16. From participation to interruption: toward an ethics of stakeholder engagement, participation and partnership in corporate social responsibility and responsible innovation

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and responsible innovation (RI), stakeholder engagement, participation and partnership are seen as important prerequisites for responsible business practices. Partnering with a diversity of stakeholders not only enhances learning and the emergence of new insights (Jehn et al. 1999), it also enhances the wealth-creating capacity of a company (Post et al. 2002; Harrison et al. 2010) by avoiding negative outcomes of business practices and promoting an excellent company reputation (Graves and Waddock 1994; cf. Gray and Stites 2013). More important in the context of CSR and RI practices, however, is that stakeholder engagement, participation and partnership encourage more responsible or ethical business practices (Wood 2002). In particular, in case the inequality among stakeholders is potentially enhanced by business practices, or in case of uncertainty with regard to the future impact of new products and services, participation and partnership for responsible business and innovation practices is required (von Schomberg 2013). By involving stakeholders who are possibly affected by these practices, ethical decision making and democratic participation in these decision-making processes are enhanced and secured (Belucci et al. 2002; Blok, 2014a).

As many stakeholders have differing ideas about what exactly is a responsible action in business and innovation, this could limit participation and partnership practices. This raises the issue of how collaboration and partnership practices in CSR and RI should be conceived. Contrary to the tendency to harmony, consensus and alignment among stakeholders in most of the literature on partnership and collaboration (Gray and Stites 2013), we ask which concept of participation and partnership is able to account for stakeholder inclusion in CSR and RI (Owen et al. 2013), while acknowledging and appreciating their fundamentally different judgments, value frames and viewpoints. To this end, we reconsider the concept of stakeholder inclusion, participation and partnership in this chapter.

In this, we are inspired by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. He explained the tendency to harmony and consensus as being the result of the reduction of the other to the same, that is, of the reduction of the fundamentally different judgments and value frames of stakeholders to a common ground, in which the singularity of the different partners is neglected in favor of their commonality. From this perspective, participation is always participation in a generality (unifying principle, common ground, and so on) in which the singularity of the participants is neglected. This neglecting of participants consists in either the assimilation of the partner to the self (self-confirmation) or the submission

of the self to the partner (self-denial). For Levinas, however, the relationship with the other is characterized by radical alterity. The other stands before me and is radically separated from me, but this does not mean that I do not have a relationship with him. The other calls for our response to him in a non-reductive way, that is, calls for our ethical behavior. Precisely this effort can be conceived as collaboration and partnership, in which fundamental differences are acknowledged and appreciated. This concept of participation and collaboration involves a shift from the cognitive level of primarily understanding the other, to the behavioral level of actual ethical behavior in response to the call of the other. Inspired by Levinas's insights, we further explore and apply this notion of collaboration and partnership in this chapter in order to conceptualize in a positive way an ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI.[1]

In section 2, we set the stage by providing a critical assessment of the tendency toward consensus and alignment in the participation, collaboration and partnership literature. In section 3, we develop an ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices, which is able to include multiple stakeholders and acknowledge and appreciate their fundamental differences at the same time. In section 4, we draw conclusions and outline the partnership stages of an ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership. With this, we open a new perspective on the opportunities and limitations of stakeholder engagement and partnership in the context of CSR and RI, and provide new directions for managing these partnerships in practice.

2.   SETTING THE STAGE: CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE TENDENCY TOWARD CONSENSUS AND ALIGNMENT IN THE PARTICIPATION, COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP LITERATURE

A common feature of participation and partnership practices, which appear under a variety of names, for example, cross-sector partnerships (CSPs), civil society organization (CSO) participation and multi-stakeholder alliances (MSAs), is that they concern complex public problems such as global warming, poverty alleviation or public health, which cannot be solved by the public or private sector alone. The establishment of partnerships is a desirable or even necessary strategy to address these problems. By 'linking and sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities', it is expected that they 'achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organisations in one sector alone' (Bryson et al. 2006, p. 44).

Since many stakeholders have differing ideas about what exactly is a responsible action in business and innovation, participation and partnership practices could be limited. These differences among stakeholders are not only due to their different assessment of the content of the problem; for instance, the problem of the definition of climate change and its solution in the business context will be framed differently by different stakeholders (Lewicki et al. 2003). Moreover, some actors are more powerful than others in defining the problem and its solution. Although various authors highlight the importance of sharing power by empowering weaker or disadvantaged stakeholders (cf. Ansell and Gash 2008), it is expected that power imbalances are especially prominent in ethical issues in business

and innovation simply because of the different value frames of the different stakeholders (cf. Bryson et al. 2006).

Since participation and partnership can be limited by these power-, vision-, goal-, sector- and motive-deviations among multiple stakeholders (Holmes and Smart 2009; Blok and Lemmens 2015), the public participation and partnership literature focuses on the initial conditions affecting partnership formation and the ways in which stakeholders try to overcome these differences in order to enhance successful collaboration. An example is the experience of sector failure to solve complex social problems such as public health or poverty, and initial agreements among partners on the problem definition. One of the reasons for this is that agreements on the problem definition can help clarify the interests partners have in solving the problem. In the literature, therefore, both acknowledgement of the interdependency of partners and recognition of the self-interest of each partner in solving the problem are seen as necessary conditions for partnership formation (Logsdon 1991; Bryson et al. 2006). Recent research is focusing, for instance, on models of business involvement (Reed and Reed 2009) and consensus-building in general (Rondinelli and London 2003), and value frame fusion in particular (Le Ber and Branzei 2010). Although several authors have contributed to the development and application of participatory and partnership processes in complex problems (Guston 1999; Stirling and Mayer 2001; Burgess et al. 2007), most of the literature on participation and partnership shows a tendency toward convergence, consonance or complementarity among multiple stakeholders (cf. Croteau and Hicks 2003; Nowell 2010; Cuppen 2012; Blok 2014b).

This tendency toward consensus and harmony seems to be paradoxical. On the one hand, consensus and alignment are conceived as a necessary condition for effective participation and partnership but, on the other hand, they seem to be out of reach in the case of complex public problems in which multiple stakeholders with different judgments and different values are involved. This raises the question of how collaboration and partnership processes in CSR and RI have to be conceived. There are at least three reasons why an answer to this question is not obvious.

As I have noted elsewhere (Blok 2014b), the tendency toward convergence and consensus can be called metaphysical. Participation and collaboration is self-evidently understood as the synthesis of different actors in the light of a unifying idea or principle. This unifying principle can be found in a shared objective, such as solving the world food problem or innovating for public health. The focus on a unifying principle or common ground, which is needed, for instance, in participatory policy-making processes (Joldersma 1997), means that commonality and consensus prevails over difference in participatory processes. Inspired by Levinas, we can argue that this commonality in participation processes is the result of the reduction of the other to the same, that is, the reduction of the fundamentally different judgments and value frames of stakeholders to a common ground in which the singularity of the different partners is neglected in favor of their commonality. The first reason why the notion of participation and collaboration in CSR and RI is not self-evident is that current notions originate from the metaphysical tradition (Blok 2014b); it explains why current concepts of participation and partnership often show a tendency toward consensus and alignment, and cannot deal with fundamental differences among stakeholders during the participation and collaboration processes. Because the ideals of partnership and participation are difficult to realize in practice (Hansen 2006), this raises

the question of how actors can acknowledge and appreciate differences among partners during the partnership.

The tendency toward consensus and alignment does not imply that all differences among stakeholders are eliminated. Several authors have indicated the importance of controversy and constructive conflict in stakeholder engagement, because these enable learning and gaining new insights in emerging technologies (Rip 1986; Cuppen 2012). However, although the importance of variety and disparity among the ideas and values of stakeholders is stressed, the cognitive distance among stakeholders should not be too large. In the case of radically different perspectives on the problem and its solution, for instance, the suggestion is to 'include people who can bridge disparate perspectives or claims' (Cuppen 2012, p. 31). Also in the case of the appreciation of different values and ideas in constructive conflict, the constructivity of conflict and controversy is dependent on the possibility of bridging and aligning disparate perspectives or claims in the end. This means that differences are appreciated, although in light of a common ground or unifying principle they are seen as complementary differences that can be bridged or aligned. Think of a non-governmental organization (NGO) for public health that is collaborating with representatives of the food industry (Blok et al. 2015). These actors find common ground in their efforts to contribute to public health and collaborate notwithstanding their different value frames and interests; they agree to disagree for the remaining issues. In case it is difficult to find such shared objectives – for instance, in the case of a stock listed multinational enterprise (MNE) that is collaborating with an NGO that fundamentally questions the political-economic ideology behind markets – these stakeholders will be excluded from the collaboration. Lezaun and Soneryd, for instance, report on stakeholder meetings on genetic modification (GM), from which so-called extra-ordinary actors were systematically excluded in order to involve the general public (Lezaun and Soneryd 2007). The second reason why the notion of participation and collaboration in CSR and RI is not self-evident, is that even if differences among stakeholders are acknowledged and appreciated, the inclusion of different but complementary stakeholders and the exclusion of fundamentally different stakeholders seems to be presupposed.

This brings us to a third and final reason why the notion of participation and collaboration in CSR and RI practices is not self-evident. The tendency toward consensus and alignment neglects the role of conflict and difference in the constitution of the identity of actors. Chantal Mouffe argues that every identification of an 'us' necessarily entails a demarcation from a 'them':

> [T]here is always the possibility of this relation us/them becoming one of friend/enemy. This happens when the others, who up to now had been considered as simply different, start to be perceived as putting into question our identity and threatening our existence. From that moment on, any form of us/them relation, be it religious, ethnic or economic, becomes the locus of an antagonism. (Mouffe 2009, pp. 550–51)

The tendency toward consensus and alignment in the notion of participation and partnership is not self-evident, because this tendency neglects the role of fundamental differences in the constitution of actors' identity. The self or identity of actors comes out in the confrontation with fundamentally different actors, which implies that stakeholders will never achieve alignment and harmony in participation and partnership practices.

The self-evident concept of partnership and participation cannot account for the role of conflict and difference in the constitution of the identity of stakeholders.

These three reasons to question the self-evidence of the concept of participation and partnership enable us to rephrase and specify the main question of this chapter: which concept of participation and partnership is able to account for stakeholder inclusion while acknowledging and appreciating their fundamentally different judgments, value frames and viewpoints? To this end, in this chapter we reconsider the concept of participation and partnership.

3.   FROM PARTICIPATION TO INTERRUPTION: FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF A NON-REDUCTIVE AND ETHICAL CONCEPT OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

In this section, we explore four characteristics of a non-reductive and ethical concept of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership, which allow for the acknowledgement and appreciation of fundamental differences among stakeholders in CSR and RI practices: (1) focus on the social–ethical relationship with other stakeholders, rather than on the cognitive understanding of the demands and needs of the actors involved; (2) focus on the performance of ethical behavior in response to the call or need of other stakeholders, rather than on the cognitive understanding of their demands and needs; (3) focus on the self-destruction and self-constitution of actors' identity in confrontation with other stakeholders, in which the performance of ethical behavior is embedded; and (4) acknowledgement of the fundamental possibility of failure of actors' responsiveness to the call of other stakeholders.

3.1   The Social–Ethical Relationships in Stakeholder Engagement, Collaboration and Partnerships

In section 2 we have seen that initial agreements among stakeholders on the problem definition and the goals of the collaboration are regarded as a precondition for successful collaboration and partnership, since they help clarify the interests and value frames partners have in solving the problem. We can conceive of this as a cognitive approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership, in which the interests, ideas and value frames of stakeholders play a central role.

In a way, this cognitive focus on understanding the interests or 'stakes' of other stakeholders is already implied in stakeholder theory itself; companies are not managed only in the best interest of their shareholders, because many other societal actors have an interest or stake in the company as well, for example, employees and NGOs (Freeman 1984). In stakeholder theory, the point of departure is to understand the rights and claims of stakeholders who can affect or be affected by the business strategy of corporate actors (Freeman 1984), and subsequently to balance these interests with sometimes competing interests of the company. In this respect, stakeholder engagement presupposes an understanding of the interests and value frames of multiple stakeholders (Habermas 1990, 1993), while stakeholder engagement can enhance understanding, for instance, in the

case of public ignorance about the impact of innovation and technology. The cognitive approach is also presupposed in the normative approach to stakeholder engagement – the idea that corporate actors should be responsive to the interests and demands of their stakeholders (Donaldson and Preston 1995; Hendry 2001) – as well as in most literature on collaboration and partnership (cf. Hardy et al. 2005; Selsky and Parker 2005, 2010; Bryson et al. 2006; Seitanidi and Crane 2009; Le Ber and Branzei 2010).

We hypothesize, on the contrary, that as long as our point of departure is found in a certain cognitive position of stakeholders – their values, norms and interests, but also a common problem statement or objective – that can be understood or known by the corporate actor, the inclusion of stakeholders is subject to the reduction of the singularity of their interests and demands to the same by assimilating their demands and needs to corporate interests (self-confirmation) or by the submission of the corporate interests to stakeholder demands (self-denial).[2] Therefore, first, we reject the primacy of the cognitive approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices and propose an approach in which the primacy of the social–ethical relationship is acknowledged. This concerns a shift from the nature of stakeholder engagement – the focus on their stake or interest – to the nature of stakeholder engagement, that is, the engagement with the demand they represent.

It involves two shifts in our concept of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership. First, the point of departure of the partnership is no longer found in the corporate actor with his or her interests and value frames that may subsequently turn out to be conflicting with the value frames of other stakeholders. Second, the social relationship no longer primarily consists in the effort to understand the other stakeholders involved in the collaboration. The other stakeholder does not simply represent another viewpoint, interest or value frame which should be taken into account or not. Instead, the other stakeholder is taken as an absolutely different actor with fundamental different value frames and interests, who can never be fully understood. This separation between actors suspends all understanding and all participation, and institutes a social relationship with other stakeholders which is intrinsically ethical, that is, responsive to their demands and needs.[3] While, in the cognitive approach to stakeholder engagement, other stakeholders are reduced to the same by the assimilation of other stakeholders (self-confirmation) or by corporate actors' submission to other more dominant stakeholders (self-denial), this ethical approach to stakeholder engagement is able to respect the fundamental differences of other stakeholders in its focus on the ethical responsiveness of corporate actors to stakeholder demands. The call of other stakeholders is normative without calling for a universal norm, and the ethical dimension of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices consist in actors' responsiveness to this call of other stakeholders. The ethical approach to stakeholder engagement implies that primacy is given to the demands of stakeholders who appeal to us to act and behave in a responsible way in our business and innovation practices.

The advantage of this shift in our attention from the cognitive understanding of the value frames and viewpoints of other stakeholders to focusing on the social–ethical relationship among stakeholders is that the focus is not (or not only) on the cognitive level of agreement on a joint problem definition, common ground or shared objective among multiple stakeholders, which is often difficult to achieve in practice (Bryson et al. 2006), but on the social–ethical relationship in which corporate actors become responsive to stakeholder demands and needs.

3.2 Performance of Ethical Behavior in Stakeholder Engagement, Collaborations and Partnerships

This brings us to a second shift in our conceptualization of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices. In section 2, we have seen that the experience of sector failure and therefore the interdependency of various stakeholders are seen as an initial condition of collaboration and partnership, because it helps to develop a common interest and objective. We can understand this as an intentional approach to stakeholder engagement. Blok et al. (2015) suggest that companies mainly engage stakeholders at a broad strategic level and only in the idea-generation phase of innovation, not during the innovation process itself. Actors first make a moral judgment, then establish moral intent, before their engagement in moral behavior (Jones 1991; Blok et al. 2017).

We can, however, turn this process around. It enables us to acknowledge that a shift is needed from the best intentions to respect the demands of other stakeholders, to a focus on the performance of ethical behavior in response to the call of other stakeholders. Why? We have to acknowledge that the tendency to reduce the other to the same in power relations among stakeholders is not something actors can easily put an end to (Selsky and Parker 2005). As Cornwall explains: 'Participation as praxis is, after all, rarely a seamless process; rather, it constitutes a terrain of contestation, in which relations of power between different actors, each with their own "projects", shape and reshape the boundaries of action' (Cornwall 2008, p. 276). Owing to this tendency to reduce the other to the same and to exhibit power play, the intention to respect the demands or interests of other stakeholders is insufficient; the fundamental differences of other stakeholders can be better respected in the continuous enactment of corporate actors' responsiveness to stakeholder demands and needs. Only in their responsiveness by performing ethical behavior toward other stakeholders is the moral intention of actors real.

This responsiveness goes beyond simple consequentialism but substitutes the other by putting corporate actors in the place of other stakeholders who bear or represent the negative impact of one's actions. This performance of ethical behavior does not necessarily call on universal norms, but calls for action, here and now, and is dependent on the circumstances in which problems emerge and can be addressed (cf. Bevan and Corvellec 2007, p. 214). In this respect, the rejection of universal norms and the call for ethical behavior in response to the call of other stakeholders highlights the importance of the singularity of the circumstances in which ethical issues in CSR and RI emerge and have to be addressed.

More important than the application of universal norms is, therefore, the demand that corporate actors' ethical responsiveness to other stakeholders should go beyond their own interests and value frames. In this respect, the focus on the behavioral performance of stakeholder engagement provides a strategy to no longer be involved in the ideal of harmony and alignment among multiple stakeholders, but instead to acknowledge fundamental differences among multiple stakeholders in corporate actors' ethical responsiveness to their demands and needs. A further advantage of such a behavioral approach to partnership and collaboration is that it prevents an 'ethics of Narcissus', that is, an approach in which actors' being seen as ethical is stressed, rather than them taking responsibility in their CSR or RI practices (cf. Roberts 2001). By focusing on ethical behavior, we are not dependent on the best intentions of companies which may

turn out to be unethical. On the contrary, in our focus on behavior, reflection on the limited and biased character of actors' current approaches of complex public problems is enhanced.

3.3   Self-destruction and Self-constitution in Stakeholder Engagement, Collaborations and Partnerships

The shift from actors' intentions to actors' performance of ethical behavior brings us to a third characteristic of an ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices. The primary function of the social relationship with other stakeholders is no longer the self-expression of the interests and value frames of actors in order to convince other stakeholders, but to become critical toward themselves, that is, toward their own interests and value frames in response to the other (self-destruction) and to become responsive to the demand of the other stakeholders (self-constitution). In partnerships and collaborations, other stakeholders tell and teach corporate actors the limitations of their interests and value frames and help them to question their self-evidently presupposed value frames and interests; businesses and NGOs can broaden each other's perspective on complex public problems and on the role and responsibility these different stakeholders have in solving the problem. In order to enhance self-criticism and self-constitution in CSR and RI practices, actors should not only collaborate with different but complementary partners, or partners with relatively low cognitive distance, but with fundamentally different stakeholders as well. Precisely these fundamentally different stakeholders ensure diversity and pluriformity among multiple stakeholders involved (Fiorino 1990), enhance and secure social learning (Bandura 1986) and the emergence of new insights (Jehn et al. 1999). Self-criticism has two sides. On the one hand, other stakeholders can question corporate actors' ideas and value frames (self-destruction) and, on the other hand, corporate actors can become responsive to the demands and needs of other stakeholders (self-constitution). In such an ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership, the focus is no longer on the interests and value frames of the actors as input in the collaboration and partnership, but on the values and ideas as output of their responsiveness to the demands of other stakeholders during the collaboration.

This focus on the values and ideas as output of actors' responsiveness in the development of previously unimagined solutions (Gray and Stites 2013) is especially important in the context of innovation. Innovation seems to flourish in an environment of open innovation, in which the interaction with other or different stakeholders is seen as a resource of competitive advantage (Chesbrough 2003); it is mainly the diversity of problem definitions and values that leads to creative and innovative solutions (cf. Blok 2014a). In this, stakeholders not simply represent another viewpoint, interest or value frame which should be taken into account. Other stakeholders are taken as absolutely foreign, because there are always other others, for instance, future generations or foreign societies, which may be affected by the future impact of actors' innovations. To the extent that a corporate actor has to be responsive to an infinity of other stakeholders, their responsiveness involves, first, the fundamental acknowledgement of the pluriformity of other viewpoints, interests and value frames. It is the engagement with a pluriformity of different viewpoints and interests which can increase social learning (Rip 1986), enhance

and secure actors' openness toward other perspectives and other possible solutions of public problems, and benefit from different stakeholders as a resource to finding new opportunities to address public problems (Blok 2014a). Furthermore, collaboration and partnership with fundamentally different stakeholders will help keep open various options for innovation during the process, increase actors' adaptivity to changes in the environment, and accommodate plurality in innovation (cf. Owen et al. 2013).

3.4 Structural Possibility of Failure in Stakeholder Engagement, Collaborations and Partnerships

To the extent that actors have to be responsive to an infinity of other stakeholders, corporate actors' responsiveness involves the acknowledgement that this responsiveness to other stakeholders will always fail in light of the infinity of other stakeholders they cannot be responsive to. The other stakeholders show primarily that our own understanding of public problems is always limited and biased by our own interests and value frames, that our knowledge is always insufficient to predict the future impact and the consequences of our innovations. This is called our epistemic insufficiency (Blok 2014a). This acknowledgement of the failure of actors' responsiveness implies a shift from corporate immunization strategies to prevent stakeholder criticism of CSR or RI practices and to be only seen as responsive, toward a vulnerability strategy in which stakeholder criticism is enhanced. This is the fourth characteristic of an ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices.

In this concept of stakeholder engagement, other stakeholders primarily represent the complexity of public problems, such as public health or sustainable development, and the fundamental uncertainty of the future impact of actors' CSR interventions and innovations to address these challenges. It is the complexity of public problems and the structural possibility of failure of actors' responsiveness to stakeholders' demands which calls for stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership to solve these problems. On the one hand, this engagement in partnerships and collaborations precisely engages stakeholders in order to define the right impact of CSR or RI policies, to prevent innovation lock-in and path dependency (Stirling 2007, 2008), enhance corrigibility (Collingridge 1980) and accommodate plurality in innovation strategies. However, owing to the fundamental uncertainty and possible failure of all approaches to public problems, stakeholder engagement consists, on the other hand, in the performance of ethical behavior in order to deal with these problems, although there is still the possibility of failure (Blok and Lemmens 2015).

The advantage of acknowledging the fundamental possibility of failure of actors' responsiveness to the demands of an infinity of other stakeholders is that it prevents overly easy solutions and acknowledges that alignment and harmony among stakeholders is difficult to achieve in the case of complex public problems such as sustainable development or public health (Cuppen 2012). These problems are sometimes called 'wicked problems', and are complex and ill structured. Since public problems often have no closed form and concern complex systems in which cause and effect are uncertain or unknown, no simple solutions exist for them. On the one hand, we cannot propose definite solutions if we do not have a definite problem description. On the other hand, all proposed solutions remain finite and provisional compared with the complexity and depth of the

public problem itself. We can never reduce complex public problems to a finite set of particular problems, nor say that these problems can definitely be solved, that is, that sustainability or public health is fully achieved. The advantage of an ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership is that the complexity of public problems is represented by the infinity of other stakeholders involved in partnership and collaboration, each with their own and legitimate value frames, and even ideologies, with regard to such public problems.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP IN CSR AND RI PRACTICES

In our development of a concept of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices that is able to acknowledge and appreciate fundamental differences among stakeholders, we have encountered four characteristics of such a non-reductive and ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership, as summarized in Table 16.1.

Table 16.1   Reductive and cognitive versus non-reductive and ethical approaches to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in CSR and RI practices

Reductive-cognitive approach to stakeholder engagement, participation and partnership	Non-reductive-ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership
(1) Cognitive focus on the interests, viewpoints and value frames of stakeholders	(1) Focus on the social–ethical relationship in which actors become ethically responsive to stakeholders' demands
(2) Focus on actors' intention to respect the demands of other stakeholders	(2) Focus on performance of ethical behavior in response to the demands of other stakeholders. Only in actors' responsiveness to the demands of other stakeholders are their demands and needs acknowledged and appreciated
(3) Focus on the identity (mission, interests, core values) of the actors as input of collaboration and partnership practices, i.e., as input to convince other stakeholders	(3) Focus on the identity (mission, interests and core values) of the actors as output of their responsiveness to the demands of other stakeholders/complex public problems (self-destruction and self-constitution)
(4) Focus on the prevention of stakeholder criticism (immunization strategy)	(4) Focus on the enhancement of self-criticism by involving fundamentally different stakeholders, because of the structural possibility of the imperfection or failure of actors' responsiveness to other stakeholders/complex public problems (vulnerability strategy)

These four characteristics of a non-reductive and ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and participation in CSR and RI practices have several implications for collaboration and partnership practices in CSPs, MSAs, and so on. We explore these implications in the remainder of this chapter. Based on the ground-breaking work of Selsky and Parker (2005), Seitanidi and Crane (2009) revealed the critical micro-processes within partnership formation.[4]

According to Seitanidi and Crane, the first stage of partnership implementation consists of the following steps: the strategic decision of a company for partnership as the preferred associational form to work on complex public problems (cf. Utting and Zammit 2009); the exploration of possible partners; and the selection of partner organizations based on selection criteria. They describe an additional step in the event of reputational risk, the situation in which potential partners came to undermine the reputation, integrity or brand of the company.

From the perspective of the cognitive approach to collaboration and partnership, partnership selection should consider the cognitive distance among actors and select bridgeable perspectives or claims of different stakeholders; it excludes unbridgeable perspectives and includes bridgeable perspectives. The ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership would focus on the fundamentally different stakeholders as well, because these 'unbridgeable' perspectives and claims, in particular, show the limitations and insufficiency of actors' understanding of public problems, on the one hand, and provide new insights to other possible solutions, on the other. In this respect, the ability of stakeholders to criticize corporate actors – and question the legitimacy of their reputation – is one of the main criteria for partner inclusion according to a non-reductive and ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership.

According to Seitanidi and Crane, the second stage of partnership implementation concerns the design of the partnership itself and consists of the following steps: partnership experimentation and adaptation, which involves agreements on partnership objectives and the operationalization of these agreements within the partnership. From the perspective of the cognitive approach to collaboration and partnership, the focus should be on the initial agreements on the problem definition, based on the interests and value frames of the different stakeholders involved, in order to achieve higher degrees of alignment on common goals (cf. Le Ber and Branzei 2010; Nowell 2010). In an iterative process of revising and adjusting the different conceptions of the problem and its solution, different actors can find areas where the problem definition and the objectives of the different actors overwrite or overlap each other in a process of value frame fusion (Le Ber and Branzei 2010). The ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership, however, would focus on (1) the social–ethical relationship in which stakeholders become ethically responsive to each other's demands. The operationalization of this social–ethical relationship is (2) primarily found in actors' performance of ethical behavior in response to the demands of other stakeholders. In this, the focus is not on the initial agreement on the problem definition based on the interests and value frames of the actors involved. Instead, it is based on actors' responsiveness to the demands of other stakeholders in their (face-to-face) encounter.

The final stage of partnership implementation concerns the institutionalization of the partnership. According to Seitanidi and Crane, partnership programs and processes

should be embedded in the partnering organizations. The institutionalization is measured by the extent to which partners are able to overcome crises within the partnership, 'a) by accepting the other organization's strengths and also weaknesses as a reality of an integrative relationship and b) by not avoiding conflict but rather accept disagreements as functional which permits retaining the organization's identity intact' (Seitanidi and Crane 2009, p. 422). The ethical approach to collaboration and partnership would agree with this third stage of partnership formation, although the institutionalization does not necessarily serve the conservation of an organization's identity, but rather serves the continuous adjustment of their identity because of the structural possibility of the failure of actors' responsiveness to other stakeholders. The focus is no longer on the identity (interests and value frames) of the actors as input in the partnership, but on the values and ideas as output of their mutual responsiveness during the partnership.

In Figure 16.1, we depict the process of partnership formation that integrates the
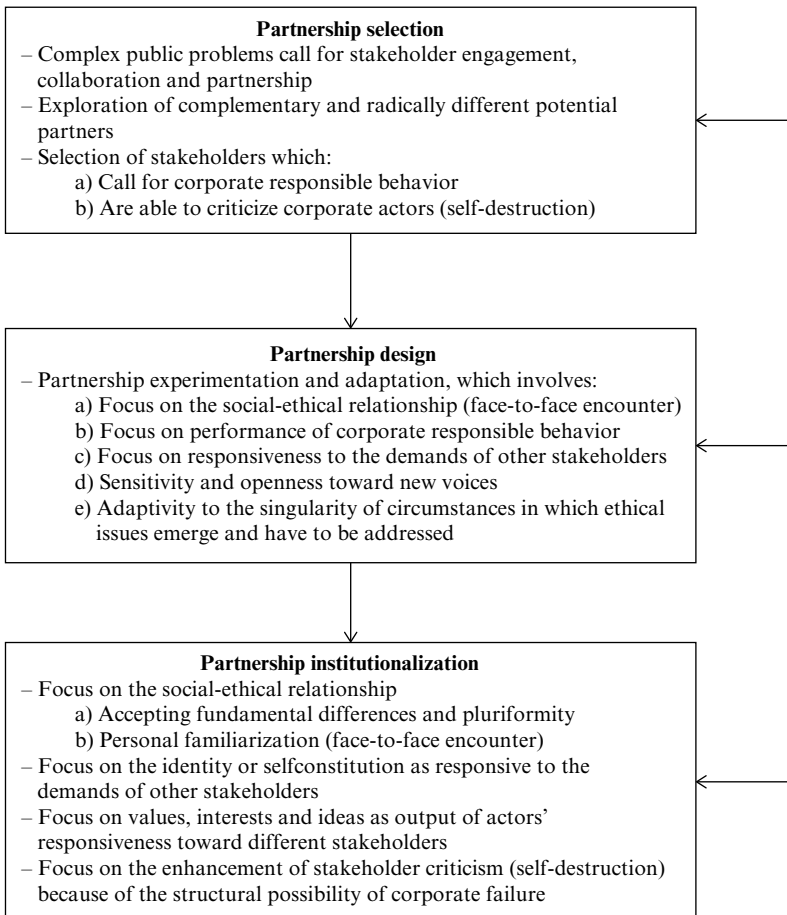

Figure 16.1   Partnership stages of a non-reductive and ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership

partnership stages of Seitanidi and Crane (2009) with our ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership.

We have opened a new perspective on stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership in the context of CSR and RI practices. Contrary to traditional conceptualizations, our non-reductive and ethical approach to stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership does not presuppose a direct or indirect ideal of harmony and alignment, which is difficult to achieve in the case of complex public problems, but acknowledges and appreciates the role of difference and constructive conflict without allowing only bridgeable or complementary differences among multiple stakeholders. We have shown the fundamental role of different stakeholders in the constitution of actors' corporate identity, in which their ethical behavior in response to the demands of other stakeholders or complex public problems is embedded. In future research, the advantages and disadvantages of such a non-reductive and ethical concept of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership should be further explored and operationalized in CSR and RI practices.

NOTES

1. The introduction of Levinas's philosophy in the context of management and organization is beyond the scope of this chapter. For this, see Blok (2014a, 2014b).
2. See Blok (2014b) for a full discussion of this process of reduction in relation to the collaboration and partnership literature.
3. With this, the difference between a Habermassian and a Levinassian conceptualization of stakeholder engagement, collaboration and partnership becomes clear. While both Habermas and Levinas focus on the social relationship among actors, Levinas, contrary to Habermas, would reject the Habermassian ideal of understanding the other stakeholders, for instance in an ideal speech situation (cf. Blok, 2014a).
4. See Blok (2014b) for a full discussion of the metaphysical origin of their conceptualization of partnership and collaboration, and a discussion of the inclusion of different but complementary stakeholders and the exclusion of radically different stakeholders. See also the excellent review of the partnership literature for recent results by Gray and Stites (2013).

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