamper cooperation later on in the project and could lead to a claim situation. As commissioning authority I ultimately decided, without incurring additional costs, to intervene by enabling the contractor to stay on schedule as specified in the contract. I pictured this process as follows: *“Obviously, we were not enthusiastic about deviating from the original plan. But this solution had dual benefits: by granting permission to close the reversible lane during daytime as well and use it for construction traffic, the nuisance caused by nighttime construction activities would be limited without this leading to traffic problems on the A9 bypass, and at the same time we could help the contractor avoid financial difficulties and make their planning more robust. This was in everyone’s interest.”* And the contractor: *“It helped us enormously; in any case our financial position did not become worse as a result. It is still remarkable that the contractor and commissioning authority dared to acknowledge that the original plan did not work very well and a solution could be found within the framework of the contract. Both parties looked beyond their own interests: even if a resilient partnership is based on an innovative idea, it must be dealt with flexibly in order to benefit the project as a whole.”* The above is summarized in Table 7.7.

## 7.9 Sensegiving and reflection

If the narratives in this chapter are compared with those from the previous chapter, it can be seen that they have become richer, both in terms of the content and storytelling. In particular, the quotations make the narratives not only livelier, but also clarify their meaning. A good example is the narrative about the many scope changes (Section 7.7). This narrative shows that sensegiving does not have to be something that is done afterwards, for example by management, but that it can also emerge from the employees themselves. In the narratives in this chapter, the basic elements of Aristotle are more obvious than in the previous chapter: not only is the plot structure clearer (*logos*), but due to the many quotations, the storytelling (*ethos*) and the dilemmas and tensions (*pathos*) have also become clearer. This was due to the more professional approach to storymaking at SAA, such as the recruitment of a story collector, but especially because the employees at Rijkswaterstaat as well as at the various contractors, became more accustomed to this phenomenon, acquired more experience with it and began experiencing the meaning of the stories and their impact on their day-to-day activities. Due to the responses of others to their stories, the self-confidence of the employees increased, enabling them to be more vulner-

able. As a result, it became increasingly easier to tell stories, as was seen in the discussion of the program 'The Chair', and stimulate the change process. In this way, employees gradually learned more about their own blockades, and could use this knowledge to cooperate with others.

As in Chapter 6, the narratives from this chapter are placed in the table of the conceptual model as vignettes to illustrate the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving, and the interaction between them (Table 7.8).

Looking at the narratives in Chapter 6 and 7 we can see different storylines. In the first storyline, it can be seen that contracts are not always entirely clear or watertight in practice, and that some situations require acting as the circumstances require. This can be seen especially in the narratives about whether or not to impose availability corrections or penalties. Although the contracts are usually rather clear on these aspects, the effects can be different than originally intended and may still require a different approach. It can also be seen that clauses in contracts are sometimes not as clear for the other party as assumed. Changes are often required, and if multiple parties, such as municipalities, are involved in the process of making changes, this can increase the confusion. This is clearly illustrated in the narration about the changes in the A1/A6 project.

A second storyline concerns being able to mitigate risks by not holding strictly on to the provisions in the contract, but daring to look at the project in a broader context. This can be seen in the narrative about connecting the tunnel systems with the traffic control center, in which a proactive attitude of the contractor led to an innovative approach and risk mitigation in the future. It can also be seen in the narrative about transporting the new railroad bridge on the A1. In this narrative, a proactive and vulnerable approach taken by the commissioning authority avoided a potentially severe risk for the project. The importance of taking a broader context into account can also be seen in the final narrative about the tension between planning, traffic disruption and nuisance in the surroundings.



The overarching dominant storyline, which actually comprises the foregoing storylines, concerns the development of mutual trust and the resulting strengthening of adaptive capacity in the relationship. These themes return in various narratives. The openness in communication and the courage to view things from the perspective of the other party enabled mutual trust to develop steadily. As a result, the adaptive capacity in the relationship also increased and the mutual *shock absorbing cushion* was filled, all of which is in accordance with the theoretical model from Chapter 3 (Figure 3.2).

Another aspect that clearly emerges from the narratives is that a proactive approach and daring to stick one's neck out not only require courage, but support and protection from the parent organization are also important. A precedent effect plays an important role in this process, along with acting predictably in situations in which the agreed provisions in the contract can be followed 'normally'. The latter aspect has been explained in Section 5.4.

To emphasize the importance of the new approach for the employees concerned, I decided with the management of SAA to make one of the stories into a whiteboard animation. Because the transport of the railway bridge on the A1 was one of the most evocative operations on the project, we decided to animate that story. To give the animation more power, it was decided to stay as close as possible to the actual events and to have the film narrated by the actual key players: the responsible directors from the commissioning authority, myself and the contractor. I believe that decision to make the animated film together with the contractor and basing it on an actual situation made it more lively and authentic (*ethos*). Moreover, by making the animated film together, we could give joint meaning to the events, which also enhanced the mutual trust.

We first showed the animated film in April 2017 during the employee meeting of SAA, in the presence of the director of the contractors consortium. The main theme of the film is that the contractor and commissioning authority empathized with each other's position and discussed the situation on this basis. This also happened during the meeting. The contractor said the following about the film and about resilient partnership: *"We both looked at the project as a whole instead of at our individual interests. This ultimately resulted in the greatest benefit for both parties. In addition, this mode of practice makes our work more pleasurable. If the other party listens to you, and you know that the commissioning authority is aware of your problems and interests, this makes a big difference. This is especially the case if you can subsequently discuss the situation with each other."* The animated film turned out to be an outstanding warm-up for a discussion about cooperation and how to go about it in practice. This was also demonstrated some time later when the session was repeated during a meeting of the contractor's employees, once again in the presence of both key players. My own experience of both of these sessions was positive. At SAA, the openness with which the director of the contractor's consortium shared his experiences with the participants was greatly appreciated, and the same goes the other way around at the meeting of the contractors consortium.

In the film, a deliberate choice was made to establish a relationship with the

Steps (theory)  Narratives (practice) 	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3
	Sensemaking Dominant narratives and dilemmas	Sensegiving Contribution to resilience and trust	Triggers for change Symbolism, framing with- in the organization(s)	Sensemaking New narratives and practices	
The extent to which societal value is jointly created.	An unfortunate combination of circumstances. (7.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empathize with each other's situation and interests.</li> <li>- During consultations, dare to deviate from previous agreements.</li> <li>- Trust in each other's expertise.</li> </ul>			
	If you want make sure that the plug will fit into the socket, then you make the socket yourself. (7.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Proactively dealing with risks, even if they are not explicit in the contract, can prevent subsequent problems and reputation damage.</li> <li>- Proactive approach can lead to innovation.</li> </ul>			
The way in which tensions are dealt with in the triangular relationship between commissioning authority, contractor and stakeholder.	From two different movies to a single joint image. (7.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Open communication and really trying to understand the other party.</li> <li>- Dare to stick your neck out and help the other party; avoid us/ them thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New collections of stories as a source of inspiration for dealing with new dilemmas and for jointly creating new narratives.</li> <li>- Employee meetings with 'The Chair' and role-plays.</li> </ul>		Continuous process
	The way in which unexpected circumstances or ambiguities in the contract are dealt with.				

<p>The way in which tensions between planning, traffic disruption and environmental nuisance are dealt with.</p>	<p>The trade-off between traffic disruption and negative effects on the surroundings. (7.8)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Optimization is possible if you enable discussion about each other's interests and considerations.</li> <li>- The broader context of a project can sometimes determine the course of action to be chosen.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Whiteboard animated film as a means for sensegiving.</li> <li>- Explicit connection with the implementation process of the Market Strategy.</li> <li>- Encouraging the discussion of challenges and dilemmas on intranet, in media and during meetings, inside and outside SAA (spreading throughout the organization).</li> </ul>
<p>The way in which the imposition of contract-based penalties following incidents are dealt with.</p>	<p>This is the first time I have wished that we were not so proactive. (7.3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The contract is paramount, but dare to look beyond the contract.</li> <li>- Be realistic about the demands you place on each other.</li> <li>- Never surprise a contractor with a penalty; discuss the reasons for it first.</li> </ul>	
<p>The way in which contract-based risks for the contractor can turn into political risks for the commissioning authority.</p>	<p>Dutch Glory at the highest level. (7.5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to think creatively, despite contractual agreements, especially if societal interests are at stake.</li> <li>- Share feelings about risks.</li> </ul>	

Table 7.8: Analysis model narrative building SAA

joint Market Strategy that was previously developed by the public and private sector parties and to position resilient partnership as an outcome of this joint strategy. This was done by explicitly citing the Market Strategy in the film (see the illustration below<sup>23</sup>) and by including it in the credits. As a result, resilient partnership could be linked to the trigger that the Market Strategy became in the Dutch infrastructure sector (see Chapter 2). The other way around, resilient partnership – partly due to this film – also contributed to the implementation of the Market Strategy in practice, which enabled the strategy to gain significance within the sector. To illustrate the foregoing, here is an excerpt from the white-board animation. It concerns a sensegiving dialogue between two employees in which they reflect on the transport of the railway bridge and how this was dealt with by both parties:

**A:** *“Won’t deviating from the contract lead to serious problems? All those rules and guidelines aren’t there for nothing.”*

**B:** *“Of course, but if following the rules leads to undesired risks, then you not only CAN deviate from them, but you HAVE to.”*

**A:** *“Does that also apply to us?”*

**B:** *“Yes. However, you should never decide this by yourself, nor just between yourself and the contractor, but together with your colleagues and your manager.”*

**A:** *“And will the accountant approve this?”*

**B:** *“If you have good reasons to deviate on only one point from the contract, and you comply carefully with the rest and complete the project on time and on budget, then the accountant will not have any difficulty going along with this. The project as a whole is more important than the contract!”*

**A:** *“So we have the flexibility to do this?”*

**B:** *“Yes, but for a long time we did not dare to use this flexibility, but this should change. This is also what the Market Strategy is about.”*

The film turned out to be very successful and had a major impact on the sensegiving, not only within the current project, but also more broadly in the sector. A director of one of the companies involved said the following about the film: *“What a beautiful and evocative story! Not only are the technical challenges addressed, but what is especially appealing is the almost childlike simplicity with which something that should be considered to be completely nor-*

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23) The film is in Dutch; ‘Marktvisie’ is the Dutch term for ‘Market Strategy’.



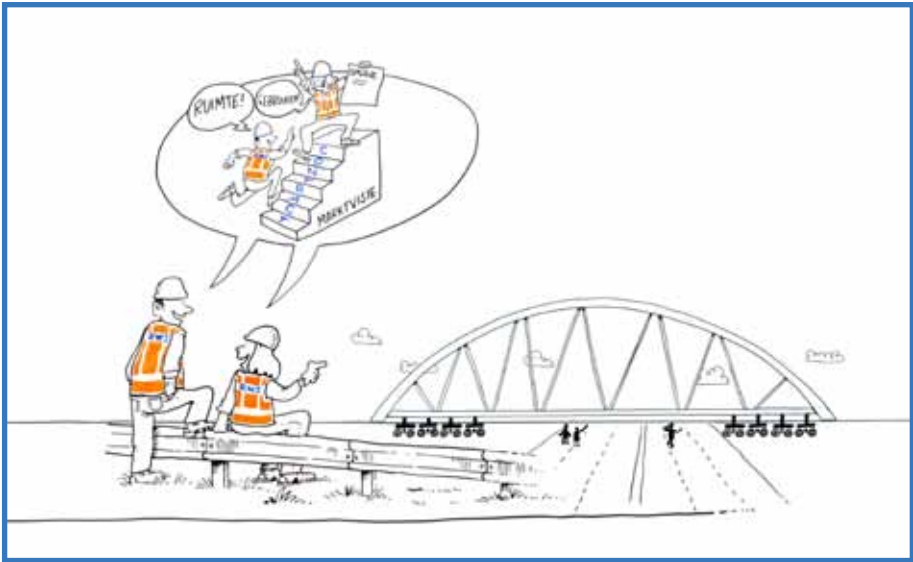


Figure 7.7: The route to the project (Illustration: whiteboard animation “Once upon a time there was a railway bridge at Muiderberg”; P&P Regisseurs 2017)

*mal, but was not self-evident for a long time, is conveyed together, you always give the whole project priority over the contract. All the human factors that can be decisive and obstructive also come to light: opportunism and risk aversion, practical orientation versus theoretical orientation, your own uncertainties, the fear (which later turned out to be a strength) of vulnerability by showing this uncertainty, making assumptions about the other party. I’m proud of how we have tackled this together. Transporting the bridge has had an important spinoff by enhancing cooperation and mutual trust. This cannot be measured, but I am convinced that it had a direct impact on the difficult year full of challenges that was to follow, ultimately resulting in opening the road on schedule!”*

Since then, the film has been shown a number of times at various meetings for the private sector and management at Rijkswaterstaat and other venues. Because the film is about a ‘real’ situation, in which the interests and dilemmas of the parties are clearly shown and are recognizable for other projects, the film was also effective outside the immediate project environment of the SAA program in promoting discussions about cooperation and implementing it in practice.

To illustrate the external effect of the film, a meeting of young profession-

als at Rijkswaterstaat and Volker Wessels, one of the largest contractors in the Netherlands, is worth mentioning. During this meeting, besides viewing and discussing the film, the role-play that was described in Section 7.2 was also conducted. For the role-play, the attendees were divided into four groups. The young professionals at Volker Wessels took the role of commissioning authority and those at Rijkswaterstaat took the role of contractor. In this way two combinations were formed, each of which was presented with a complex dilemma from practice. During the first round, the teams formulated their strategy separately. This sounds simple, but the conflicting interests and a number of external interventions sometimes led to intense discussions. Moreover, the participants were also required to reason according to the interests of the party that they usually encountered on the other side of the table. This role switch quickly resulted in a joint lesson: *"It is sometimes difficult for commissioning authorities and contractors to put themselves into the role of their counterpart."* During the second round, the commissioning authority and contractor came together to arrive at a jointly supported mode of action to address the contractual dilemma. During these discussions, the principles of resilient partnership were emphasized. *"If something goes wrong, acknowledge that you made a mistake instead of immediately going on the defensive. I think that I am doing that already, but there is always room for improvement"*, said a young professional at Volker Wessels. The participants were usually able to avoid discussions about contractual responsibilities and not focus entirely on their own interests, but joined together to achieve the aim of the project as a whole. A young professional at Rijkswaterstaat said: *"It is a challenge, especially when there is a conflict, to follow the principles of resilient partnership without immediately falling back on the letter of the contract."* During the third round, all groups came together to reflect jointly on the role-play.

As could be expected, the younger generation did not lack daring during the role-play, but the relationship with the parent organization was sometimes neglected. During the game, the participants focused on the one-to-one relationship between the commissioning authority and contractor, and there was little attention for other parties such as municipalities and other stakeholders. During the feedback after the role-play, the participants were also informed about the multidimensional complexity with which 'real' players in practice are faced and the fact that they often have to play chess on several boards simultaneously. Participants on both sides felt the role-play was very useful, as was evident from a follow-up interview with a young professional at Volker Wessels: *"It was good to stand in each other's shoes with this role-play. Only then do you understand what is involved"* and his young counterpart from Rijkswaterstaat: *"I*



Figure 7.8: Young professionals of Rijkswaterstaat and Volker Wessels in action during the role-play of resilient partnership (Photo: Hans Ruijter)

*was surprised that the contractor was not at all negative about Rijkswaterstaat. Apparently, our reputation is not so bad. But I became especially aware that you should sometimes be even more explicit about the background and reasons for our actions. That is sometimes unclear for a contractor, which makes it more difficult for them to understand our position.”*

Reflecting on the narratives in this and the previous chapter, it can be stated that not only can a development be seen in the nature and content of the narratives themselves, but also that the whole can be seen as a narrative: a meta-narrative about the search within the SAA infrastructure program for a new mode of cooperation between commissioning authority and contractor, based on mutual trust, resulting in resiliency and adaptive capacity in the relationship. A crucial aspect of this process is the joint search for a balance between contract-based management on one hand and acting according to circumstances on the other.

In these two empirical chapters on professional practice at SAA, various

resources or vignettes have been used: story collections, employee meetings, 'The Chair', the role-play and the whiteboard animation. Referring to the theory from Chapter 2 and following, these resources were used as narrative interventions in the prevailing practice within the construction sector in which contract-based management and control mechanisms are dominant. The narratives presented here provide a view of the downside to these mechanisms, revealing how people and organizations become trapped in their own actions. These insights can be used to legitimize the initiated change process. The whiteboard animation about moving the railway bridge was a particularly good illustration of these elements.

This is not a complete story, but a story with an open ending. The initiated development will continue in some form, in the same way that the cyclical movement between sensemaking and sensegiving is a continuous process. In the following chapter I will reflect more on this aspect.

## 7.10 Reflections from the sector

In the final section of this chapter, I look back on the implementation of resilient partnership within the SAA infrastructure program based on interviews with various key officers in the public and private sectors.<sup>24</sup> These officers included the Contract Managers at Rijkswaterstaat and their partners in the consortia who were involved in the three major SAA projects that were being implemented during the research period: A1/A6, A9 Gaasperdammerweg and A6 Almere. Two board members of SAAone, the consortia responsible for the A1/A6 project, were also interviewed at the end of the research period, so that the entire construction period could be reflected upon. Finally, the CPO<sup>25</sup> and the Manager of Market Strategy Implementation at Rijkswaterstaat were interviewed to about their assessment of the approach.

As with the interviews from Chapter 2, these interviews had the character of an open conversation, especially since I was also involved as a participant in the implementation of resilient partnership and in the abovementioned projects. During the interviews, the following themes were discussed with the interviewees:

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24) The references after the quotations in this section refer to the date on which the interview took place. An overview of the persons interviewed can be found in Appendix A.

25) Chief Procurement Officer.

- How did they experience the approach? What were the advantages and disadvantages of the approach?
- What does the approach require from the employees involved, and from management?
- What did they think about the narrative approach as the carrier of the change process?
- What did they think about the effectiveness of the approach? Did it work?

In general, the approach was positively assessed during the discussions. One of the board members of SAAone was enthusiastic about resilient partnership, *“because it puts the project goals at the center, but at the same time does not throw all the contracts and conditions overboard. This is an effective way to attain this balance, based on risk assessment and mutual trust, which you need to realize a project. This is not blind faith, but trust that is based on transparency and the ability to explain.”* (interview 061217). His colleague on the board also responded positively: *“What is your goal: contract compliance or realizing a successful project together? Is it realistic to make a contract at the beginning that describes how every possibility should be interpreted and allocates all risks in advance? I think that’s impossible. We are talking about a very large, very complex project with many external influences. A black-and-white allocation from the contract would by definition have led to major conflicts. In that case you end up with a project full of conflicts; everyone loses and there is a lot of resentment and negative publicity. You also have to give each other something, and that happens far too little because it is in conflict with the contract. If we had adhered strictly to the contract for this project, we would have been worse off, because the contract stipulated severe penalties for infractions. This would have resulted in legal conflicts, which would have become chronic throughout the project. We might have gained something from the legal battles, but this would have cost so much money that it would not have been worth it.”* (interview 131217). One of the contracting directors compared it with previous experiences: *“For other DBFM projects I sometimes had the idea that the contractors were doing the work on the project, while Rijkswaterstaat just monitored the contract. The feeling of working on this project together creates a completely different starting point.”* (interview 201217). For the interviewees, this meant that both parties must be prepared to stick their necks out and be vulnerable, but that is only possible if you think you are in an open and safe environment (interview 191217). For one of the Contract Managers at Rijkswaterstaat, this openness started during the dialogue phase: *“I remember that we asked the potential contractors what risks they foresaw, and one of the parties indicated*

*that they did not see any risks. For me, that meant that they apparently did not want to share everything with us. I then responded by saying, 'if you do not want to talk about your risks, how do I know that I can manage my risks?' I need this openness to be able to start the real conversation."* (interview 271117). Another Contract Manager reported that this did not happen automatically: *"I was rather hesitant at the beginning. Soon after the contract was awarded, we asked: 'When are we going to sit down together?' The reaction of the contractor was somewhat reluctant: 'Let's do our own thing now, we will get together later on'. But we wanted to participate from the beginning. As the project has progressed, we have become better at anticipating what the other party needs and when they need it. It has to do with getting to know each other and learning how you can benefit from each other's expertise."* (interview 201217). One of the board members of SAAone summarized this as follows: *"It is quite difficult to talk openly about risks, because you are afraid that it can be used against you, which has happened in the past. It is the same with the participants from the commissioning authority; few are brave enough to share their own uncertainties, out of fear that this will give the other side an advantage. This is certainly difficult when the financial consequences are significant. That is why large projects go amiss relatively often."* (interview 061217).

All the respondents agreed on one major disadvantage to this approach: the development of the relationships in practice obviously depends on the individuals involved. This makes it difficult because the participants feel vulnerable. According to the SAAone project director: *"My question is whether this approach was successful for this particular project due to coincidental compatibility between the people involved, or is it an approach based on principles that you can always apply."* (interview 271117). The success of the approach was also influenced by the support of the management on both sides and their respective constituencies. They must also be motivated to participate: *"You have to put a lot of time and energy into your own organization. In case of financial difficulties, gaining the support of the parent organization becomes more difficult as well. You then encounter doubts and distrust."* (interview 201217). One of the directors in the contractors consortium said the following: *"The advantage of the approach is that you deal with a commissioning authority who puts forward that he wants the work done as needed and is prepared to pay in accordance with the performance, even if this is not specified literally in the contract. In practice, you sometimes work together in the interest of the commissioning authority and sometimes in the interest of the contractor. The disadvantage is that this approach is not always strictly in line with the contract and you can-*

*not always substantiate this rationally to the technocratic environment in which we work. It is also based partly on faith, on trust and on intuition about what is fair and what is not. You have to defend yourself against a parent organization that reasons differently than you do.*" (interview 271117). The importance of getting the support of the parent organization was also endorsed by the Contract Managers at Rijkswaterstaat, although they emphasized their own responsibility and craftsmanship: *"You have to really understand what the project is about, because if you feel insecure about this you automatically fall back on the security of the contract. If you always have to seek support from your parent organization, then you will no longer make any independent choices. The issues you encounter will always be different from those specified in the rules. You will then have to interpret and improvise, and that requires craftsmanship, courage and looking ahead. With this approach, you will make more progress than if you just analyze events in retrospect. Large losses in projects are incurred because progress has come to a standstill. If you stop when an incident occurs to see what has happened and start to think about who is to blame, then you are looking backwards. This not only wastes energy, but because you are looking backwards you do not see the next problem that is approaching. In that case, it goes from bad to worse. You have to create maneuvering space for yourself so you can keep looking ahead."* (interviews 201217 and 271117). From the perspective of management, this approach primarily requires support and exemplary behavior: *"As a manager, you can call for everyone to start behaving differently, but there is little chance that people will do this on their own. It's about trusting your employees and showing that you trust them. Change starts by setting a good example: 'people do not do what you say, they do what you do yourself'."* (interview 061217).

According to the interviewees, the narrative approach chosen in this study helps with the implementation of resilient partnership: *"Narratives provide more space to clarify the experience from multiple perspectives; it is more interactive. This is a way to incorporate reflection, not only for yourself, but also collectively. The awareness-building process is crucial, and by writing the narratives you are really engaged; this compels people to think much more deliberately about what they are doing. For management, this is a much more natural way to provide direction than simply telling employees that they have to follow a specific procedure."* (interview 201217). The Contract Manager of A1/A6 said the following: *"The narratives make it easy to start conversations with others, but they also touch on many aspects about which you say 'I'm doing that already.' It is then difficult to define the system change and explain that this is a different mode*

*of operation: what are we doing differently from what we used to do? For me it is not about the individual examples, but about the entire set of narratives. The comprehensive structured approach is what makes it different. But you have to watch out for self-congratulation, because that risk is also inherent.”* (interview 271117).

During the interviews much time was spent on discussing whether the approach was effective: did it work? The interviewees found it difficult to answer this question because it was not possible to determine how the project and the cooperation would have proceeded if a different approach had been chosen. One of the Rijkswaterstaat Contract Managers looked at this this way: *“I mainly look at the complexity of the project and the scale of the failure costs that can occur if you are not all working together. Of course we had failure costs in this project, but they would have been much higher if we had not tackled the obstacles together. The mentality - not ‘who should do it?’, but ‘what do we see and how do we deal with it?’ - makes the success visible.”* (interview 201217). This was also confirmed by the private sector participants: *“If you do not tackle it that way, the costs of failure become so much higher, precisely because our projects are so complex with many cross-links. Although we encountered setbacks on this project, the most important gain was that we were able to prevent delays and inefficiencies by working together. Our project had all the potential for serious problems (a large, complex project with many innovative and risky aspects), but that did not happen. The decisive factor was how we dealt with the setbacks. This requires something from both sides, in a technical sense, in a financial sense and also in a social sense. However, the setbacks must be acknowledged and it must be possible to discuss them with each other.”* (interviews 271117 and 061217).

The interviewees also talked about how the parent organizations, the aforementioned constituencies, would look at the effectiveness of the approach, i.e. how could the effectiveness and success of the approach be measured and determined objectively? (assuming that there is a clear definition of project success, see Chapter 3). One of the board members of SAAone summarized this as follows: *“Wanting to measure and prove success also says something about the people who want to assess it that way. The success of cooperation is mainly determined by the people involved. In our technical environment, people often do not want to believe something until it has been proven, but if we, as the responsible parties on both sides of the table, decide together that the new approach has been successful and that this is a good way to realize a project, is that not just how it is?”* (interview 131217). The CPO and the Manager Implemen-



tation Market Vision of Rijkswaterstaat responded similarly: *“That this approach was effective for a major project such as the A1/A6 can be seen from the fact the project was completed without disputes. Both parties completed the task together and both were satisfied with the final result and with the financial settlement. The positive reactions of those involved also contributed to this. The question of whether this approach was actually taken on board by the project participants can be answered only after it is shown that they have used this approach in other projects under different circumstances. It is not yet possible to draw this conclusion. The beauty of the SAA approach is that there was a direct link between what you want to achieve, the philosophy and its application in practice, and that a road map was developed on how to get people to the final destination.”* (interview 211217).

One of the board members of SAAone summarized this as follows: *“In my view, this approach also contributes to something that transcends the project. The issues about contracts and the conversations we have about them are almost always about the domain of the commissioning authority. However, we are essentially builders: we can prepare for the work, do the work and we do it well. Today, however, we have become a much broader organization; besides construction itself, we do all kinds of things related to construction, because we are asked to do them. In that case, a potential pitfall is that Rijkswaterstaat as the commissioning authority will have less and less attention for our core competence. The commissioning authority appears to focus only on matters surrounding the construction itself, because the construction task is seen as self-evident. I have the feeling that resilient partnership, and the way in which we have dealt with each other in this project, have brought the worlds of the commissioning authority and of the contractor closer together, and I think this is a very significant added value. For me, the term ‘expert commissioning authority’ means much more than just monitoring the contract and organizing their domain; it is also about being able to delve into what is happening with the contractor and discussing this. In this way, resilient partnership enhances mutual understanding. That is absolutely essential and has nothing to do with money. Before this project we were drifting away from each other and we understood each other’s world less and less.”* (interview 131217).

This concludes the chapters on professional practice in this thesis. In the final chapter, I reflect on the above, first from the perspective of theory and then from my role as Program Director at SAA.



# Chapter 8

Reflection and looking ahead:  
analysis, discussion and conclusions

## 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I conclude my research by answering the research questions from Chapter 1. To this end, I connect the empirical insights and themes (Chapters 6 and 7) with the theoretical framework (Chapter 3, 4 and 5) and formulate the theoretical outcome of my research in an interpretive manner.

In Section 8.6 I reflect on my main research question: how public and private actors give meaning to concept of resilient partnership within the Dutch infrastructure sector. Before that I discuss the respective sub-questions, in particular the third and final sub-question, which is explanatory in nature. The first sub-question – theoretical in nature – was answered in Chapters 3 and 4. The second sub-question – descriptive in nature – was answered in Chapters 6 and 7, which focused on professional practice.

Section 8.2 provides a reflection on the narratives from the project practice of SAA with regard to how actors from this practice deal with the grey area between paper and practice, given the observation that standard methods and contracts will never be able to provide a solution for all situations. The narratives from SAA projects show how attempts were made over the years to find a balance in this grey area between the contract-driven approach and a more collaborative approach. The term ‘resilient partnership’ was introduced for this purpose within SAA. Key concepts are openness, empathy, trust and reflection. This first-order analysis shows how a process of change has been initiated through interpretation and sensegiving within the project environment of SAA and its cooperating partners. In Chapter 4 it was explained that in an interpretive approach, the culture in an organization is determined by the way in which employees look at the events around them, how they give meaning to these events and how they communicate this to each other. As a result, narratives become the carriers of the culture in an organization. A change to a more cooperative culture therefore focuses on a change in narratives. These narratives, about tensions and dilemmas in the daily practice of projects, therefore established the basis for the interpretive research.

In Section 8.3, the empirical findings are linked to the theory as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, resulting in a deeper analysis of the problem (second order analysis). The problem is linked to the scientific debate on *structure versus agency* (Giddens, 1979, 1984; Greenwood, Oliver, Lawrence, & Meyer, 2017; Levitt & Scott, 2016; Scott, Levitt, & Orr, 2011). Ultimately, this leads in Section 8.4 to a number of more broadly applicable action strategies and factors of influence for achieving a balance between the procedure-oriented approach and the cooperative approach.

Section 8.5 then addresses my unique position in this auto-ethnographic research. This concerns my double role as researcher on the one hand and as Program Director of the object of my research, the infrastructure program SAA, on the other. I discussed the theoretical approach to this role duality, with the associated pros and cons, in Chapter 5 and regularly reflected on this in the chapters on professional practice. In Section 8.5 I reflect on the role duality and discuss the pros and cons of auto-ethnographic research in a general sense.

In Section 8.6, the foregoing aspects come together and, as stated previously, I discuss the answer to my main research question.

The recurring theme in this study is achieving a balance between the contract-driven, bureaucratic approach and the cooperative, holistic approach. In the examples from practice in previous chapters it has become apparent that finding this balance is not always a rational process and can be difficult. Indeed, the bureaucracy in an organization is often so recalcitrant that it prevents us from choosing a different approach. In Section 8.7, I reflect more broadly on this topic.

Finally, in Section 8.8 I formulate a number of recommendations for subsequent research.

## 8.2 Narratives leading to change

In the previous chapters it has been made clear that the answer to the question of what a cooperative relationship between a commissioning authority and a contractor, based on a balance between contract-based management and cooperation, could look like, will not be a simple one or one that can be formulated as a recipe or the like. Indeed, a simple answer would be impossible because the actual implementation of this balance in practice is strongly influenced by the circumstances and the context in which this cooperative relationship can be structured. The basis is that contracts will never be able to account for all conceivable situations that occur during the implementation of large infrastructure projects. The environment in which infrastructure projects must operate is too complex, dynamic and ambiguous for that. In this regard it is relevant to quote the title of a 1992 paper by Clegg: *“Contracts Cause Conflicts”*. Clegg substantiated this statement by emphasizing that contracts, like any other set of rules, can never fully explain or clarify themselves. There will always be passages in a contract that are unclear or are open to multiple interpretations. And it is pre-

cisely in a complex environment involving parties with different interests that contracts – almost by definition – will be interpreted differently based on those interests. This creates the paradoxical situation, discussed in Chapter 3, in which contracts, although originally intended to avoid conflicts, simultaneously create an important source of conflict. The daily uncertainties, which are inherent to complex infrastructure projects, give rise to a reality with which the parties concerned, the commissioning authority and the contractor, have to deal. This ‘daily reality’ then takes the place of the formal ‘contractual reality’, which in fact has become more of a kind of ideology (Clegg, 1992). Clegg closes his paper with the prediction that the ‘contractualization of everything’, as part of the economic rationalism emerging at the time, might not be the panacea against all evils. Looking at the examples from practice in the previous chapters, this prediction, although made in 1992, is still applicable today.

The previous passage summarizes the core of the SAA narratives that have been collected in this study. It also shows that contracts in practice do not cover every eventuality and may be unclear, and that unforeseen situations will occur in practice in which the parties will have to act accordingly and in which the project will sometimes have to be viewed in a broader context (see Section 7.9). In Chapter 5, I stated that in general the largest component of an infrastructure project will be relatively predictable. In such predictable situations, standard methods and the contract-driven approach will generally be appropriate. Due to the complex nature of most infrastructure projects, however, some of the work will be different than envisioned in the original plan, and in these cases the contracts will not work and the parties will have to act jointly according to the situation. The latter component becomes larger as the work, or the context in which the work is to be carried out, becomes more complex or dynamic. Based on my own experience, I have previously used the ratio of 90% predictable and 10% unpredictable. However, this is an estimate and is not based on statistical research.<sup>26</sup> These percentages are meant only as an illustration: the exact percentages are not so relevant in my opinion. The essence is that in an infrastructure project, some of the work will always be unpredictable, and that in those situations the parties will need to work together to reach a solution.

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26) In a metaphorical sense, a parallel could be drawn here with flying an airliner. Most of the time, the airliner will be flown by the autopilot (the 90%). However in unusual situations this will not be sufficient, and manual operation will be required (the 10%).

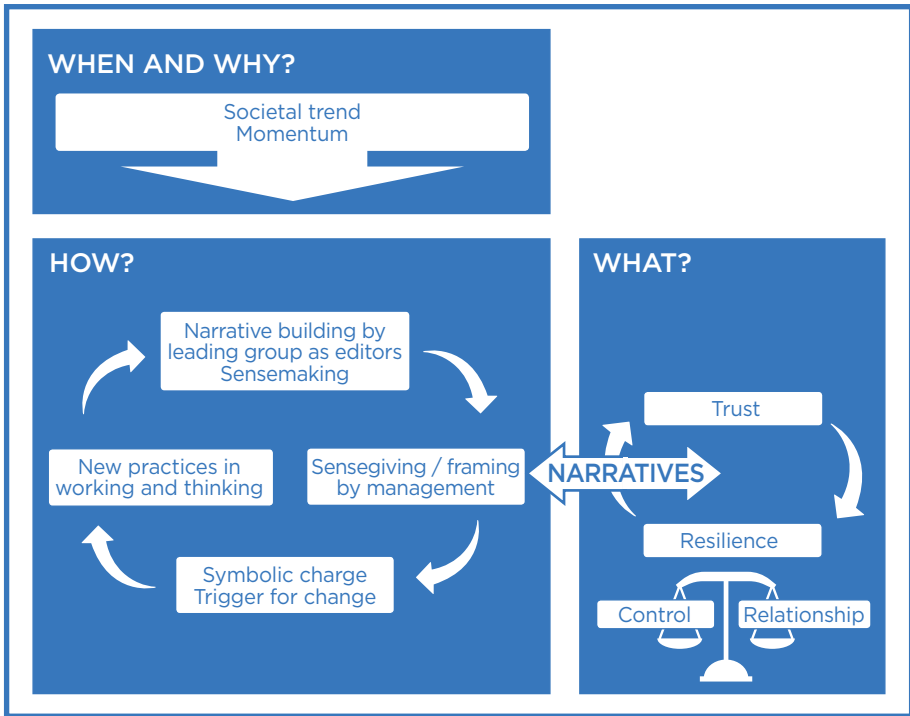


Figure 8.1 Conceptual model for a changing cooperative relationship

The narratives from SAA projects show how attempts were made over the years to find a balance between the contract-driven approach and a more cooperative approach, in accordance with the previously introduced conceptual model (shown again in Figure 8.1). The openness in communication and the courage to view things from the perspective of the other party enabled mutual trust to develop steadily between the commissioning authority and the various contractors. As a result, the adaptive capacity in the relationship also increased and the metaphorical *shock absorbing cushion* was jointly filled. We have seen that important key concepts include not only reflecting and looking ahead together, but also the capacity to be critical towards each other. This was illustrated by the reaction of one of the board members of contractor SAAone about finding the right balance; he indicated that it is also important not to throw all the contracts and conditions overboard. The point is to give substance to the contract and conditions in a positive way that is based on risk assessment and mutual trust, which in turn is based on transparency and interpretability (see Section 7.10). As indicated in Chapter 6, the narratives included in this study

may all look like success stories. In that chapter, I explained that this is also a question of framing. With a slightly different tone, a narrative could also have been presented differently. For example, the narrative about moving the railway bridge into position (Section 7.5) is now presented as a success story because a potentially severe political risk was successfully mitigated. However, if the focus had been on the additional costs that were required to strengthen the subsurface, the narrative would have been seen differently. In terms of sensegiving, I have aimed to present the narratives as much as possible in accordance with the intentions at the time, and when this particular narrative emerged these intentions were generally positive. And finally, the narrative about the railway bridge was also experienced as positive by all participants, and from a social constructivist perspective it was indeed positive. The narratives were intended show that different courses of action can be chosen besides the contract-driven approach, and that it is important to think about this and discuss this explicitly with those involved. This is the essence of resilient partnership.

Moreover, not only the commissioning authority and the contractor for a project need to invest in building trust, but this also applies to the relationship with their respective parent organizations. In the narratives in the previous chapters we have seen the influence that the parent organization can have on the perceived maneuvering space in a project context to act according to the circumstances if required. Returning to the aforementioned 90%-10% approach, if something goes wrong in the unpredictable 10% component we see that the parent organizations often respond with additional regulations. What happens then is an attempt to enlarge the predictable component, i.e. the 90%. The aim is to reduce the risks in the future. However, this leads to a reduction in the maneuvering space that is necessary to act effectively in the unpredictable component. As a result, the risks actually increase (see Section 5.6). To avoid this and to maintain the maneuvering space, the public and the private sides both have to work on enhancing the trust of their constituencies in the project organizations. The predictability of the project organization towards the parent organization is crucial to this process. By acting as predictably as possible in the 90% component (by following standard practices and contracts), the trust of the parent organization is enhanced and maneuvering space can be created (and granted by the parent organization) to act as circumstances require in the unpredictable 10% component. In the infrastructure program SAA, much energy and time has been invested in this predictability. By acting as predictably, proactively and transparently as possible towards its commissioning authority<sup>26</sup>, maneuvering space has been created to act as circumstances require.



Core values	Characteristics
Content expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Understanding what is happening; mastery.</li> <li>● Focusing on things that are really important.</li> <li>● Sensing when you have to deviate from the standard.</li> </ul>
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sensing the concerns of the other person.</li> <li>● Being aware of and understanding each other's interests.</li> <li>● Giving each other something (reciprocity).</li> </ul>
Transparency and predictability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Don't surprise each other.</li> <li>● Involve the parent organization in the process at an early stage.</li> <li>● Take time and space to build and maintain mutual trust.</li> </ul>
Reflective capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reflect on events and give meaning to these events together.</li> <li>● Based on this shared meaning, look forward together to manage risks.</li> </ul>
Decision power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maintain clarity and continuity in the direction taken by the organization.</li> <li>● Avoid a wait-and-see attitude.</li> <li>● Do not postpone difficult decisions.</li> <li>● Dare to act pragmatically.</li> </ul>

*Table 8.1: Core values and characteristics of resilient partnership  
(sources: Tables 6.7 and 7.1 and interviews in Section 7.10)*

The importance of enhancing the trust of the parent organization was also confirmed during the interviews with key officers from the SAA projects (see Section 7.10), although their own responsibility was also emphasized: if you always have to seek support from your parent organization, you stop making choices. Therefore you have to interpret and improvise independently, and that requires craftsmanship, courage and looking ahead. By creating space to keep looking forward, delays can be prevented.

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this section, based on the explanation before it can be stated that finding a balance between contract-based management and cooperation is important to the success of a project, but this balance, which must be achieved in practice, cannot be specified

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26) SAA reports to a steering committee headed by the Director General of Rijkswaterstaat.

in advance. This is because the contextual dependency is too great. In Chapters 6 and 7 and in this section, a number of elements have been formulated that are important to the joint processes of filling the *shock absorbing cushion* and finding the above-mentioned balance. The foregoing is summarized in Table 8.1.

The examples from the previous chapters show that the parties involved have experienced the SAA approach as effective. During the interviews (reported in Section 7.10) this conclusion was mainly linked to being able to limit the costs of failure during the implementation of the projects. Despite a number of setbacks, a large project such as A1/A6 was successfully completed. According to the parties involved, this was mainly due to the way in which the parties dealt with these setbacks and thus prevented delays and inefficiencies. This was confirmed by the CPO and the Manager of Market Strategy Implementation of Rijkswaterstaat, who confirmed that the approach has been effective for a major project such as A1/A6 as shown by the fact that it was completed without disputes. Both parties completed the task together and both were satisfied with the final result and with the financial settlement. The question that remains is of course whether the positive outcome of the A1/A6 project is the result of the chosen approach or whether it had to do with a coincidental compatibility between the people involved in the project. In other words, how effective is the approach in other contexts and how can this be determined? I return to this question in Section 8.6.

The narratives have also clearly shown that a process of change has been set in motion within the project environment of SAA and its cooperating partners. For example, the narratives about dilemmas and cooperation have become richer over time, and the number of narratives has increased steadily: narratives create new narratives. The entirety of narratives and their development can thus be seen as an overarching meta-narrative about a search for a different approach to infrastructure projects, during which the partners continuously endeavored to find a balance between contract-based management and cooperation. This balance was based on mutual trust, resilience and adaptive capacity in the relationship (see Section 7.9). The circular motion from the conceptual model of Figure 8.1, in which the continuous motion is fueled by the narratives, is clearly visible. For me, the trigger was the debate – fueled by the economic crisis – within the infrastructure sector at the time of my appointment at SAA: that parties, public and private, were truly motivated to realize projects differently, resulting in a jointly formulated Market Strategy (see Chapter 2 and Section 7.9).

### 8.3 The balance between contract-based management and cooperation

In this section, from a theoretical perspective I reflect more deeply on the foregoing. The recurring struggle expressed by employees in the narratives – having to choose between standard procedures and a strict interpretation of the contract on the one hand and the perceived need to act as circumstances require on the other – can be easily positioned within the scientific debate on the *structure versus agency* trade-off (Giddens, 1979, 1984; Greenwood et al., 2017; Levitt & Scott, 2016; Scott et al., 2011) This debate is based on the duality in institutional structures, which must provide context and support for employees to be able to base their actions on, but simultaneously leads to these same employees continuously questioning and modifying these structures (*structuration theory* - Giddens (1979)). In this way, structures and procedures are the product of a social construct, created organically. Paradoxically, if these structures and procedures within an organization have started to lead their own lives, they can have a guiding and sometimes restrictive influence on the future social action in that organization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Greif, 2006; Scott, 2011). In other words: the rules that an organization sets for itself to create order inherently limit the maneuvering space of that organization in the future.

We also see this paradoxical character in the narratives of SAA. On the one hand, in the narratives we see that both the organization of the commissioning authority and that of the contractor are inclined when necessary to deviate from existing rules and procedures and to act as circumstances require. On the other hand there can sometimes be strong pressure from the same organizations to comply with these rules and procedures (Levitt & Scott, 2016; March & Olsen, 2010). However, the latter approach is not always doomed to failure. Indeed, Chapter 3 underpins the proposition that the contractual approach to infrastructure projects does not always lead to poor project results. Contracts offer a projection of the future and a clear division of roles between parties, elements that are also important for the orderly progression of projects (Clegg, 1992). Uncertainty, ambiguity and unpredictability, issues that are characteristic of complex infrastructure projects, also require cooperation between parties (Pitsis et al., 2004). The way in which both parties manage to deal with this uncertainty and unpredictability together will determine the ultimate success of the project (Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). It is precisely the inherent uncertainty that makes it impossible to predict which situations will suffice with the contractual approach and which will not. In the latter case it will also not be clear in

advance exactly how the cooperative relationship will have to be given shape. As substantiated in Chapter 3, this aspect will be contextually determined and influenced by the way in which parties have developed their cooperative relationship together during the course of a project and have been able to place the collective interest above their own interests to benefit the joint project result (Bresnen & Marshall, 2000; Clegg et al., 2002; Leufkens & Noorderhaven, 2011). In Chapter 3, the terms adaptive capacity and resilience were used for the combination of unexpected situations and setbacks. Also introduced in this chapter was the metaphor of the *shock-absorbing cushion*, which has to be filled together to be able to withstand a 'shock' if something happens. To fill the *shock-absorbing cushion*, working together to build mutual trust is crucial (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Khan et al., 2011; Samba & Vera, 2013; Svedin, 2009).

Trust is not something that can be contractually 'arranged'; it comes about through experience and becomes especially important in unforeseen circumstances, such as financial setbacks (Jones & Lichtenstein, 2008; Swärd, 2016). In Chapter 3, trust in another party is defined as having confidence in another party based on the willingness to be dependent on the actions of that other party and the expectation that they will act in a way that will not adversely affect the trusting party (Mayer et al., 1995). In this definition of trust, two elements are important: reciprocity (it works from both sides: if you give trust, you get trust) and the element of time (trust is built up over time and if reciprocity is postponed too long, this will be at the expense of building trust) (Bignoux, 2006; Göbel, Vogel, & Weber, 2013). For that matter, care must be taken not to overshoot when building trust. This can then lead to groupthink and naivety (see Chapter 2). Without critical reflection, a 'cult-like' culture can arise, in which 'wanting to do everything together' is elevated to an end in itself (Pitsis, Clegg, Rura-Polley, & Marosszeky, 2001). This risk could also be present in for example alliance-like cooperation structures.

Of course, building predictability and trust does not start entirely from scratch with every project. Previous experiences contribute to building trust (or can make it more difficult!). Sector-wide agreements (such as the previously mentioned Market Strategy) and the use of standard contracts also contribute to building predictability and trust over the years and can ensure that projects in the corresponding sector begin with a 'flying start' (Hoppner & Griffith, 2011). At the same time, every project will be unique in terms of content and context, and the people involved – from both commissioning authority and the contractors – will generally be different. This makes building trust essentially project-

specific; it is something that we need to work on together every time (Pitsis et al., 2004).

In the foregoing it has been made clear that an approach based on resilient partnership and the creation of adaptive capacity and resilience by working together on mutual trust is not a method that can be laid down in a handbook. Nor is it an approach that guarantees success. As with trust, resilient partnership is not something that is arranged only on paper. It is hard work, it does not happen automatically and it is not always easy to take a vulnerable position due to fear of allowing the other person to take advantage, as one of the board members of SAAone put it (Section 7.10). This certainly is the case when the financial consequences are significant, which is why it is difficult to achieve in large projects. The approach itself is also vulnerable precisely because it concerns people and trust and because the interests of the respective constituencies are often significant. There is also another pitfall: if there is a severe setback or if the financial interests become too great, the parties may fall back on the strictly contractual approach (Levitt & Scott, 2016). This may lead to increased pressure to implement external control, such as conducting an audit to determine the 'real' state of cooperation within the project. Such a technocratic approach can then bring about exactly the opposite result of what you want to achieve (Bachmann, Gillespie, & Priem, 2015).

In Chapter 4 it was explained that the process of building trust and resilience between cooperating partners takes shape through social interaction between people, creating new narratives that gradually gain the upper hand over older narratives. It is these new narratives that lead to a change in the sensegiving among the employees in an organization (Geiger, 2009; Grant et al., 1998; Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011; Holt & Cornelissen, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Vaara et al., 2016; Weick et al., 2005). The strength of the narratives lies in the extent to which they give meaning to the employees (see similar applications in for instance Landau & Drori (2008) and Landau, Drori & Terjesen (2014)). In this way the narratives become the 'air' that fills the aforementioned *shock-absorbing cushion* between the cooperating partners. This narrative approach stands in contrast to large-scale change programs from the past, which have been imposed top-down from management without really taking the events on the work floor into account (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2016). Or, as Beer et al. (1990, p. 159) stated: "*Successful change efforts focus on the work itself, not on abstractions like 'participation' or 'culture'.*" I followed the approach of Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991), who described

the change as an interaction between *sensemaking* (how employees experience and interpret their daily practice) and *sensegiving* (how management tries to influence this process). The way in which the participants in a project environment give meaning to what happens in daily practice (sensemaking) forms the basis for their daily actions and for the way in which they deal with the other organizations (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). As explained in Chapter 4, the narratives in this approach serve as a source of inspiration for sensemaking and at the same time provide fuel for sensegiving. Or, as Abolafia (2010) argued, every organization (in this case, the project organization) has its own set of narratives and plots from which it can choose to give meaning to what happens. By selectively strengthening the sensemaking on the work floor via sensegiving, the narratives can thus serve as a trigger for the desired change. The resulting practice will in turn give rise to new narratives that will continue to strengthen the process. Tsoukas & Chia (2002) articulated this by defining change as the reordering by people of beliefs and habits to support new experiences that have come about through interaction. This circular movement of change, with the narratives as the central element, forms the basis for my conceptual model that I described in Chapter 4 (see Figure 8.1).

Because people always judge what happens around them from their own frame of reference, in real-life situations involving more people, multiple images of 'reality' can co-exist simultaneously (see Chapter 5). In this situation, narratives are an excellent way to illustrate multiple meanings, as was made clear in the previous chapters (see Tables 6.8 and 7.8). Similar to other literature on types of narratives, such as the narrative styles of Beech (2000), who recognized heroic, romantic, tragic and ironic narratives in his research, the SAA narratives can be broken down into different narrative themes. In this way, four narrative themes can be distinguished that returned throughout my research, see Table 8.2.

The central aim of my research was twofold: to study what happens on the work floor of the SAA infrastructure program and to look at how a change process was initiated in the cooperative relationships between the commissioning authority and the contractors through sensegiving. The focus in the narratives was mainly on the uncertain, unpredictable component of the work, which falls outside the planned course of events. Following on from the previous section, this concerned the '10% component' of the work. Indeed, this component consists of the dilemmas, tensions and emotions that the employees on the project struggle with. The narratives are then intended to gain more insight into this component and subsequently to provide insight in terms of sensegiving.

Theme	Essence/meaning	Example of a narrative from practice
Openness	The desire for openness and transparency on both sides to enable candid discussion of the issues and avoid playing games.	The openness of the contractor about their financial position and the openness of the commissioning authority about the possibilities to do something about it. (Section 6.5)
Empathy	Putting oneself in the position of the other – with their problems – and thinking about solutions from this position.	The problems surrounding the leak in the excavation for the aqueduct (Section 6.9) and the narrative on the conflict that arose between the planned implementation of two different projects. (Section 7.4)
Reciprocity	Building trust based on the conviction that the other person will not abuse it and will do something in return.	Due to the effective way in which the postponement of a train-free period was dealt with (Section 6.8), the contractor, after being concerned about the transport of the railway bridge, was prepared to think creatively and do the work without first having to negotiate the financial consequences in detail. (Section 7.5)
Daring	For the sake of the underlying mandate of the project, dare to deviate from or act according to the spirit of the standard and the contract if the circumstances require it.	The narrative about potholes in the road surface, in which keeping strictly to the contract would have been unfair to the contractor. (Section 6.7)

Table 8.2: Recurring narrative themes in the practice of SAA

In this way, the narratives are not only a representation of events, they also give direction to future action through their signifying power (Bieger, 2015). The vocabulary that is developed in the narratives contributes to building the narrative identity of an organization (Somers, 1994). The reflection with key officers from the field (Section 7.10) confirms the effectiveness of this narrative approach. These key officers endorsed the idea that narratives not only provide space to clarify multiple perspectives, but also encourage people to think more deliberately about what they do. This is a way to incorporate reflection, both individually and collectively. One of the key officers therefore experienced it

as a more natural method of providing direction than to tell employees that a certain procedure had to be followed. The use of narratives for sensemaking is also endorsed in previous research, precisely because they offer the space to make multiple realities, ambiguities and emotional reactions visible (e.g. Brown, Colville, & Pye (2014)). If a narrative ultimately raises more questions than it answers, as Wond (2016) argued, this does not have to be a problem; in that case it at least offers a platform to focus on a specific topic in a different way. In the reflection it was stated that the narratives also contain many experiences about which some people say *"I already do that"*. This quickly leads to the conclusion that *'there is nothing new under the sun'*. This may be the case for these individuals, of course, but the important aspect is the catalyzing effect for the entire organization. It is also important that change is not so much the result of a single narrative, but that it mainly concerns the impact of the set of narratives (e.g. Abolafia (2010)).

With the guiding function of the narratives from the empirical chapters in the change process towards a different mode of cooperation, I also intended for them to have a performative function (i.e. narratives may bring about change in organizations) (Homan, 2017; Merkus et al., 2014; Merkus & Veenswijk, 2017; Vaara et al., 2016). If certain narratives are told and repeated often enough (and the use of illustrations and metaphors certainly contributes to this), they automatically become a meaningful framework that replicates and maintains itself and thus inspires similar, new narratives. In this way, narratives contribute to the formation of the overarching meta-narrative (or 'grand narrative') mentioned in the previous section about the development and implementation of the concept of resilient partnership within SAA (compare Somers (1994), Boje (2001), Cooren (2010) and Vaara et al. (2016)). This is also what I referred to in the previous section with the framing function of narratives: positive narratives contribute to the success of a project, which is also experienced as such and thus becomes a socially constructed 'reality' (*"it is talked into existence"*; Weick et al. (2005)). As explained in Section 2.2, the credibility of the narratives plays an important role in this (Bruner, 1986; Czarniawska, 2004). Or, as formulated by Austin (1963), one of the founders of 'performativity': *"Words can describe reality and at the same time perform reality."* At the same time, no generally applicable normative methods or recommendations can be derived from the narratives that are directly applicable in other project environments. Indeed, doing so would disregard the unique and location-specific character of those other project environments. Precisely because the individual perceptions and the context in which they take place are so decisive, this is not an approach



that can simply be replicated (like a recipe) in a different situation or project environment. In every project the participants will have to reflect anew on their experiences and have to create their own narratives. Those involved will have to discover this themselves, or as stated by Beer et al. (1990, p. 164): *“The temptation to force newfound insights on the rest of the organization is great, but it will only short-circuit change.”* However, I hope that others will recognize the events in my narratives so that they can serve as a source of inspiration and contribute to enriching their own frame of reference. In this way, the narratives contained in this thesis do not in themselves represent a generalized reality, but they can lead to ‘natural generalizations’, i.e. points of recognition and new insights that other Project Managers can incorporate in their own daily activities and interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Homan (2016) used the term ‘idea sex’ for this process. Looking back on my own experiences so far, I can state that the narratives have already contributed in this way. In particular, the animated film about moving the railway bridge into position appealed to the imagination of my colleagues in the sector. As stated by Vaara et al. (2016), films might better capture the valence of narratives because of their richer ability to account for emotions.

Chapter 4 explains the roles of emotions and management in processes of sensemaking and sensegiving. When giving meaning to what is happening around us, we focus not only on that environment, but also on ourselves. How someone defines their surroundings also says something about how they see themselves within that environment, and the other way around (Weick, 1995). As indicated previously, the process of sensemaking is not only rational, but also emotional (Damasio, 2010; Maitlis et al., 2013; Steigenberger, 2015), which could, for example, influence the outcome of a top-down change process (Balogun & Johnson, 2005). Rafferty et al. (2012) stated that the decision to participate in a change will generally be determined by a combination of the belief in the necessity of the change, the ability to do something about it and the expectations regarding the effectiveness of the actions. Also, the new mode of practice should not be too different from current one, otherwise the likelihood that it will be accepted is small (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). As shown by the narrative approach at SAA, in this context it is important that employees are allowed to experience their own dilemmas and the effects of their actions and to encourage them to actively reflect on this individually and collectively. The aforementioned reorganization of meaning, through which change can come about, is indeed largely given shape by the employees involved (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011). From a social constructivist perspective, a reality is actually determined by what is socially accepted as reality by people, i.e. the employees of the com-

missioning authority and contractor, in a project context. This emphasizes the need for active participation, sharing meaning and a process of interactive and collective sensemaking between employees. This need arises precisely because the daily practice in projects is full of ambiguity and uncertainty (Van Nistelrooij & De Caluwé, 2016). Indeed, this was the intention of the interactive workshops between the commissioning authority and the contractor and the role plays. By letting the participants take each other's role in the role play, the empathy and willingness to see from a different viewpoint can be enhanced. The core of this approach is that it does not define change as changes in behavior, but as changes in social perception, i.e. in the way people look at their environment. Because, as noted earlier, the social perception of the environment also says something about how people look at themselves, their previous experiences (and meanings that have been given to those earlier experiences) and aspects such as upbringing and education will also be involved in that perception. This means that change is possible only after people have become acquainted with their own resistance or blockades (Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002; Van Nistelrooij & De Caluwé, 2016).

The foregoing confirms that, especially in a complex and ambiguous context, arriving at a collective, unified perception will often prove to be an illusion. Overlooking or ignoring multiple perceptions makes it unlikely that they will be jointly transformed into win-win situations that improve the project result for all parties (Ford & Ford, 2010). It is more effective to focus on understanding what is happening in ourselves and between people (Van Nistelrooij & De Caluwé, 2016). From there (sensemaking), a process of collective reinterpretation and reframing of daily events (sensegiving) can begin. This means that both sensemaking and sensegiving are collective processes. At the same time, attention should be paid to asking the right questions, reflecting on the answers from different perspectives and then giving people maneuvering space to deal with the answers. This process can be aided by creating a temporary and safe environment from which the reframing process can be given shape together so this can be helpful in the 'real' world (see the interactive workshops between commissioning authority and contractor). In the foregoing, an important role is also reserved for management. I had two roles in this process: to contribute my own perspective as a participant and provide scope for other perspectives (sensemaking), and as a Program Director to guide the team towards the new reality and mode of cooperation (sensegiving). Above all, the active engagement of the manager is important: he or she will have to demonstrate this engagement and be open to deal with issues that arise with others (Balogun, 2006). After all, *"employees do not do what their managers say, they do what their managers do"*.

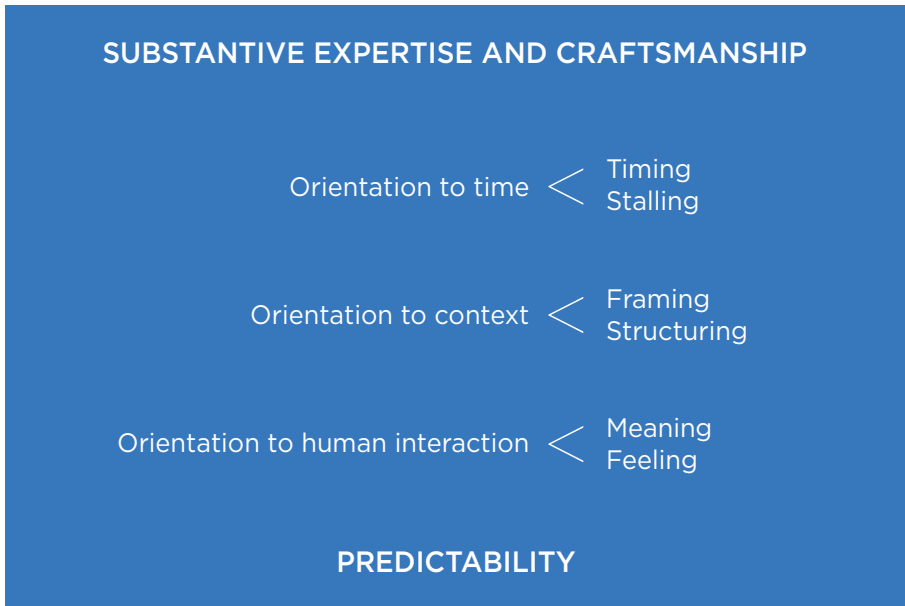


Figure 8.2: Coping strategies for resilient partnership

## 8.4 Action strategies for resilient partnership

Returning to the *structure versus agency* debate from the beginning of the previous section, the following question arises: based on the foregoing, can general strategies be derived to ‘deal’ with the issue of choosing between compliance with standard procedures or acting as the circumstances require? (see similar applications in Orr & Levitt (2011) and Smits (2013)). In other words: in their daily lives, how can actors use their repertoires and context to deal with their systems world? Or: despite the fact that individual perceptions and the context in which they take place are very decisive for finding a balance between a procedure-oriented approach and a collaborative approach, which makes the latter approach difficult to replicate in other project environments, are there no other applicable action strategies with a broader scope? We have seen several strategies in this and the previous section. These are listed again below, with their application being determined on a situational basis.

Six basic strategies can be derived from empirical evidence and theoretical reflection. These are divided into three orientations: orientation to time, orientation to context and orientation to human interaction (see Figure 8.2).

## Orientation to time

- *Timing*: Due to the pressure exerted by parent organizations on projects to stay within the system frameworks (Levitt & Scott, 2016; March & Olsen, 2010), it is not a good tactic to always row against the current and deviate from the rules too often. Moreover, this will be at the expense of the predictability of the project, see below. It is a question of 'choosing your battles' and picking the right moment to act; moving with the current and 'playing by the book' is often the best option. A good illustration of this strategy is the narrative in Section 6.6, in which the contractual approach provided predictability and certainty for the contractor, while the stakeholder in question was actually benefited by a different approach. By having the right discussion at the right time and place with all parties concerned, the stalemate could be broken and the interests of those involved could be taken into account. Another aspect of timing has to do with building mutual trust. In Chapter 3 it was explained that not only reciprocity is important for this, but also the timing, both when taking the first step and when 'paying back' (Bignoux, 2006). Here too, various examples can be found in the narratives.
- *Stalling*: Progress is crucial for every project. However, if something unexpected happens, the natural tendency is often to stop and look at what has happened. If that takes too long, a delay will occur. Large losses in projects are incurred because projects have come to a standstill. A lot of time is lost then because the parties are concerned about the how and why of the situation and who to blame. This not only wastes a lot of energy for all parties involved, it also means that they will not see the next potential risk as it approaches, which can cause the next delay. It then becomes a self-reinforcing process. To maintain momentum in the project, however, it is important to create a sense of peace and make time to invest in the relationship with the partners. Then they can look ahead, listen to signals and pay attention to their intuition. As a result unexpected events can be anticipated more effectively, so that timely action can be taken. An example of this approach is the narrative of the failure of the road surfacing near the Vechtbrug (see Section 7.3). Because the parties did not immediately take action as a result of this incident, but first took the time to think, the issue could be solved in a controlled manner.

## Orientation to context:

- *Framing*: By framing a project in a certain way, space can be created to act differently. A good illustration of this strategy is the transport of the railway bridge on the A1 motorway (Section 7.5). From the beginning, it was decided to publicize this transport in external communication as the 'biggest transport in the world'. By presenting it this way it was evident that transport entailed substantial risk, and it became possible to discuss the option of deviating from the strict line of the contract (transport is formally the responsibility of the contractor) and choosing a different approach (a joint agreement to request a second opinion and to take additional measures on that basis). As a result, a major political risk was mitigated. In theory, this is linked to the performative and framing function of narratives, which, if presented with sufficient force, become a socially constructed reality (Merkus et al., 2014; Weick et al., 2005).
- *Structuring*: It was explained in the foregoing that contracts and standard procedures, no matter how effective, will never cover all project situations that occur in practice (e.g. Clegg (1992)). In this study I used the 90%-10% ratio to explain that in 10% of the situations we will have to act according to the circumstances. By positioning an incident in such a structure, it becomes understandable and therefore also manageable, certainly in a technically oriented environment. An example of this experiential strategy (partly overlapping with the framing strategy) is the narrative about the potholes in the road surface (Section 6.7). By deliberately choosing to place the issue in the 10% category, it became manageable and it was possible to work towards a solution. The use of metaphors is also part of this strategy. In Chapter 4 it was explained that the use of symbolism and metaphors can help to better understand the functioning of an organization or a cooperative relationship (sensemaking), but can also help management to clarify the intended direction of change (sensegiving). Examples of the use of metaphors as a strategy to clarify and make things more manageable include the shock-absorbing cushion, which served as a model for the joint development of adaptive capacity and resilience in the relationship to deal with occasional setbacks, and the steerable kite with two strings, where one string stood for the contractual relationship and the other for the cooperative relationship. As indicated previously, metaphors, provided they connect effectively with the target group, make it easier to discuss difficult matters (Cornelissen et al., 2011; Jermier & Forbes, 2016).

## Orientation to human interaction:

- *Meaning*: The aforementioned ambiguity and imperfection of contracts leads to various people looking at a contract differently and interpreting events differently in terms of the contract, each from their own frame of reference. As long as this frame of reference is not stimulated with new experiences, similar events will be perceived in the same way. For example, if employees have always approached project situations from a contractual point of view in their previous experiences, and they are surrounded by people who do the same, it will be difficult to take an entirely different approach during a new experience. If the same narratives are repeated in an organization for long enough, they will reinforce each other and it will become increasingly difficult to change them. People then become 'stuck' in the prevailing frame of reference, which makes change difficult. As a result, differences in interpretation will continue, with stalemates and possible arbitration as a result. To avoid this, it is important to accept that different perspectives can exist in parallel and offer people the opportunity to open their frame of reference to these other perspectives, which will expand their own frame of reference. By opening the mental space between fixed thought-patterns, new meaning can surface (Van Loon & Van Dijk, 2015). This can be done by letting people know about the experiences, i.e. the narratives, of others, but above all by allowing them to experience it themselves by reflecting together on events, thereby giving meaning to these events (Boje, 2001; Thomas et al., 2011; Van Nistelrooij & De Caluwé, 2016). Illustrations of this strategy include the narrative of the project session in which parties jointly ascertained that they were acting in 'different films' (Section 7.7), but also the interactive workshops between the commissioning authority and contractor and the role plays. The management of an organization plays both a facilitating and a guiding role in this strategy, especially by setting a good example. As stated before: "*employees do not do what their managers say, they do what their managers do*". Collective reflection not only contributes to the expansion of reference frameworks, but, by highlighting issues from different perspectives, it also improves the decision-making process and reduces the chance of making 'wrong' decisions.
- *Feeling*: This final strategy focuses purely on the relationship and makes a normative appeal to the other party. To repeat the explanation of trust given previously, two elements are important: reciprocity (it works from both sides) and time; trust is built up over time and it must be earned (Göbel et al., 2013). The element of time has been discussed in the *timing* strat-

egy. The reciprocity has both a rational side (I give you something, I expect something in return) and an emotional side (the goodwill to help the other person). With regard to the latter, the narrative about the train-free period and the conditional penalty is very illustrative (Section 6.8). The fact that I was prepared to stick my neck out and made the agreement with my counterpart personally proved to be worth much more than the gesture of imposing a conditional penalty. The result was that he felt personally obligated to make the next part of the project a success. In this sense, the emotional side of trust will be of greater value and durability than the rational side (Loewenstein et al., 2001; Steigenberger, 2015).

With the above six action strategies for resilient partnership, I have established a link between the theoretical insights and the interpretive result of empiricism, as types of agency within an overarching management structure. I do not, however, pretend to have presented all possible strategies; other strategies are certainly conceivable. The strategies presented here arose from this interpretive research. Which strategy will have the most impact in which situation depends, of course, on a multitude of factors, such as the nature of the situation, the context, the previous history and certainly the people involved, with their own frames of reference and personal interests. Although this choice cannot be indicated stated in advance, at least two aspects will play an important role: substantive expertise and craftsmanship and predictability.

- *Substantive expertise and craftsmanship*: It is perhaps an obvious conclusion, but the availability of substantive expertise and craftsmanship is the basis for good project management and for deciding on an action strategy. Without this expertise, a project becomes impervious to signals from the environment concerning impending risks. Substantive expertise is also important to be able to understand and assess the issues that concern other parties in the project and subsequently to respect and appreciate these issues. If this understanding is not present, this can lead to communication dysfunctions, and an important component for building mutual trust is lost.
- *Predictability*: It was previously explained that the scope for acting according to the circumstances is not automatically given, but must be earned and granted by the parent organization, the parent organizations and stakeholders involved in the project. Predictability is the key word here. By acting predictably, proactively and transparently (in the 90% component) towards the parent organizations, trust can be gained and sufficient scope created to act as circumstances require (in the 10% section). The metaphorical *shock-*

*absorbing cushion* used in this study must therefore not only be filled between the client and the contractor, but also between all parties that give the contract its structuring and delineating power.

As shown in Figure 8.2, substantive expertise and predictability thus encompass the various action strategies.

## 8.5 Auto-ethnoventionism and role duality

This section reflects on the research methodology used, auto-ethnoventionism as a specific form of auto-ethnography, and my dual role as researcher on the one hand and Program Director on the other. In the theory presented in Chapter 5, the research methodology and the pros and cons of this role duality were discussed extensively. Auto-ethnography brings together the ‘self’ (*auto*), the culture (*ethno*) and the research process (*graphy*) (Natifu, 2016; Reed-Danahay, 1997). This methodology is aimed at systematically describing and analyzing personal experiences to improve understanding of cultural experiences in an organization (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). According to Ellis et al., auto ethnography is “one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding these matters or assuming they don’t exist”. As Adams (2011) explained, auto-ethnographers interview employees in an organization, observe them, take part in cultural events and rituals and investigate how those employees communicate and collaborate with each other. The auto-ethnographers also involve their own personal experiences in their research (Rowe, 2017). Auto-ethnography thus focuses on the reflection of someone’s experiences in relation to those of others, and subsequently to give meaning to these experiences (Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

In Chapter 5 it was explained that to clearly understand and give meaning to events on the work floor in the project, the researcher must become ‘immersed’ in the organization (Denzin, 1989; Ellis, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Van Marrewijk, 2011). People are constantly trying to give meaning to their own experiences in interaction with other people. Such experiences are always local, unique and specific. Moreover, they elaborate on previous experiences and meanings that have been given to those previous experiences. People do not respond from an overview position (*aboutness*) to the whole, but rather from a position in which meaning is given in local interactions to that whole. Therefore they respond from what they perceive and define as ‘whole’ (*withness*) (Homan, 2017; Shotter, 2006). Indeed, recognizing ambiguities and contradictions,



and the resulting struggles among participants in the project environment, will be difficult when observing them from the sidelines. In my role as Program Director of SAA, I did not stand alone in the middle of that project organization, I also provided guidance. This immediately touches on the core of both my research and my approach within SAA to implement a different mode of operation: through interpretive research I aimed to study daily events on the work floor and in the cooperative relationships of SAA, and by giving meaning to those events, to bring about changes through interventions (narratives) on the work floor and at the management level. It is precisely because of my years of experience in the infrastructure sector that I have been able to understand and give meaning to the observations that I made during my research. As noted previously, how people look at the events in their environment also says something about how they look at themselves. Indeed, interpreting the events in a social context will always take place from a personal frame of reference, and the other way around, personal experience and self-knowledge can be enriched by the sensegiving about the events in a person's social context (Anderson, 2006). I can state that the latter was also the case with me.

Obviously, an auto-ethnographic approach and the associated role duality also have disadvantages, as previously stated, in terms of reliability and integrity. For this reason, auto-ethnographies are sometimes seen as non-scientific, biased and not generalizable (Grenier & Collins, 2016). These disadvantages are inherent to my position with regard to my colleagues within SAA and in the private sector: when I interviewed someone they saw me not only as a researcher, but also me as the director at SAA. This certainly could have influenced their answers (Natifu, 2016). The disadvantages are also inherent to me as a person. Indeed, the personal frame of reference plays a role in how someone interprets an event. This could lead to self-absorption or tunnel vision (Geertz, 1988). Through reflexivity and transparency, I have tried to limit these disadvantages as much as possible and prevent them for negating the benefits of this approach (e.g. Schwartz-Shea & Yanow (2012)). I have done this in four different ways, thus linking up with similar approaches in other recent theses (Daubner-Siva, 2016; Yumarnamto, 2016):

1. In my research I aimed to clearly distinguish between the voices of myself as a researcher and as a director. In the end, this was easier said than done. After all, my observations are those of an individual who was simultaneously a researcher and director; I was unable to split myself, a dilemma that was also discussed by Helps (2017).
2. In the context of reflexivity, I shared my own perceptions and experiences

with others in order to avoid my own tunnel vision and 'cultural nearsightedness'. An additional advantage of this reflexivity was that the experiences and the corresponding narratives were given a richer coloration because they made several perspectives visible. It is precisely by looking at a jointly experienced event with several people that it becomes possible to see one's own frame of reference more clearly, to step outside that frame of reference and to understand other people's perceptions.

3. In addition, in the narratives I regularly gave other sources the space to affirm or contradict my own findings.
4. Finally, I gradually involved an external party in the process to help to draw up the narratives. This made it easier to ask 'why' questions without incurring substantive responsibility. Some of the narratives from Chapters 6 and 7 were created in this way.

The narratives from the previous chapters thus became 'collective co-constructions' by different people, including myself in part, who were involved in various project situations and who have given meaning to them from their own frame of reference. As was emphasized in Chapter 5, therefore, there are no narratives in which it is objectively stated what 'really' happened. Based on the premise that the 'reality' in human interaction will be socially constructed, this is not possible and there is no objectively measurable reality. Indeed, this was not the aim of the narratives. The essential aim was to present the narratives in such a way that the underlying core is as clear as possible to the reader and the desired effect in terms of sensegiving is achieved. This is in line with the vision of Ellis (2004) and Reed-Danahay (1997) regarding auto-ethnographic research. With the narratives from Chapters 6 and 7, I tried to link my personal experiences to social and organizational sensegiving, which would have been less feasible if I had used a more traditional research design (see also Chang (2008) and Grenier (2015) in Grenier & Collins (2016)). The auto-ethnographic approach is unique in that sense because it embraces a subjective perspective and enables the researcher to be both subject and object of the research (Richards, 2008).

It was explained previously that each narrative is not the construction of reality, but only one possible construction. By this I mean that other participants probably looked at an event differently, from their own frame of reference, so that a different narrative would have been constructed. Based on the same reasoning, narratives are presented as success stories because the participants have experienced them in this way and have given that meaning to their experiences. It concerns their experiences, their dilemmas, their narratives and therefore their sensegiving. Who can describe it better than the participants themselves? I

therefore wholeheartedly agree with interpretive researchers such as Weick, who study the organizational practice on the basis of day-to-day events on the work floor and how the people on the work floor give meaning to these events. This is an interactive approach that, narrative after narrative, gives more and more substance to the changing operational method. Based on the growing number of experiences from practice, theory could gradually be derived with this approach (Weick, 1974; Weick et al., 2005) and at the same time an operational method that is 'supported' within SAA (i.e. based on collective sensegiving) could be developed.

In Chapter 5, I described the above approach as '*auto-ethnoventionist*', i.e. a combination of the auto-ethnography and interventionist approaches. The term is derived from the *ethnovention*, developed by Van Marrewijk, Veenswijk & Clegg (2010), which I put into practice in the present study. Precisely because it brings together scientific research and practical applicability, this approach fits perfectly with my dual role as researcher and director. Although a situation in which the researcher is part of the population he or she is studying is fairly common (as in auto-ethnographic research), in my view a situation in which the researcher is not only part of the population under study, but also gives leadership to this population and is therefore able to intervene and provide guidance, is unusual and has rarely been described in the literature. This approach has the potential to bring the daily practice of project management and the academic world of the organizational sciences closer together (Bartunek, 2004; Bate & Robert, 2007; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2007; van Marrewijk et al., 2010). During my research, however, this has not always been easy. For example, I regularly engaged in discussions about the balance between scientific rigidity on the one hand and practical relevance and readability for my target group in the sector on the other. This links up with the perspective of Bartunek & Rynes (2014), who do not see the 'gap' between science and practice as something to bridge, but as something to learn from. In any case, there are also regular debates in the scientific world about the relationship between science and practice, specifically the question of whether one side should be subordinate to the other (Daft & Lewin, 2008; K. Orr & Bennett, 2009; Schein, 2017). In my view, this tension is perceptualized in part by scientists. Indeed, 'practitioners', who are categorized as such by those scientists as everyone who works outside science, do not recognize themselves as being part of a homogeneous category, nor do they experience this tension in the same way. These practitioners are nothing more than social constructs of scientists, not 'real' people (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Caprar, Kim, & Rynes, 2010).

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that in my research, theory and practice have continuously merged into each other. In my view, the auto-ethnovenionist approach I have chosen automatically implies that theory and practice are interconnected. In the present study, I have shown how this previously theoretical concept can be applied in practice and can actually lead to results. Consequently this approach has outcomes for both theory and practice, and the dissertation is written for both target groups. Inherently linked to this approach is the researcher's role duality, and in this case a manager in professional practice. By explicitly paying attention to transparency and reflexivity with regard to this role duality, the drawbacks do not have to stand in the way of the advantages.

With this research and this approach, I have also tried to fulfill a bridging function between theory and practice. By conducting my research from professional practice, I have shown that the often perceived tension between these worlds is not inevitable. I therefore hope that in this way I have been able to contribute to this debate and to the mutual understanding between the scientific community and professional practice.

## 8.6 The research questions - conclusions

In this section we return to the main research question for this study:

**How do public and private actors give meaning to the concept of resilient partnership within the Dutch infrastructure domain?**

In previous sections, I reflected on this question from various angles, based on the professional practice within the SAA infrastructure program: what form does this new mode of cooperation take in practice (the *what*), how can the route towards this objective be given shape (the *how*) and what is the role of the manager/researcher in this?

In terms of the *what*, the mode of cooperation is essentially based on the fact that infrastructure projects in the complex and dynamic world in which they have to be executed will never be entirely predictable, and that standard contracts and operational methods will never be able to foresee and account for all possible situations. In these cases, the parties involved will need each other and must act together according to the situation. To do this well, there will have to be a mutual basis of trust. Because it will never be possible to foresee in advance when trust will be needed, it is important that parties work

together to build this trust from the beginning. For this process, I used the metaphor 'filling the *shock-absorbing cushion*'. By filling the cushion, the adaptive capacity and the resilience of the partnership will increase, so that parties, in case of a setback, can withstand the shock. This all seems very simple, but in the previous chapters it has been explained that it is not. At the start of the project, parties can agree to trust each other and cooperate, and for example publish their intention in bilaterally signed pamphlets and the like, but ultimately it will be about how people trust each other and cooperate in practice. And then it will become apparent that trust does not happen automatically, that it concerns your vulnerable attitude, daring to show your weaknesses and daring to ask the other person for help. This is not always easy; in fact it is hard work. It also does not guarantee success in advance and it is not a 'trick' that can simply be replicated from one project to another. Nevertheless, the examples from practice in the previous chapters show that the approach at SAA has been effective, or in any case the key participants have reached this conclusion.

The first question is therefore: what is effective and how do you assess that? In Chapter 3 it was explained that the concept of 'project success' is not unambiguous and can be defined in several ways, which has also been confirmed by recent research (Koops, 2017). In this case, the positive assessment was based on the image formed by the main actors on both sides of the cooperation spectrum and by representatives of their respective parent organizations (see the interviews in Section 7.10). From a social constructivist perspective – the perspective of my research – this is also the only way to make such an assessment. If those who have experienced it view it as a success, then it is a success. This can also be seen from the narratives in Chapters 6 and 7. These narratives are about effective cooperation, because the people involved experienced it as effective. However, this constructivist approach also means that it cannot be predicted in advance whether such an approach will also prove effective in other project situations. The trust, the adaptive capacity and the cooperative relationship will then have to be constructed again, by new participants working together. As explained in the previous section, the approach at SAA may well serve as inspiration for others, and in this way lead to 'natural generalizations', points of recognition and new insights, which in turn can lead to the formation of new narratives in other project situations. However, in Section 8.4 I described a number of action strategies that can help to achieve a balance between a procedure-oriented approach and a cooperative approach. I also indicated that when achieving this balance, matters such as substantive expertise, craftsmanship and predictability play an important role.

The foregoing also provides the starting point for *how* to use narratives to encourage employees to deliberately reflect on their actions and give meaning to what is happening around them. By sharing the sensegiving, an interactive and collective process of sensemaking can then be set in motion. By selectively strengthening the sensemaking on the work floor via sensegiving, the narratives can thus serve as a trigger for change. In the professional practice at SAA, the narratives proved to be an excellent way to incorporate reflection, both individually and collectively, and highlight the multiple meanings given to daily events in the project environment. This narrative approach is in line with the work of Weick and subsequent interpretive researchers. Because people always give meaning events from their own frame of reference, it is precisely the collective approach that makes it possible to view events from a different angle and to learn about one's own limitations. From there new narratives can arise and change will become possible. For management it is important to provide space for this collective reflection and storytelling to develop and to guide this process towards the desired direction of change.

In Chapter 2 I addressed the question of whether triggers can be created to initiate change. In the foregoing it has been shown that narratives can act as triggers for change in the sense that they can initiate new narratives and thus a process of gradual change. In my view, these are different triggers than those discussed in Chapter 2, which were social events that gave rise to a leap forward in the process of change. For example, it can be argued that the Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management at the end of the 1980s used the construction of the Maeslantkering as a trigger to translate the emerging *New Public Management* into a rigorously different mode of cooperation between public authorities and private parties in the realization of infrastructure projects.<sup>28</sup> More recently, the economic crisis, which had a major impact on the infrastructure sector in the Netherlands, has led to a broad reorientation towards cooperation, ultimately resulting in the jointly formulated Market Strategy (Rijkswaterstaat et al., 2016). However, similar to the aforementioned cooperation pamphlets, it is all about how people put this into practice together. This is what makes real change possible. By linking the practical concept of resilient partnership explicitly to the Market Strategy, this functioned for me as a trigger for change. For example, the Market Strategy as a trigger for change has given the concept of resilient partnership more power and credibility as a new narrative, and at the same time I have been able to give the Market Strategy a concrete interpretation.

In this way, drastic events such as the economic crisis may give an impetus to looking at things differently and in this way lead to other narratives. In this

context the answer of former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan (1894-1986) to a question from a journalist about what he feared the most and could bring the government from its course was very illustrative: *“Events, my dear boy, events”*<sup>29</sup>.

In this study I have tried to give a practical interpretation to a different mode of public-private cooperation within the infrastructure domain in an interpretive way through interactive sensegiving. In doing so, I presented a number of insights into cooperation and building trust and resilience, and I provided a number of strategies for action. Furthermore, I have shown how, by means of a narrative approach, the concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving can be implemented in practice, and I have shown how collective reflection and sensegiving can serve as catalysts for creating new narratives in the workplace. This is in line with the call of Vaara et al. (2016) to understand deeper the way in which personal narratives shape organizational narratives. Finally, I have shown how an auto-ethnovectionist approach has enabled my dual role as manager and researcher and thereby strengthened both theory and practice. On this basis two arguments are possible: that the theory has adequately described practice, or that the practical application is designed in such a way that it fits the theory (e.g. Callon (2007)). The extent to which my research actually contributed to theory and practice is, in my opinion, to be judged by others. As far as practice is concerned, the consensus has been positive so far. Therefore, to conclude this section in a socially-constructivist way: *“If everyone says that it is a success, then it is a success.”*

## 8.7 Returning to the original intention

In this section I return to the development of public commissioning in the Dutch infrastructure, as outlined in Chapter 2, with which I aim to place my findings in a broader social context. In the development of public commissioning from the 1980s onwards, we see increasing complexity and social engagement in infrastructure projects. As a result, more and more factors have come into play in the realization of these types of projects than the construction task alone. Today these projects are about integrating and reshaping of a part of

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28) It should be noted that this was much more a top-down approach than the narrative bottom-up approach described here.

29) Although this statement is quoted regularly, it is not entirely clear whether MacMillan actually said this.

the Netherlands while taking various societal aspects into account, and are no longer just about building a new road, for example. This requires coordination with many different parties and organizations and the translation of societal complexity into meaningful action. During this period, under the banner of *New Public Management*, we also witnessed increasing commercialization and an ever-increasing shift in tasks and responsibilities from the public to the private sector (e.g. Pollitt (2001)). This process was strengthened by the Parliamentary Construction Fraud Inquiry, at the beginning of this century. Within Rijkswaterstaat, this process was linked action plans with names such as *Professional Commissioning* and *Private Sector, unless*. The role of Rijkswaterstaat as a public organization was given a more service-oriented orientation towards society. Partly under the influence of the recent economic crisis, parties have increasingly questioned this shift in tasks, both on the public and private side, and the sentiment that 'we overshot the goal' has become increasingly widespread. Ultimately, this resulted in a new joint Market Strategy, in which public and private parties agreed that they want to move towards a different mode of cooperation, taking into account each other's expertise and responsibilities.

This development can also be seen in a broader context. For example, a recent policy vision of Rijkswaterstaat is linked to the credo '*Terug naar de bedoeling*' [Returning to the original intention] (Koers 2020). The same credo can also be seen increasingly in society. On the other hand, we also see a growing tendency in society to quantify and clarify, and if something goes wrong, we ask ourselves indignantly: "*Didn't we make clear agreements and procedures for that event?*" This 'measurement addiction' also harbors a paradox: on the one hand we want to get rid of bureaucracy, but on the other hand we cannot do without it. In this thesis, when I refer to aspects such as 'acting as circumstances require' and 'daring to deviate from the contract if the circumstances require it', it means that this often seems easier than it actually is. Although this can be interpreted as a relativization of my own approach and research, I mean the opposite: that it takes a lot of energy, and, above all, patience, to really arrive at a different approach. I will explore this in more detail below.

Measurement and reporting play an important role in strongly bureaucratized organizations. Employees and projects in such organizations are no longer judged on their actual performance, but on how they report on their performance on paper. Professionals in an organization are then held to account based on a type of paper reflection of their actual work, so that they lose scope to respond to specific situations. This can not only lead to frustration for



those employees, but ultimately to a decline in the learning capacity of such an organization (see for example Homan (2017)). It is then tempting to blame the organization for this situation, and from a project perspective, to see the line organization as a kind of common enemy.

However, this is too simple. After all, bureaucracy did not arise from one day to the next; many decades have gone by. Reducing bureaucracy is not an easy task (Courpasson & Clegg, 2006; Martin, Callaghan, Fox, Wells, & Cawte, 1997). The tendency to want to register and verify more and more has become ingrained, a *protected discourse* (Dahler-Larsen, 2012), that is becoming increasingly difficult to resist. The formal frameworks, procedures and systems of bureaucracy are still relatively easy to change, but changing the underlying normative and cultural systems requires more time and energy (Levitt & Scott, 2016). Moreover, as stated in previous chapters, things sometimes go wrong in infrastructure projects, which makes it difficult for the organization to release its control with less auditing and monitoring. Furthermore, infrastructure projects inherently involve conflicts between the interests of various parties. Consequently, an open, transparent culture in which mutual trust can be developed without power games is not always realistic. Simply calling for the organization to “*return to the original intention*” will not automatically lead to change; the narratives about command and control thinking, which are still the leading discourse, are too deeply rooted within the organization. Although this discourse almost feels like an objective reality, it is in fact not much more than a broadly shared sensegiving that was built up over the years, i.e. a socially constructed reality. If the discourse is repeated often enough, it will strengthen itself and start to feel ‘true’ (Weick et al., 2005).

As described in previous chapters, change is about developing new narratives and finding effective *counter-language* (Homan, 2017). Because the leading discourse is so deeply rooted, additional energy will have to be invested in this counter-language.<sup>30</sup> In a bureaucratic organization, after all, command and control thinking is quickly perceived as ‘normal’ (“*the controller is always right*”). As a result, any deviations from the norm require extra justification. This can be compared with the research method I used: because I opted for an interpretive approach and not for the positivistic method that is more commonly used in research, I had to provide additional justification for my choice.

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30) This was the aim of collecting narratives within the SAA project organization.

In Chapter 2, I posited a number of elements that are important if narratives are to act as a trigger for change: there must be a societal trend which can propel and give shape to the new narratives; the impact of the initiator or initiating event must be sufficiently large; coupled with the societal trend, the timing is also important; there must be a leading group that can give meaning and to color the new narrative as *editors*; and finally, the framing is important (see Section 2.5).

By linking the practical concept of resilient partnership explicitly to the Market Strategy, this can function as a trigger (framing). Because the narrative was subsequently propelled by the societal trend in the infrastructure sector towards a different mode of cooperation, the timing was effective. And precisely because SAA is currently the largest infrastructure program in the Netherlands, a 'leading group' for change could be formed with sufficient impact. All ingredients were therefore present, just as large infrastructure projects in the past have a catalyzed change in the sector. However, this continues to be a long-term process, in which it is not always sensible to row against the current; it is still comes down to '*choosing your battles*'; sometimes you have to accept the bureaucracy (see also the *timing* strategy in Section 8.4). Nonetheless, with the experiences described in the previous chapters I hope that I have shown that change, through perseverance and a systematic approach, is indeed possible, and that this can inspire my colleagues in the sector.

## 8.8 Recommendations for follow-up research

Looking back at my research and my project practice, I would like to close this chapter with some suggestions for follow-up research. In the first place, I would like to focus on finding the right balance between following the contract and deviating from it by acting as circumstances require, How can you deal with this process? If you cannot predict exactly what is coming, when is it advisable to act as circumstances require in a particular situation? And how do you sense this? In Section 8.4, I suggested a number of possible action strategies and indicated which factors are important when considering their advantages and disadvantages. It would be interesting to consider the extent to which these strategies could be applied also in other (public) sectors, like Jeekel & Martens (2017) did the other way around in their research into equity in transport, when they compared it with equity principles in other public domains, such as health care, education and housing.

In the example of transporting the new railway bridge on the A1, at a certain

point I took the initiative to deviate from the contract by imposing additional requirements with respect to risk management, and in doing so, intervening in something which at that time was the contractual responsibility of the contractor. Without being able to predict how the transport would proceed if I did not intervene, I did it anyway, because I considered the risk too great if the transport failed. As I explained previously, I did so in response to a news report about another transport and based on my gut feeling. Not only aspects such as expertise and experience played a role, but also critical thinking and an intuitive sense of what could go wrong. In addition to the strategies and factors already presented in this study, I would like to recommend further research into the factors that may influence the decision when deciding whether or not to deviate from the contract. This could, for example, be linked to the concept of *prospective sensemaking*, whereby an attempt is made to give meaning to ambiguous signals in order to determine future actions ((Brown et al., 2014; Corley & Gioia, 2011; Weick, 1974), and to the work of Weick & Sutcliffe on the *management of the unexpected* (2001). In line with the interpretive approach taken in this study, I would like to warn future researchers about the ‘prescriptive pitfall’. This pitfall can be present, for example, when developing a generic assessment framework to determine which situations require deviation from the contract (see the narratives about train-free periods and conditional penalties in Section 6.8). Such prescriptive thinking does not take sufficient account of the ambiguous and intuitive nature of these kinds of considerations. In my view, this touches on the core of project management: the sense of when you have to intervene in which situation.

As another theme for future research, I would like to suggest the role of emotions in influencing collective perception and sensemaking, also regarding the effectiveness of sensegiving. Indeed, the narratives from practice in Chapters 6 and 7 are characterized by many emotions, such as fear, anger, daring, pride and envy. Because emotions are an important motivation for human judgment and action, they act as both input and output for sensemaking processes, and from there they will also influence sensegiving, even though this may incur the risk of manipulation. In my view, this makes it worthwhile to conduct further research into this theme, which could be linked to the previously cited work by, among others, Damasio (2010), Maitlis et al. (2007; 2013) and Steigenberger (2015) (see Section 4.3).

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, my research made use in practice of the approach – known as *ethnovention* – proposed by Van Marrewijk, Veenswijk &

Clegg (2010). And not from the outside, but from the inside as Program Director of SAA. To describe my position in this research, I have labeled this approach as *auto-ethnovention*. From this position I was able to give meaning to events in the project environment and moreover, by providing space for collective reflection, I was able to give direction to the change process towards a different mode of cooperation. Despite the limitations inherent to auto-ethnographic research, I argued in Section 8.5 that this research approach can also yield results and insights that could not have been obtained in a more traditional research design. This method is therefore gaining popularity in research (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2011). An approach in which the researcher studies his or her own organization while at the same time guiding the developments within that organization is innovative in this field of research (see Doloriert & Sambrook (2012)). I can sincerely recommend this approach to my colleagues in this field. Through this approach I was able to create a win-win situation: with the theoretical concepts I found and developed during my research, I reinforced the change process within the SAA infrastructure program. And at the same time I was able to base my research on the enormous source of empirical data that I had at my disposal. It would be interesting for the scientific world to use this approach and discover its additional possibilities, even if it is only to bring both worlds closer together.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Individuals interviewed

### In support of Chapter 2: Triggers for change in the Dutch infrasector

**Leendert Bouter** Rijkswaterstaat; Director of Infrastructure Department 2004-2009

**Cees Brandsen** Rijkswaterstaat; Director of Infrastructure Department 2009-2017

**Jan Hendrik Dronkers** Rijkswaterstaat; Director General 2010-2017

**Benny Nieswaag** Rijkswaterstaat; Project Engineer Maeslantkering 1987-1990

**Rinus Olierook** Rijkswaterstaat; Director of Infrastructure Department 1995-2003

**Tjebbe Visser** Rijkswaterstaat; Director of Infrastructure Department 1986-1994

**Marcel Hertogh** Van Hattem & Blankevoort; Design Coördinator Maeslantkering 1990-1992

**Jil Ligterink** Van Hattem & Blankevoort; Director 2007-2016

**Cees Robers** NS-RIB / ProRail; Director of Projects 1994-2005

**Daan Sperling** TBI Holdings; Chairman of the Board 2002-2017

### In support of Chapter 7: Reflections from the sector

**Jean Luc Beguin** Rijkswaterstaat; Director of Infrastructure Department 2017- Rijkswaterstaat; Chief Procurement Officer

**Aline Arends** Rijkswaterstaat; Manager Implementation Market Strategy

**Jil Ligterink** Director Volker Infra (from 2017) Chairman Integral Steering Committee SAAone

**Pim van der Knaap** General Director Boskalis Nederland; from 2017 Group Director Boskalis Board Member SAAone

#### Team A1/A6:

**Ferdinand Bockhoudt** Rijkswaterstaat SAA A1/A6; Contract Manager

**Martin de Weijze** SAAone BV; General Director (CEO) (from 2015)

#### Team A9 Gaasperdammerweg:

**Frans de Kock** Rijkswaterstaat SAA A9 GDW; Project Manager

**Helen Miley** Rijkswaterstaat SAA A9 GDW; Contract Manager

**Peter Schouten** IXAS; EPCM Project Director - Senior Director Fluor Infra BV

#### Team A6 Almere:

**Martin Anneeze** Rijkswaterstaat SAA A6 Almere; Contract Manager

**Martin Schellekens** Parkway6; SPC Project Director; Project Director John Laing

**Erik Stoelinga** Parkway6; EPC Project Director; Project Director Dura Vermeer

## Appendix B: Summary of SAA activities in the research period

### Workshops SAA Program Management:

**March 12, 2014**

with SAA Contract Managers

**May 7, 2014**

with SAA Contract Managers

**October 29, 2014**

with SAA program management, Project Managers and Contract Managers

**December 4, 2014**

with SAA program management, Project Managers and Contract Managers

**February 2015**

internal workshops with SAA project teams

**June 18, 2015**

workshop with SAA program management & Project Managers (cases)

**October 1, 2015**

workshop with SAA program management & Project Managers (storytelling)

**March 6, 2017**

workshop with SAA program management & Project Managers (role-play)

### SAA employee meetings:

**April 9, 2015**

topic: competences and core values of resilient partnership

**October 15, 2015**

topic: storytelling ('The Chair'); preconditions and resulting benefits of resilient partnership

**April 21, 2016**

topic: storytelling ('The Chair'); presentation of first SAA story collection

**September 29, 2016**

topic: exchange of experiences with resilient partnership

**April 20, 2017**

topic: premiere of whiteboard animation and role-play

### Workshops commissioning authority and contractor:

**May 13, 2015**

SAAone (A1/A6). Topic: how to deal with dilemma's?

**June 15, 2015**

IXAS (A9 GDW). Topic: how to deal with dilemma's?

**June 17, 2015**

Witteveen+Bos (A9 BAHO). Topic: how to deal with dilemma's?

**April 5, 2016**

SAAone (A1/A6). Topic: storytelling

**April 14, 2016**

Witteveen+Bos (A9 BAHO). Topic: storytelling

**May 25, 2016**

IXAS (A9 GDW). Topic: storytelling

**May 16, 2017**

Parkway6 (A6 Almere). Topic: storytelling

**May 17, 2017**

IXAS (A9 GDW). Topic: role-play

**August 23, 2017**

Young professionals of Rijkswaterstaat and Volker Wessels. Topic: role-play

## Appendix C: Summary

### Introduction

Infrastructure projects in the Netherlands, such as the construction of roads, bridges and tunnels, have become larger and more complex in recent years. These projects often have a large societal impact, a long duration and high societal costs, which can easily run into tens or hundreds of millions of euros. The Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere (SAA) infrastructure program of Rijkswaterstaat, which is the focus of this study, is among the largest of such projects: its planned total construction is more than 10 years and the total financial volume is around 4.5 billion euros. At the same time, with the rise of neoliberal thinking (*New Public Management*) in the last decades of the 20th century, the mode of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractors in the infrastructure sector in the Netherlands has changed. Since then, under pressure from politics and the private sector, more tasks and responsibilities have shifted from the public sector to the private sector, and the large public contracting authorities such as Rijkswaterstaat have increasingly distanced themselves from the actual projects. The relationship between the commissioning authority and the contractor became more and more contract-driven, and the respective contractual responsibilities have become more strictly separated.

Recent studies have shown that the course of infrastructure projects, and everything that happens around them, is never fully predictable, and that a good contract does not automatically guarantee a good project. There is a risk that the separation of responsibilities in the contract will lead to parties gradually losing contact with each other. In the new *Market Strategy*, developed jointly by Rijkswaterstaat, other public contracting authorities and parties from the private sector, a shift can therefore be seen, from separate responsibilities to a focus on a joint task for the commissioning authority and contractor, in which these parties make better use of each other's expertise (*'Bouwen doe je samen'* [Building together]). In this strategy both parties, the commissioning authority and contractor, focus on the underlying societal aspects of the project as a mutual task.

This idea has been implemented within the infrastructure program SAA under the name *Resilient Partnership*. Achieving such a partnership requires a shift at the commissioning authority from a controlling role to a more facilitating role with respect to the contractor; for the contractor this requires an ability to empathize with the societal and political responsibility of the commissioning



authority. In this way, 'being of service to the project' means that both parties are aware of and consider each other's roles and interests so that everyone's expertise serves the realization of the project to the maximum extent possible.

## The research question

I have formulated my main research question as follows:

**How do public and private actors give meaning to the concept of Resilient Partnership within the Dutch infrastructure domain?**

In the present study I took an interpretative research approach based on the assumption that phenomena in the social domain, such as modes of cooperation between people and organizations, are social constructs and not natural phenomena. According to this approach, these constructs can best be investigated by focusing on processes of sensemaking – interpretation – by people; hence the term interpretative research. This qualitative research method is fundamentally different from the more common quantitative method, which focuses on aspects such as quantitative data collection and objective measurability.

The object of my research was the program organization SAA with its cooperating partners, such as the various contractors on the project. The organization is responsible for the realization of the SAA infrastructure program, which aims to improve the accessibility and quality of life in the northern part of the *Randstad* (the urban conglomeration in the western region of the Netherlands.) To achieve this aim, about 63 km of the national road network is being widened between Schiphol, Amsterdam and Almere, and various landscape integration measures are being implemented. I searched for narratives about cooperation with these partners and about the corresponding dilemmas and tensions. My research centered on the conversations, i.e. the narratives on the work floor, and the changes in these narratives over time. By taking an interpretive approach, I endeavored to create a picture of the mode of cooperation in a large infrastructure program such as SAA, and gave meaning to these findings. Subsequently, I investigated how changes in that mode of cooperation could be brought about through narratives.

## Theoretical background

### Resilient partnering: building trust and adaptive capacity together

Since the 1990s, a shift has been observed in the scientific debates about projects and project management towards a more holistic view of project management and the associated success factors. Until that time, research into projects was conducted primarily in an instrumental and practice-oriented fashion, and was largely normative and prescriptive, with a focus on what should happen to improve project management. But after the 1990s, researchers began to focus increasingly on what actually happened in projects. This new scientific approach, introduced under the term *Practice Turn*, emphasized action and interaction between people and organizations, and studied what people do and say regarding specific events.

In this approach, project organizations are seen as complex social environments in which all participants have their own norms, values and interests, and can respond in different ways to a specific situation or context. In literature since the turn of the century, we therefore see a shift from a functional to a more substantive approach, with more attention for the 'soft' side of project management, based on the idea that context is not predictable and that management which is based only on hard elements does not guarantee project success. In the approach to projects as technical instruments, the emphasis is on the delineation of the work and a rigid system-oriented tactic with clearly defined tasks for all project staff. In contrast, the social construct approach assumes a changing context, and the emphasis is much more on the necessity of human interaction to arrive at acceptable project results.

In the area of cooperation, which is a crucial success factor for projects and project management, a shift can also be seen in literature from the functional and contract-driven approach to the substantial and cooperative approach. For the latter approach, the term *partnering* is also used in literature. The contract-based approach to partnering, with aspects such as contract-based incentives and bonus/malus arrangements, will not by definition lead to positive project results. After all, contracts between project partners will never be able to cover every contingency. Certain aspects of contracts are subject to multiple interpretations and/or are contradictory. As a result, in conflict situations they will be explained differently based on differing interests. The way in which parties do this collectively can greatly influence the result of the project. This makes trust between parties an important factor in partnering. Trust is not something that

can be contractually ‘arranged’ in advance. It comes about through experience, and parties have to build mutual trust as they work together. When building trust, it is good to understand that the interests of the parties can be divergent and potentially conflicting. During partnering it is therefore important for the parties to be able to transcend their own interests to benefit the mutual interest that focuses on achieving the joint project result. Despite the expectation that both parties can achieve the greatest benefit when they cooperate, it can be a problem if neither party wants to put itself in a vulnerable position by being the first to seek cooperation without the guarantee that the other party will do that as well. This leads to a continuous threat of keeping their individual options open, or falling back on these options.

Based on the above, in the present study partnering is seen as a dynamic and iterative process in which the actual implementation of partnering will be determined by the collective experiences acquired during the course of the project. Based on this reasoning, no blueprint can be provided for successful partnering, and a successful approach in one project will not necessarily lead to the same success in another project. It is not a ‘trick’ that can be easily copied.

Focusing on the relationship between the commissioning authority and the contractor in large infrastructure projects, during the process of partnering it is important for these parties to jointly seek a balance between the contract-driven approach and the more relationship-oriented approach in which both parties develop the capacity to reflect and learn to deal more effectively with unexpected events. Besides mutual trust, adaptive capacity is also a key concept. For adaptive capacity, I have used the term *resilience*, with the corresponding metaphor of a *shock-absorbing cushion* that must be filled in order to withstand unexpected situations or setbacks, which indeed will occur in every complex project. To fill this cushion, mutual trust is essential. A mutually reinforcing process then emerges: trust enhances resilience, which in turn enhances trust, and so on. If the cushion is sufficiently filled, the parties can ‘withstand a shock’ if something happens. With increasing resilience, the capacity to solve problems in the cooperative relationship also increases in order to find a good balance between contract-based management and cooperation.

### The interaction between sensemaking and sensegiving

To achieve the aforementioned partnering, the assumption in this study is that the cooperative culture of the parties involved is focused on the development of resilience and trust. This is often not automatic, and changing the

culture of cooperation is usually a long and complex process. In this process it is important to look at what is actually happening on the work floor, which narratives have been created there, the normative force that emerges from these narratives through sensegiving and how both parties change their cooperative behavior and reflect on this process. This practice is dynamic, it is influenced by the context and it is continually subject to change. It can be stated that these narratives are the carriers of culture within an organization, and that new narratives lead to a change in the sensegiving of the employees in the organization and consequently to a change in the culture of the organization. This narrative approach is fundamentally different from the more classical approach to programs for culture interventions, which are often designed as large technocratic projects, mainly deployed top-down from management while taking little account of actual processes on the work floor.

Culture change can also be described as an interaction between *sensegiving* and *sensemaking*. In this process, sensemaking concerns how employees experience and understand their day-to-day activities, and how they discuss this with each other, while sensegiving concerns how the management of an organization attempts to influence the process of sensemaking towards the cultural change that they desire. Management-directed sensegiving in an organization focuses on and enlarges upon new experiences or narratives on the work floor to replace the old narratives. Employees respond to this with sensemaking, which in turn leads to sensemaking for management and to 'adapted' sensegiving, based on the new practices. This creates a process of interaction between sensegiving and sensemaking that involves the entire organization, management and employees alike. In this way, the narratives can be used by employees as a means to clarify the situation for themselves (sensemaking) and at the same time as a means of influencing the understanding of others (sensegiving) and thus as an outcome of collective construction of meaning. New narratives can in this way lead to a new culture of cooperation between the commissioning authority and contractor and can create and enhance a new mode of partnering: resilient partnering. During this process, the narratives serve essentially as a source of inspiration for sensemaking, which then fuels sensegiving. The narratives thus become the air that is used to fill the aforementioned *shock-absorbing cushion*.

## The narratives from practice

To obtain a broad and diverse picture of events and processes within the SAA program and within the cooperative relationships with other parties, narra-

tives have been 'gathered' from all parts of the SAA organization and from the contracting parties. This was done at the management level, on the work floor and at all levels in between. This made it possible to illuminate the same event from various perspectives, which in turn enriched the corresponding narratives. The study itself lasted approximately three years, from 2015 through 2017. As a result, a clear picture was acquired of the developments among employees at both Rijkswaterstaat and in the private sector regarding their thinking about and dealing with the above-mentioned topics, such as resilience, trust, contract-based management and reflection.

Narratives were collected in various ways, such as observations, interviews, interactive workshops with employees of the commissioning authority or jointly with employees of the contractor, and during the twice-yearly organization-wide employee meetings of the SAA program. During the initial phase of the process, in my role as director and initiator of the change process I took a steering role while recording the first narratives. Indeed, because I held the final responsibility as director of the program, I was also an 'actor' in most of the narratives, and due to my daily presence in the organization I 'co-built' the narratives. In these situations, instead of retrieving and collecting narratives, it is more accurate to refer to generating/co-generating narratives or constructing/co-constructing them. From the beginning of the research process, the executive management of SAA actively encouraged the deployment of more storytellers from all levels of the organization, for example by asking employees to share their stories with the group during meetings. After some time, employees spontaneously volunteered to share their story with the others. This created an environment in which employees felt safe to take a vulnerable position, and the 'art of storytelling' spread through the organization in a natural way, resulting in a rich harvest of stories.

As much as possible I searched the narratives for dilemmas and tensions that have arisen in practice when the actors encountered unexpected situations and for their corresponding considerations and choices. I then looked at the consequences of the dilemmas and choices for the adaptive capacity and mutual trust in the relationship between commissioning authority and contractor. This enabled me to establish the foundation for the subsequent step: giving meaning to the narratives, and initiating the interaction between sensemaking and sensegiving.

Several storylines emerged from the field study. In the first storyline, it can be seen that contracts are not always entirely clear or watertight in practice, and that some situations require acting as the circumstances require. This can

be seen especially in the narratives about whether or not to impose availability corrections or penalties. Although the contracts are usually rather clear on these aspects, the effects can be different than originally intended and may sometimes require a different mode of action. It can also be seen that clauses in contracts are sometimes not as clear for the other party as assumed. Changes are often required, and if multiple parties, such as municipalities, are involved in the process of making changes, this may only increase the confusion. A second storyline concerns being able to mitigate risks by not holding strictly to the provisions in the contract, but daring to look at the project in a broader context. For example, this is important when the contractor's risks stipulated in the contract threaten to turn into political risks for the commissioning authority or when there is a conflict between project planning, traffic disruption and environmental nuisance.

The overarching dominant storyline, which actually comprises the foregoing storylines, concerns the development of mutual trust and the resulting strengthening of adaptive capacity in the relationship. These themes return in various narratives. The openness in communication and the courage to view things from the perspective of the other party enabled mutual trust to develop steadily. As a result, the adaptive capacity in the relationship also increased and the mutual *shock absorbing cushion* was filled.

## Scientific accountability

Research into the phenomenon of the emergence of narratives in organizations, with their dimensions, versatility and ambiguity, and the process of giving meaning to one's experience through these narratives, lends itself well to an interpretive organizational ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research focuses mainly on how processes in organizations develop over a longer period of time; instead of taking snapshots of organizations at a specific time, this type of research can effectively show what actually happens in an organization when new narratives become dominant over old ones, and what meaning can be given to these narratives. If the ethnographic researcher is part of the organization he is investigating, or if he is an employee of that organization, and is therefore also part of the object of research, this is known as auto-ethnographic research. A characteristic of this research method is that the auto-ethnographic researcher, based on his own experience and knowledge of the context, can give meaning to what happens in practice from a personal perspective in an autobiographical style. Indeed, recognizing ambiguities and contradictions, and the resulting struggles among participants in the project environment, would

be difficult when observing them from the sidelines. As a result, the researcher is not an objective outsider, but someone who helps to construct the narrative.

The present study is based on a combination of auto-ethnography and intervention research, in which the researcher not only observes but also does something with the observations (intervenes) to see what happens in a longer-term context. I have therefore labeled my research method as *auto-ethnoventionist*, a combination of auto-ethnographic and intervention research (and elaborating on the *ethnovention* approach introduced previously in literature). This approach, in which scientific research and application in practice are combined, fits in an almost natural way with my own dual role as interpretive researcher and as Program Director of the Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere infrastructure program (SAA). Besides being a researcher, I am not only part of the SAA organization, but am also in charge of it and therefore provide direction to the changes within the organization and the cooperative relationship with other parties. It is precisely because of my years of experience in the infrastructure sector that I have been able to understand and give meaning to the observations I made during my research.

An auto-ethnographic approach, with its associated role duality, also has disadvantages in terms of reliability and integrity. Through reflexivity regarding this role duality, as well as transparency and regular citation of other sources, I have tried to limit these disadvantages as much as possible and prevent them for negating the benefits of the approach.

Together with the foregoing, the narratives thus became 'collective co-constructions' by various people, including myself, who were involved in various project situations and who have given meaning to them from their own frame of reference. Importantly, these are not narratives in which it is objectively stated what 'really' happened. Based on the premise that the 'reality' in human interaction is socially constructed, this is obviously impossible; there is no objectively measurable reality. Indeed, this was not the aim of the narratives. The essential aim was to present the narratives in such a way that the underlying core is as clear as possible to the reader and the desired effect in terms of sensegiving is achieved. With the narratives I have tried to link my personal experiences to social and organizational sensegiving, which would have been less feasible if I had used a more traditional research design. Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that in my research theory and practice have continuously merged into each other. In the present study, I have shown how this formerly theoretical concept of *auto-ethnoventionism* can be applied in practice and can actually

lead to results. Consequently this approach has outcomes for both theory and practice, and is therefore in line with what is described in science as *engaged scholarship*.

## Analysis, discussion and conclusions

The narratives about SAA have shown that over the years a process of change has been set in motion within the project environment of SAA and its cooperating partners. The narratives about dilemmas and cooperation have become richer over time, and the number of narratives has increased steadily: narratives create new narratives. In this way the entirety of narratives and their development can be seen as a meta-narrative about a search for a different approach to infrastructure projects, during which the partners continuously struggled to find a balance between contract-based management and cooperation based on mutual trust, resilience and adaptive capacity in the relationship. This struggle, which continually recurs in the narratives, can be clearly positioned in the scientific debate on *structure versus agency*. This debate is based on the duality in institutional structures, which must provide context and support on which employees can base their actions, but simultaneously leads to these same employees continuously questioning and modifying these structures. Formulated differently, the rules that an organization sets for itself to create order inherently limit the maneuvering space of that organization in the future.

Obviously, the narratives also contain experiences about which people will say 'I am doing that already' which can quickly lead to the conclusion that 'there is there is nothing new under the sun'. This may indeed be the case for these individuals, but the important aspect is the catalyzing effect for the entire organization. Change is not so much the result of a single narrative, but it concerns the impact of all the narratives. In this way, the narratives have a guiding function, in the sense that they can initiate and guide a change in a certain direction. If narratives are told and repeated often enough, they automatically become a meaningful framework that replicates and maintains itself and thus inspires similar, new narratives. In this way, these narratives help to give shape to the meta-narrative – or grand narrative – about the development and implementation of the concept of resilient partnership within SAA. However, no generally applicable normative methods or recommendations can be derived from these narratives that are directly transferrable to other project environments. Indeed, doing so would disregard the unique and location-specific character of those other project environments. Precisely because the individual perceptions and the context



Orientation	Strategy	Explanation
on time	Timing	It is not a good tactic to always row against the current and deviate from the rules too often. It is a question of 'choosing your battles' and picking the right moment to act; moving with the current and 'playing by the book' is often the best option.
	Stalling	Progress is crucial for every project. To maintain momentum in the project, however, it is important to deliberately make time together with the partners to look ahead and to pay attention to signals and intuition. As a result unexpected events can anticipated more effectively, so that timely action can be taken.
on context	Framing	By framing a project in a certain way, space can be created to act differently.
	Structuring	The use of symbolism and metaphors can help to better understand the functioning of an organization or a cooperative relationship (sensemaking), but can also help management to clarify the intended direction of change (sensegiving). An example of such a metaphor is the <i>shock-absorbing cushion</i> .
on human interaction	Meaning	Accept that different perspectives can exist in parallel and give people the opportunity - through reflection - to open their frame of reference to view things from these other perspectives. This will expand their own frame of reference and can create mental space for new understanding.
	Feeling	This strategy focuses on the relationship and involves a normative appeal to the other party: reciprocity when building trust, with a rational and an emotional side.

in which they take place are so decisive, this is not an approach that can simply be replicated (like a recipe) in a different situation or project environment. In every project the participants will have to reflect anew on their experiences and will have to create their own narratives. The parties involved in the project will have to discover this for themselves. In this way, the narratives contained in this thesis do not in themselves represent a generalized reality, but they can lead to 'natural generalizations', i.e. points of recognition and new insights that other project managers can incorporate in their own daily activities and interactions. From these insights I have derived a number of more broadly applicable action strategies - or coping strategies - for resilient partnership. See the table above.

Which strategy will have the most impact in which situation obviously depends on a multitude of factors, such as the nature of the situation, the context, the previous history and especially the people involved, with their own frames of reference and personal interests.

With the above action strategies for resilient partnership, I have established a link between the theoretical insights and the interpretative result of empiricism, as forms of agency within an overarching management structure.

Regarding the question of what meaning actors give to the concept of resilient partnership, we can conclude that the narratives in this thesis focus mainly on giving shape to effective collaboration. I base this assessment partly on the picture that has been created by actors on both sides of the cooperation spectrum. In the project environment of SAA, attempts have been made to encourage employees to deliberately reflect on their actions, give meaning to what is happening around them and to record this in narratives. By sharing this sensegiving, an interactive and collective process of sensemaking was set in motion, and by selectively enhancing sensemaking through sensegiving, new narratives were created. As a result, these narratives could serve as a trigger for change.

## Appendix D: Samenvatting

### Introductie

Infrastructuurprojecten in Nederland, zoals de aanleg van wegen en de bouw van bruggen en tunnels, zijn de laatste jaren groter en complexer geworden. Ze hebben vaak een grote maatschappelijke impact, een lange looptijd en hoge maatschappelijke kosten, die al gauw in de tientallen zo niet honderden miljoenen euro's lopen. Zo heeft het infrastructuurprogramma Schiphol-Amsterdam-Almere (SAA) van Rijkswaterstaat, dat centraal staat in dit onderzoek, een totale bouwtijd van ruim 10 jaar en een financieel volume van circa 4,5 miljard euro. Tegelijkertijd is, met de opkomst van het neoliberale denken (*New Public Management*) in de laatste decennia van de vorige eeuw ook de wijze van samenwerking tussen opdrachtgevers en opdrachtnemers in de infrasector in Nederland veranderd. Onder druk van zowel de politiek als de private sector zijn vanaf dat moment steeds meer taken en verantwoordelijkheden verschoven naar de private sector en zijn de grote publieke opdrachtgevers zoals Rijkswaterstaat meer op afstand komen te staan. De relatie tussen opdrachtgever en opdrachtnemer is daarbij steeds verder contractueel gestuurd en de respectievelijke contractuele verantwoordelijkheden zijn strakker gescheiden.

Recente onderzoeken laten zien dat het verloop van infrastructuurprojecten en alles wat daaromheen gebeurt nooit volledig vooraf voorspelbaar is en dat een goed contract niet automatisch een garantie zal vormen voor een goed project. Op basis daarvan bestaat het risico dat de gescheiden verantwoordelijkheden uit het contract ertoe gaan leiden dat partijen gaandeweg het gesprek met elkaar gaan verliezen. In de nieuwe *Marktvisie*, die Rijkswaterstaat samen met andere publieke opdrachtgevers en marktpartijen recent heeft opgesteld, is dan ook weer een verschuiving te constateren van gescheiden verantwoordelijkheden naar een focus op de gezamenlijke opgave voor opdrachtgever en opdrachtnemer, waarbij partijen elkaars expertise meer benutten (*'Bouwen doe je samen'*). Hierbij staat de dienstbaarheid aan de maatschappelijke projectopgave voor beide partijen, opdrachtgever en opdrachtnemer, centraal.

Deze gedachte is geïmplementeerd binnen het infrastructuurprogramma SAA onder de naam 'dienend opdrachtgeverschap' (in het Engels: *'Resilient Partnership'*). Het kunnen bereiken van een dergelijk partnerschap vraagt om een verschuiving bij de opdrachtgever van een controlerende naar een meer faciliterende rol richting opdrachtnemer en voor de opdrachtnemer dat deze zich bijvoorbeeld moet kunnen verplaatsen in de (politieke) verantwoordelijk-

heid van de opdrachtgevende partij. Op deze wijze betekent 'dienstbaar aan de opdracht' dat beide partijen zich verplaatsen in en redeneren vanuit elkaars rol en belang op een zodanige wijze dat ieders expertise zo maximaal mogelijk in dienst wordt gesteld van het realiseren van de projectopgave.

## De onderzoeksvraag

Ik heb mijn hoofdvraag voor dit onderzoek als volgt geformuleerd:

**Hoe geven publieke en private actoren betekenis aan het concept Dienend Opdrachtgeverschap (Resilient Partnership) binnen het Nederlandse infrastructuurdomein?**

Deze studie volgt een interpretatieve onderzoeks aanpak, welke ervan uit gaat dat fenomenen die zich voordoen in het sociale domein, zoals de samenwerking tussen mensen en organisaties, sociale constructies zijn en geen natuurverschijnselen. Deze constructies kunnen volgens deze aanpak het beste onderzocht worden door te focussen op processen van betekenisvorming - interpretatie - door mensen. Vandaar de term interpretatief onderzoek. Deze kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethodiek is wezenlijk anders dan de meer gangbare kwantitatieve manier van onderzoek, waarbij zaken als kwantitatieve dataverzameling en objectieve meetbaarheid centraal staan.

Het object van mijn onderzoek was de programmaorganisatie SAA met haar samenwerkingspartners, zoals de verschillende betrokken aannemers. De organisatie is verantwoordelijk voor de realisatie van het infrastructuurprogramma SAA, met als doel de bereikbaarheid en de leefbaarheid in het noordelijk deel van de Nederlandse Randstad te verbeteren. Hiertoe worden tussen Schiphol, Amsterdam en Almere het rijkswegennet over circa 63 km verbreed en verschillende landschappelijke inpassingmaatregelen gerealiseerd. Ik ben op zoek gegaan naar verhalen over samenwerking met genoemde partners en de dilemma's en spanningen die daarbij optreden. Het zijn de verhalen op de werkvloer en de veranderingen die daar in de loop van tijd in ontstaan die de centrale positie innemen in mijn onderzoek. Op basis van die verhalen heb ik getracht een beeld te vormen en betekenis te geven aan wat er op dit vlak omgaat binnen een groot infrastructuurprogramma als SAA. Vervolgens heb ik onderzocht op welke wijze vanuit die verhalen verandering in die wijze van samenwerking tot stand kon worden gebracht.

## Theoretische achtergrond

### Resilient partnering: het samen opbouwen van vertrouwen en adaptief vermogen

Sinds de jaren '90 van de vorige eeuw is in de wetenschappelijke debatten over projecten en projectmanagement een verschuiving te constateren naar een meer holistische kijk op projectmanagement en de daaraan gekoppelde succesfactoren. Waar tot op dat moment onderzoek naar projecten vooral instrumenteel en praktijkgericht was en grotendeels normatief en prescriptief, met een focus op wat zou moeten gebeuren om projecten beter te kunnen managen, gingen onderzoekers zich nu meer richten op wat daadwerkelijk gebeurt in projecten. Deze nieuwe wetenschappelijke benadering, geïntroduceerd onder de term *Practice Turn*, legt het accent op actie en interactie tussen mensen en organisaties en bestudeert wat mensen doen en zeggen omtrent een bepaalde specifieke gebeurtenis.

In deze benadering worden projectorganisaties gezien als complexe sociale omgevingen, waarin iedere deelnemer zijn of haar eigen normen, waarden en belangen meebrengt en op een verschillende manier kan reageren op een bepaalde situatie of context. We zien in de literatuur na de eeuwwisseling dan ook een verschuiving van een functionele benadering naar een meer substantiële benadering, met meer aandacht voor de 'zachte' kant van projectmanagement, vanuit het idee dat context niet voorspelbaar is en dat sturen op alleen harde elementen geen garantie is gebleken voor projectsucces. Waar bij de benadering van het project als technisch instrument de nadruk ligt op afbakening van het werk en op een strakke systeemgerichte aanpak met vast omliggende taken voor alle projectmedewerkers, gaat het project als sociale constructie veel meer uit van een veranderende context en wordt de nadruk vooral gelegd op de noodzaak tot menselijke interactie om te komen tot geaccepteerde projectresultaten.

Ook op het gebied van samenwerking, een cruciale succesfactor voor projecten en projectmanagement, is in de literatuur een verschuiving te zien van de functionele en contractgestuurde benadering naar de substantiële en samenwerkingsgerichte benadering. Voor de laatste benadering wordt in de literatuur ook wel de term *partnering* gehanteerd. Daarbij zal de contractuele benadering van partnering, met bijvoorbeeld contractuele *incentives* en bonus/malus regelingen, niet per definitie leiden tot positieve projectresultaten. Contracten tussen projectpartners zullen immers nooit alles af kunnen dekken. Op onderdelen

zullen ze multi-interpretabel en/of tegenstrijdig zijn en hierdoor zullen ze in conflictsituaties vanuit verschillende belangen verschillend worden uitgelegd. De wijze waarop partijen dit gezamenlijk doen zal in hoge mate de uitkomst van het project kunnen beïnvloeden. Deze constatering maakt vertrouwen tussen partijen bij partnering tot een belangrijke factor. Vertrouwen is niet iets dat op voorhand contractueel kan worden 'geregeld'. Het komt door ervaring tot stand en partijen zullen werkende weg aan hun vertrouwensrelatie moeten bouwen. Belangrijk aspect bij dat opbouwen van vertrouwen is het gegeven dat de belangen van partijen verschillend en mogelijk conflicterend met elkaar kunnen zijn. Bij partnering gaat het erom dat partijen in staat moeten zijn om hun eigen belang te overwinnen ten gunste van het gezamenlijke belang dat gericht is op het bereiken van het gezamenlijke projectresultaat. Probleem daarbij kan zijn dat, ondanks de verwachting dat voor beide partijen de meeste winst te bereiken is wanneer ze met elkaar samenwerken, geen van beide partijen zichzelf in een kwetsbare positie wil brengen door als eerste de samenwerking te zoeken zonder de garantie dat de ander dat ook zal doen. Er ontstaat dan een continue dreiging van het openhouden van of het terugvallen op de individuele optie.

Op basis van het voorgaande wordt in deze studie partnering beschouwd als een dynamisch en iteratief proces, waarvan de invulling mede zal worden bepaald door de gezamenlijke ervaringen die gedurende de loop van het project zullen ontstaan. Vanuit deze redenering is er dan ook geen blauwdruk te geven voor een succesvolle partnering en zal een succesvolle aanpak bij het ene project niet per definitie leiden tot een zelfde succes bij een ander project. Het is geen 'kunstje' dat simpelweg gekopieerd kan worden.

Toegespitst op de relatie tussen opdrachtgever en opdrachtnemer van grote infrastructuurprojecten kan worden gesteld dat in het proces om te komen tot partnering het van belang is dat deze partijen gezamenlijk op zoek gaan naar een balans tussen de contractgestuurde benadering en de meer op samenwerking gerichte benadering, waarbij beide partijen het vermogen ontwikkelen om te reflecteren en steeds beter om te leren gaan met onverwachte gebeurtenissen. Naast wederzijds vertrouwen is daarbij ook het adaptief vermogen een sleutelbegrip. Voor dit laatste hanteer ik de term *resilience*, wat ik heb benaderd als een *stootkussen* dat gevuld moet worden om gesteld te staan voor onverwachte situaties of tegenvallers die immers bij ieder complex project zullen optreden. Om dit stootkussen te kunnen vullen is onderling vertrouwen noodzakelijk. Er ontstaat dan een elkaar versterkend proces: door vertrouwen neemt de resilience toe en daarmee weer het vertrouwen en zo verder. Als het stootkussen voldoende gevuld is kunnen partijen 'tegen een stootje' als er wat

gebeurt. Met een toegenomen resilience neemt het oplossend vermogen in de samenwerkingsrelatie toe om de goede balans te vinden tussen contractsturing en samenwerking.

## De wisselwerking tussen sensemaking en sensegiving

Om voornoemde partnering tot stand te brengen wordt in dit onderzoek de aanname gehanteerd dat de samenwerkingscultuur bij de betrokken partijen gericht is op het ontwikkelen van resilience en vertrouwen. Dit is vaak niet automatisch het geval en het veranderen van de cultuur van samenwerking is over het algemeen een lang en ingewikkeld proces. Hierbij gaat het om wat er daadwerkelijk op de werkvloer gebeurt, welke verhalen daar ontstaan, welke normatieve kracht daar via betekenisgeving uit voort vloeit, hoe het gedrag van medewerkers daardoor wordt beïnvloed en hoe daarop door beide partijen wordt gereflecteerd. Die praktijk is dynamisch van aard, wordt beïnvloed door de context en is continu aan verandering onderhevig. Gesteld kan worden dat de verhalen op de werkvloer de dragers zijn van de cultuur binnen een organisatie en dat nieuwe verhalen leiden tot een verandering in betekenisgeving bij de medewerkers in die organisatie en daarmee ook tot een verandering van de cultuur. Deze narratieve benadering is wezenlijk anders dan de meer klassieke aanpak van programma's voor cultuurinterventie, vaak opgezet als grote technocratische projecten, vooral top-down vanuit het management ingezet en weinig rekening houdend met welke processen zich daadwerkelijk in de praktijk op de werkvloer afspelen.

Cultuurverandering kan in het verlengde hiervan ook worden beschreven als wisselwerking tussen *sensegiving* en *sensemaking*. Daarbij heeft sensemaking te maken met hoe medewerkers hun dagelijkse praktijk ervaren en begrijpen en daarover met elkaar in gesprek gaan, terwijl sensegiving te maken heeft met hoe het management van een organisatie het proces van sensemaking tracht te beïnvloeden in de richting van de door het management gewenste cultuurverandering. Bij sensegiving vanuit het management in een organisatie staat het gericht aandacht geven en uitvergroten van nieuwe ervaringen of verhalen op de werkvloer ter vervanging van oude verhalen centraal. Door werknemers wordt hierop via sensemaking gereageerd, hetgeen voor het management ook weer aanleiding geeft voor sensemaking en een op de (nieuwe) praktijken gebaseerde 'bijgestelde' sensegiving. Hierdoor ontstaat een proces van wisselwerking tussen sensegiving en sensemaking, waarbij de gehele organisatie, management én medewerkers, betrokken is. De verhalen kunnen op deze wijze

zowel door medewerkers worden gebruikt als middel om voor zichzelf de situatie duidelijk te maken (sensemaking) en tegelijkertijd als middel om het begrip door anderen te beïnvloeden (sensegiving) en daarmee als een uitkomst van een collectieve constructie van betekenis. Zo kunnen nieuwe verhalen leiden tot een nieuwe cultuur van samenwerking tussen opdrachtgever en opdrachtnemer en kan een nieuwe manier van (resilient) partnering ontstaan en versterkt worden. De verhalen dienen in dit proces als het ware als inspiratiebron voor sensemaking en daarmee tegelijkertijd als brandstof voor sensegiving. Ze vormen hierdoor de lucht waarmee eerder genoemd stootkussen kan worden gevuld.

## De verhalen uit de praktijk

Om een zo breed en divers mogelijk beeld te verkrijgen van wat er speelt binnen het programma SAA en binnen de samenwerkingsrelaties met andere partijen zijn verhalen 'opgehaald' uit alle geledingen van de SAA organisatie en ook bij de opdrachtnemende partijen, zowel op managementniveau als op 'werkvloer'-niveau en alles wat daar tussen zit. Op deze wijze was het mogelijk om een zelfde gebeurtenis vanuit verschillende perspectieven te belichten, hetgeen ook weer heeft geleid tot verrijking van de verhalen daarover. De onderzoeksperiode betrof ongeveer drie jaar, van 2015 tot en met 2017. Hiermee kon een goed beeld worden verkregen van de ontwikkeling bij medewerkers van zowel Rijkswaterstaat als markt in het denken en omgaan met eerdergenoemde onderwerpen als resilience, vertrouwen, contractsturing en reflectie.

Het ophalen van de verhalen is gedaan op verschillende wijzen, zoals via observaties, interviews, interactieve workshops met medewerkers van opdrachtgever of met medewerkers van opdrachtgever en opdrachtnemer tezamen en tijdens halfjaarlijkse brede medewerkerbijeenkomsten van het SAA programma. In de opstartfase van dit proces heb ik zelf, vanuit mijn rol als directeur en initiator van het veranderingstraject, een sturende rol vervuld bij het optekenen van de eerste verhalen. Ik was immers, als eindverantwoordelijke directeur binnen het programma, ook 'acteur' in de meeste verhalen en door mijn dagelijkse aanwezigheid binnen de organisatie heb ik als het ware meegebouwd aan de verhalen. Het is in deze gevallen, in plaats van ophalen en verzamelen, dan ook beter te spreken van (co)genereren of (co)construeren van verhalen. Vanaf het begin van dit traject is er door de programmadirectie van SAA actief gestuurd op de inzet van meer verhalenvertellers uit alle geledingen van de organisatie, bijvoorbeeld door medewerkers tijdens bijeenkomsten hun verhaal met de groep te laten delen. Na enige tijd boden medewerkers zich spontaan aan om hun verhaal met de anderen te delen. Zo werd een omgeving gecreëerd waarin



medewerkers zich kwetsbaar konden opstellen en kon de ‘kunst van het verhalen vertellen’ zich als een natuurlijke olievlek door de organisatie verspreiden met een rijke oogst als resultaat.

Ik ben in de verhalen zoveel mogelijk op zoek gegaan naar dilemma’s en spanningen die bij medewerkers in de praktijk zijn ontstaan wanneer ze tegen onverwachte situaties aan zijn gelopen en welke afwegingen en keuzes daarbij zijn gemaakt. Vervolgens heb ik gekeken wat de consequenties van die dilemma’s en keuzes zijn geweest voor het adaptief vermogen en het onderling vertrouwen in de relatie tussen opdrachtgever en opdrachtnemer. Hiermee kon de basis worden gelegd voor het zetten van de volgende stap, het geven van betekenis aan de verhalen en het op gang brengen van de wisselwerking tussen sensemaking en sensegiving.

Uit het veldonderzoek komen verschillende verhaallijnen naar voren. Als eerste verhaallijn is te zien dat contracten in de praktijk nooit geheel helder of dekkend zullen zijn en dat er in de praktijk dus situaties zullen voorkomen waarbij naar bevind van zaken gehandeld zal moeten worden. Dit is vooral terug te zien bij de verhalen over het al dan niet opleggen van beschikbaarheidscorrecties of boetes. Ondanks dat contracten daarover over het algemeen vrij helder zijn kunnen de effecten anders zijn dan oorspronkelijk beoogd en nopen ze soms toch tot een andere handelwijze. Ook is terug te zien dat clausules in contracten voor de andere partij soms minder helder zijn dan gedacht. Vaak is dit dan een bron voor wijzigingen en als bij het proces om te komen tot wijzigingen weer meerdere partijen, zoals gemeentes en dergelijke, betrokken zijn dan kan dat de verwarring alleen maar groter maken. Een tweede verhaallijn heeft betrekking op het kunnen mitigeren van risico’s door niet strikt te kijken naar de contractuele bepalingen, maar ook te durven kijken naar het project in bredere context. Dit is bijvoorbeeld van belang wanneer contractuele opdrachtnemerrisico’s dreigen om te slaan in politieke opdrachtgever-risico’s of als er een spanning is tussen planningsvoortgang, verkeershinder en omgevingshinder.

De overkoepelende dominante verhaallijn, die eigenlijk de voorgaande verhaallijnen omvat, gaat over het opbouwen van wederzijds vertrouwen en het van daaruit versterken van het adaptief vermogen in de relatie. Deze thema’s komen bij verschillende verhalen terug. Door de openheid in communicatie en het zich durven verplaatsen in de positie van de ander heeft een toenemend vertrouwen over en weer kunnen ontstaan, waardoor ook het adaptief vermogen in de relatie heeft kunnen groeien en het gezamenlijke *stootkussen* is gevuld.

## Wetenschappelijke verantwoording

Onderzoek naar het fenomeen van het ontstaan van verhalen in organisaties, met hun dimensies, veelzijdigheid en ambiguïteit, en het proces van betekenis geven via die verhalen leent zich goed voor een interpretatieve organisatie-etnografische benadering. Omdat etnografisch onderzoek zich vooral richt op hoe organisaties zich procesmatig over een langere periode ontwikkelen in plaats van op snapshots van organisaties op een specifiek moment kan deze vorm van onderzoek goed laten zien wat er daadwerkelijk gebeurt in een organisatie als nieuwe verhalen de overhand krijgen over oude en welke betekenis daaraan kan worden gegeven. Als de etnografisch onderzoeker tegelijkertijd ook onderdeel of medewerker is van de organisatie die hij onderzoekt en dus ook mede object van onderzoek is, is sprake van auto-etnografisch onderzoek. Kenmerk van dit type onderzoek is dat de auto-etnografische onderzoeker vanuit een persoonlijk perspectief, gebaseerd op eigen ervaring en kennis van de context, in een autobiografische stijl betekenis kan geven aan wat er in de praktijk gebeurt. Het herkennen van ambiguïteiten en tegenstrijdigheden en de daaruit volgende worstelingen bij spelers binnen de projectomgeving zal immers lastig zijn als daar vanaf de zijkant naar wordt gekeken. Dit brengt met zich mee dat de onderzoeker geen objectieve buitenstaander is, maar iemand die het verhaal mee construeert.

In onderhavig onderzoek borduur ik voort op een combinatie tussen auto-etnografie en zogenaamd interventieonderzoek, waarbij de onderzoeker, naast waarnemen, ook iets doet met de observaties (interveniert) om vervolgens te kijken wat er dan gebeurt in een langduriger context. Ik heb daarmee mijn onderzoeksmethode bestempeld als *auto-etnoventionistisch*, een samenvoeging van auto-etnografie en interventieonderzoek (en voortbordurend op de eerder in de literatuur geïntroduceerde *ethnovention* benadering). Deze benadering waarbij wetenschappelijk onderzoek en praktische toepasbaarheid worden gecombineerd past immers op een bijna natuurlijke wijze bij mijn eigen dubbelrol als enerzijds die van programmadirecteur van het infrastructuurprogramma SAA en anderzijds die van interpretatieve onderzoeker. Ik ben, naast onderzoeker, niet alleen onderdeel van de SAA organisatie, ik geef er leiding aan en daarmee sturing aan de veranderingen binnen de organisatie en de samenwerkingsrelatie met andere partijen. Juist door mijn jarenlange ervaring in de infrastructuursector ben ik in staat geweest om de waarnemingen die ik tijdens mijn onderzoek heb gedaan te plaatsen en betekenis te geven.

Aan een auto-etnografische aanpak en de daaraan vast zittende roldualiteit kleven ook nadelen, liggend op het vlak van betrouwbaarheid en integriteit.

Door middel van reflexiviteit ten aanzien van deze roldualiteit, alsmede door transparantie en het regelmatig aan het woord laten van andere bronnen heb ik geprobeerd om deze nadelen zoveel mogelijk te beperken en niet in de weg van de voordelen te laten staan.

De verhalen zijn met het voorgaande dus ‘collectieve coconstructies’ geworden door verschillende mensen, waaronder voor een deel ik zelf, die betrokken zijn geweest bij verschillende projectsituaties en daar vanuit hun eigen referentiekader betekenis aan hebben gegeven. Benadrukt wordt dat het derhalve geen verhalen zijn, waarin objectief is aangegeven wat er ‘echt’ is gebeurd. Vanuit het uitgangspunt dat de ‘werkelijkheid’ bij menselijke interactie sociaal geconstrueerd zal zijn is dit immers niet mogelijk en bestaat er geen objectieve meetbare realiteit. Dit was ook niet het doel van de verhalen. De essentie is om de verhalen zo te brengen dat de kern erachter zo goed mogelijk overkomt bij de lezer en het beoogde effect qua betekenisgeving wordt bereikt. Met de verhalen heb ik gepoogd om mijn persoonlijke ervaringen te koppelen aan sociale en organisatorische betekenisgeving, hetgeen aan de hand van een meer traditionele onderzoekopzet minder goed mogelijk was geweest. Op basis van het voorgaande kan worden geconcludeerd dat in mijn onderzoek theorie en praktijk continu in elkaar zijn overgelopen. Ik heb in onderhavig onderzoek laten zien hoe het tot nu toe theoretische concept van *auto-etnoventionisme* in de praktijk kan worden toegepast en daar daadwerkelijk tot resultaat kan leiden. De aanpak heeft daarmee opbrengst voor zowel de theorie als de praktijk en sluit daarmee aan op wat in de wetenschap wordt omschreven als *engaged scholarship*.

## Analyse, discussie en conclusies

De verhalen van SAA hebben laten zien dat binnen de projectomgeving van SAA en haar samenwerkingspartners over de jaren heen een proces van verandering op gang is gebracht. De verhalen over dilemma’s en samenwerking zijn in de loop der tijd steeds rijker geworden en het aantal verhalen is gestaag toegenomen: verhalen creëren nieuwe verhalen. Zo kan het geheel aan verhalen en de ontwikkeling daarin gezien worden als een metaverhaal over een zoektocht naar een andere benadering van infrastructuurprojecten, waarbij continu gestreefd wordt naar het vinden van een goede balans tussen contractsturing en samenwerking, gebaseerd op wederzijds vertrouwen en adaptief vermogen in de relatie. Deze in de verhalen steeds terugkerende worsteling is goed te positioneren binnen het wetenschappelijke debat over de afweging *structure versus*

*agency*. Dit debat is gebaseerd op de dualiteit in institutionele structuren, die context en houvast moeten bieden voor medewerkers om daarop hun handelen te kunnen baseren, maar tegelijkertijd ook aanleiding geven voor diezelfde medewerkers om die structuren ter discussie te stellen en ze te modificeren. Anders geformuleerd: met de regels die een organisatie voor zichzelf stelt om orde te creëren wordt tegelijkertijd de bewegingsruimte van die organisatie voor de toekomst ingeperkt.

De verhalen bevatten natuurlijk ook ervaringen, waarvan mensen zullen zeggen 'dat doe ik nu ook al', waardoor al snel de conclusie kan worden getrokken dat er 'weinig nieuws onder de zon' is. Dat kan voor deze individuen natuurlijk zo zijn, het gaat dan echter om het katalyserende effect voor de gehele organisatie. Daarbij is belangrijk dat verandering niet zo zeer tot stand zal komen door één enkel verhaal, maar dat het vooral gaat om de impact van de verzameling aan verhalen. Op deze wijze bezien hebben de verhalen een sturende functie, in de zin dat ze een verandering op gang kunnen brengen. Als bepaalde verhalen maar vaak genoeg worden verteld en herhaald, worden ze vanzelf een betekenisgevend kader dat zichzelf steeds repliceert en in stand houdt en daardoor weer een inspiratie vormt voor nieuwe vergelijkbare verhalen. Op deze wijze dragen verhalen bij aan de vorming van het genoemde metaverhaal of *grand narrative* over de ontwikkeling en implementatie van het concept van dienend opdrachtgeverschap binnen SAA. Tegelijkertijd kunnen uit de verhalen geen algemeen toepasbare normatieve werkwijzen of aanbevelingen worden gedestilleerd, die in andere projectomgevingen zomaar overgenomen kunnen worden. Men zou dan immers voorbij gaan aan het unieke en locatiespecifieke karakter van die andere projectomgevingen. Juist omdat de individuele percepties en de context waarin zij plaatsvinden zo bepalend zijn is het niet een aanpak die zich als een kookboek eenvoudigweg laat kopiëren naar een andere situatie of projectomgeving. Ieder project opnieuw zullen de spelers op dat moment moeten reflecteren op hun ervaringen en hun verhalen zelf moeten inkleuren. Betrokkenen zullen het zelf moeten ontdekken. Op deze manier vertegenwoordigen de in dit proefschrift opgenomen verhalen uit zichzelf dus geen gegeneraliseerde werkelijkheid, maar kunnen ze wel leiden tot 'natuurlijke generalisaties', punten van herkenning en nieuwe inzichten die andere projectmanagers kunnen meenemen in hun eigen dagelijkse activiteiten en interacties. Uit deze inzichten is een aantal breder toepasbare handelingsstrategieën of coping strategieën voor dienend opdrachtgeverschap gedestilleerd, zie onderstaande tabel. Welke strategie in welke situatie het meeste effect zal sorteren is natuurlijk afhankelijk van een veelheid aan factoren, zoals de aard van de situatie, de context, de voorge-

Oriëntatie	Strategie	Toelichting
op tijd	Timing	Het is niet verstandig om altijd tegen de stroom in te willen roeien en te vaak van de regels af te wijken. Het is een kwestie van <i>'choose your battles'</i> en kiezen van het juiste moment; vaak is meebewegen en <i>'play it by the book'</i> de beste optie.
	Stalling	Voortgang is cruciaal bij ieder project. Om de vaart in het project te houden is het echter juist van belang om bewust tijd in te ruimen om vooruit te kijken en te luisteren naar signalen en intuïtie. Onverwachte gebeurtenissen kunnen dan beter worden voorzien, zodat tijdig kan worden ingegrepen.
op context	Framing	Door een project op een bepaalde manier te framen kan ruimte worden gecreëerd om anders te handelen.
	Structuring	Het gebruik van symboliek en metaforen kan helpen om het functioneren van een organisatie of een samenwerkingsrelatie beter te leren begrijpen (sensemaking), maar ook om vanuit het management een beoogde veranderingsrichting beter te kunnen duiden (sensegiving). Een voorbeeld hiervan is het <i>stootkussen</i> .
op menselijke interactie	Meaning	Accepteer dat er verschillende zienswijzen naast elkaar kunnen bestaan en biedt mensen de ruimte om via reflectie hun referentiekader open te stellen voor deze andere zienswijzen en iets vanuit een andere invalshoek te bekijken. Hierdoor kan mentale ruimte ontstaan voor nieuwe betekenisvorming.
	Feeling	Deze strategie richt zich op de relatie en doet een normatief appel op de ander: wederkerigheid bij het opbouwen van vertrouwen, met een rationele en een emotionele kant.

schiedenis en zeker ook de betrokken personages, met hun eigen referentiekaders en persoonlijke belangen.

Met bovenstaande handelingsstrategieën voor dienend opdrachtgeverschap heb ik een koppeling gelegd tussen de theoretische inzichten en de interpretatieve opbrengst van de empirie, als vormen van agency binnen een overkoepelende beheersstructuur.

Op de vraag welke betekenis actoren geven aan het concept dienend op-

drachtgeverschap kunnen we vaststellen dat de verhalen in dit proefschrift met name gericht zijn op het vormgeven van effectieve samenwerking. Dit oordeel baseer ik mede op het beeld zoals dat is gevormd door actoren aan beide kanten van het samenwerkingsspectrum. In de projectomgeving van SAA is geprobeerd te stimuleren dat medewerkers bewust reflecteren op hun handelen en betekenis geven aan wat er om hen heen gebeurt en dat ook vast te leggen in verhalen. Door het delen van die betekenisgeving kon een interactief en collectief proces van sensemaking op gang worden gebracht en door via sensegiving de sensemaking selectief te versterken ontstonden nieuwe verhalen. Deze verhalen hebben daarmee kunnen dienen als trigger voor verandering.

## Appendix E: References

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**Hans Ruijter**





## About the author

Hans Ruijter (1961) graduated in 1985 as a civil engineer from Delft University of Technology. He started his career at Rijkswaterstaat in Zeeland, where he was involved in structuring the management and maintenance of the Oosterscheldekering. At the end of the 1990s, after holding various positions at Rijkswaterstaat, he became project manager for road pricing at the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and

Water Management. In 2000 Ruijter returned to Rijkswaterstaat as director of traffic infrastructure at the civil engineering department. In 2006 he moved to Limburg as project director of the Maaswerken (River Meuse Project), at that time one of the largest water management projects in the Netherlands. Subsequently, in 2010, he was asked as national tunnel director to develop a different approach to the construction of tunnels in the Netherlands. Since the end of 2012, he has been program director for the motorway widening project between Schiphol, Amsterdam and Almere (SAA), the largest infrastructure project in the Netherlands with a total construction budget of around € 4.5 billion. Beside that Ruijter is, since the end of 2018, Chairman of the Board of Netlipse, the international network for the dissemination of knowledge on the management and organization of large infrastructure projects in Europe.

The main theme in Ruijter's career has been his passion for cooperation, especially between the public and the private sectors. According to Ruijter, this is the key to successful infrastructure projects. He believes that most project delays are the result of a failure to address issues and frustrations between parties before they become chronic. *"In these situations, cooperation is not only essential; it also makes the work much more enjoyable."* This passion for cooperation led to Ruijter's decision to undertake a PhD study at the Faculty of Social Sciences at VU University Amsterdam on public-private partnerships in the infrastructure domain.

