Cross Culture Work:
Practices of Collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program
This research was funded by the Next Generation Infrastructures Foundation.

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Cross Culture Work: 
Practices of Collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor aan de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 
op gezag van de rector magnificus prof.dr. F.A. van der Duyn Schouten, 
in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie van de Faculteit der Sociale Wetenschappen 
op dinsdag 25 juni 2013 om 11.45 uur in de aula van de universiteit, 
De Boelelaan 1105

doork

Karen Cornelia Maria Smits 
geboren te ˈs-Hertogenbosch
promotoren: prof. dr. M.B. Veenswijk
             prof. dr. A.H. van Marrewijk
Acknowledgements

Working together is often a complex undertaking. It is through collaboration, however, that we can combine our knowledge, skills and experiences to create and develop magnificent projects. The same goes for this Ph.D. project. I have been privileged to work with wonderfully inspiring people and here, at the beginning of this book, I would like to express my gratitude.

First and foremost, my appreciation goes to my promotors Alfons van Marrewijk and Marcel Veenswijk. This research project shows the result of our teamwork. Alfons and Marcel strongly believed in this project, allowed me to explore the academic jungle and helped me to find the path when I was completely lost. Marcel, I couldn’t have succeeded without your analytical eye, and Alfons, your stimulating talks and fascinating experiences helped me immensely throughout this project. You both supported me all along and I hope that we continue working together on fascinating projects.

Thanks and appreciation also go to the members of the reading committee, who devoted time and energy to review the manuscript and provided me with constructive comments: Steward Clegg, Halleh Gorashi, Jaap de Heer, Marcel den Hertogh en Joop Koppejan.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Carel Roessingh. From the moment I stepped into his classroom he has been inspiring and encouraging. He always triggered my curiosity, opened doors for me and I believe his mentorship turned into a genuine friendship. You have taught me so much.

All project participants in the Panama Canal Expansion Program, as well as practitioners from other projects with whom I could discuss my findings, deserve my sincere gratitude for allowing me into their work life and sharing their experiences and thoughts with me. Especially Jorge Quijano, Ilya Marotta, Jan Kop, Carlos Fabrega and Joe Cazares for giving me the opportunity to study the project organization from
all angles. And thank you to those friends in Panama who taught me about their culture and made the fieldwork period an unforgettable time in life: Blanca, Karina, Yafá, Marco, Roberto, Davy and Pim.

Of course, a heartfelt appreciation goes to my colleagues. The former department of Culture, Organization and Management, currently the department of Organization Sciences at VU University, offered me a professional work environment where someone was always available for advice. Thank you very much! Sierk deserves to be mentioned here for his intellectual support and creativity with regard to the book title, Hanneke and Myrte, for guiding me through the academic life, Elles and Welmoed, for their administrative support, and the members of the PhD Club for fierce debates, inspirational feedback on my work and for sharing their work with me. Special thanks to fellow Ph.D.’s Martijn, Kalpana, Nicole, Sander, Anne, Dhoya, Leonore, Maya, Gea, Silvia, Michiel, Leonie. And to Femke, for comradeship, bearing the brunt of frustrations and celebrating each small step completed towards finalizing this book. I thank you!

My friends Roos, Heather, Jaap, Hanneke and Steve came to visit me in Panama. Thank you for the wonderful adventures we had. It was amazing that I could give you a peek into my fieldwork life and I enjoy that we share those experiences. Heather, I’m very grateful for your editing work on the manuscript!

I want to say thank you in the biggest way to my friends, who were sources of laughter, joy and support during this Ph.D. project. My paranymphs each represent a group of friends in my life. Lot van Brakel symbolizes my friends in Amsterdam, especially Maud, Eva, Roos, Bregje, Chris and Chris. We all met at this university and the friendship we have built from here always fills me with happiness. Karin Schoones stands for my friends in Brabant: Gera, Danique, Marianne, Joris and Bas. You have known me for such a long time and never forget how to put a smile on my face. Dear friends, you mean the world to me!
No words can express nor any act of gratitude can relay what the love and support from my family means to me. Marij, you visited me twice in Panama and those memories will stay with me forever. Sanne and Toon, the many emails, post cards and text messages were highly appreciated. Mum and Dad, you support me in every step I take. I owe you everything and I hope that this work makes you proud. Despite the geographical distance between us, dear family, you will always be close to me.

And finally, Adolfo. Meeting you has been one of the many amazing things that made this project so special. Although at times there was an ocean between us, we were courageous and proved that our love is strong. Your encouragement helped me in finalizing this project and I know you will support all of my future projects. Schatje, I thank you so much for sharing life with me.

Before starting this adventure, I was often warned that it would be a lonely process at times. Indeed, there were many things I had to do by myself, but honestly, I never felt alone; you were all there to support me. This book is a result of a collaborative process, in which each of you participated in your own way, and I’m grateful for your contribution. Nevertheless, it needs to be said that all responsibility for the following, and for any error you might find, is mine.

Karen Smits
Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Chapter 1. Introducing the Field 15
  Visiting the Panama Canal 16
  Mega projects 18
  Cross-Cultural Collaboration 21
  Problem Statement and Outline 25

PART I: GOING TO THE FIELD

Chapter 2. Practices of Collaboration in Mega Projects 33
  Introduction 34
  Developments in Project Management Research 34
    The Practice Turn in Project Management Research 39
    Projects-as-Practice 45
  Cross-Cultural Collaboration and Project Management 48
  Cross-Cultural Management Research 52
  To Conclude 56

Chapter 3. Ethnography in Practice 59
  Knowledge Claim 60
  Organizational Ethnography 63
  Selection of and Access to a Mega Project 66
    Obtaining Access 69
  Ethnography in the Field 71
    Interviewing 75
    Observing 77
    Reading 80
  Analyzing and Writing 82
  About me: the researcher 87
Collaboration in Practice

‘It just does not work that way in the ACP’

‘Where would I be without you?’

‘We are the Shadow of CH2M Hill’

Discussion

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PART III: LEARNING FROM THE FIELD

Chapter 8. Cross-Cultural Work in the Panama Canal Expansion Program: A Collabyrinth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Actuality</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Collaboration Labyrinth</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices of Collaboration</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manifest practices</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealed Practices</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Collaboration Continuum</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC-practices</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the Academic Debates</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas for Future Research</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear Project Participant,</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partners</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibilities</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Summary</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Summary</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Summary</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the author</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGInfra PhD Thesis Series on Infrastructures</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables and Figures

Tables
3.1 Short-list of mega projects 67
3.2 Overview of presence in the research field 72
3.3 Amount of interviews per organization 76
3.4 Type of documents per organization 80
I.1 Total score for tender consortiums in Third Set of Locks Project 134
5.1 Spatial setting of the GUPC project offices 171
6.1 Bridging actors 190
7.1 Common versus chaperone practices in Program Management 233
8.1 Manifest practices in the Panama Canal Expansion Program 252
8.2 Concealed practices in the Panama Canal Expansion Program 258
8.3 ABC-practices 264

Figures
3.1 Final research cases 84
4.1 Map of Panama 95
4.2 Panama Canal profile 105
4.3 Components of the Panama Canal Expansion Program 113
4.4 Measurements of the locks 114
4.5 Explanation water-saving system 115
4.6 Partners in the Third Set of Locks Project 120
7.1 Description of tasks in program management services for Engineer 212
8.1 The Collabyrinth 247
8.2 The Collaboration Continuum 262
### List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>Autoridad del Canal de Panamá / Panama Canal Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUSA</td>
<td>Constructora Urbana Sociedad Anónima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUPC</td>
<td>Grupo Unidos por el Canal / United Group for the Canal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impregilo</td>
<td>Impregilo Group</td>
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<td>Jan de Nul</td>
<td>Jan de Nul Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCC</td>
<td>Panama Canal Company</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWS</td>
<td>Rijkswaterstaat / Dutch Ministry of Public Works and Water management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacyr</td>
<td>Sacyr Vallehermoso Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMT</td>
<td>Works Management Team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visiting the Panama Canal

Wow! The massive and large entrance of the Centro de Visitantes de Miraflores (Miraflores Visitors Center) blows me away. Seen from far away, this grotesque building marks the importance of the Panama Canal for Panama. I have been in Panama for two days now and I have seen ships passing through the country as if they are big trucks driving slowly on a jungle road. Just like any other tourist in Panama, I visit the museum that is built around the Panama Canal locks and located close to the city: Miraflores Locks.

Long, steep stairs, or an escalator, lead towards the entrance of the building where the ticket officer charges me eight Balboa (or US dollar, these currencies are equal) for a full entrance ticket for foreigners. Upon entrance of the building a cold air gives me goose bumps while the security guard guides me through a detector and checks my purse. A guide is waiting for me, or so it seems, to explain the route in the museum. With a thick American accent she urges me to go to the observation deck immediately, because a ship is passing through the locks right now. I can see the rest of the museum, four exhibitions and a documentary, later. Following her advice, and many other tourists, I take an elevator up to the fourth floor. When I step outside, a blanket of moist air embraces me. The temperature and humidity are high. The sun is burning on my face. The observation deck is filled with people, all leaning over the banisters to see as much as possible of the canal and the ship passing through. The view is incredible. The Panama Canal is right in front of me. I can see the Pacific entrance to the canal on my left hand side and on my right hand side, far away, I recognize the Pedro Miguel Locks. In front of me, and in between two water lanes, and odd looking, seemingly small, white building reveals that these locks were built in 1913. Constructed such a long time ago; it still appears to be in perfect state!

Through speakers I hear the voice of a guide named ‘Kennedy’, giving information about the ship that is passing through the lock gates at the moment. I notice he speaks in American English first and then pronounces the same information in Spanish. The vessel entering the locks at the moment is called Petrel Arrow Naussau and carries the flag of the Bahamas. The cargo ship came from the Atlantic Ocean and is passing through the canal to reach the Pacific Ocean. While the boat enters
the second lock gate, Kennedy explains that, with an average of 35 to 40 vessels a day, it is mostly container vessels that pass through the Panama Canal. “Apart from the administrative process beforehand, a transit through the Panama Canal takes about 8 to 10 hours,” he states. Kennedy needs to interrupt his story to announce that a documentary video will be shown in English in a few minutes, if you have a full entrance pass, you can go to the theatre on the ground floor. Like most tourists on the observation deck, I decide to stay. Quickly, Kennedy continues by informing that, with each vessel passage approximately 52 million gallons (that’s about 197 million liters) of fresh water goes in the ocean. This water comes from three different lakes that store Panama’s rainwater. None of the water is recycled, because during the nine months of the rainy season sufficient water remains in the lakes to operate the Canal year-round.

The vessel is connected to what Kennedy calls ‘mules’, little locomotives. “These are not here to pull the ship, just to make sure it is centered,” assures Kennedy. He also explains that each locomotive weighs about fifty tons, costs about 2 million US dollars, runs on electricity and is designed by the Mitsubishi company. Kennedy gives further detailed information, but my attention is drawn to the operation of the locks.

The lock releases its water and the vessel slowly moves further down in the lock. It is a funny sight: it seems like the vessel disappears in the ground. When the boat is at the lowest level, a bell rings to signal that the lock gates will be opened. Gradually, both doors open. They look very heavy and strong, which they must be if they can hold 52 gallons of water and carry the weight of a full cargo ship. Using its own power, the vessel moves to the next lock gate, where, applying the same routine, the ship is lowered to ocean level and released to continue his journey in the Pacific Ocean.

While Petrel Arrow Nassau leaves this highly traveled waterway behind, I’m still standing on the observation deck. Amazed by all there is to see: the waters of the Panama Canal, the hundred year old locks that still function perfectly and the immense size of the vessel, I can only imagine how many people are directly connected with the operations of the Panama Canal on a daily basis. Also, it strikes me that English and Spanish are strongly interwoven in the Panama Canal. The guide spoke in English before translating his text to Spanish, Panama’s mother tongue, all signs were both in English and in Spanish and the American currency and measurement units were
This fragment, derived from my research journal, marks the beginning of the fieldwork period for this study. A visit to the Miraflores Locks is a must-see when in Panama, and for me it was the first introduction to what was going to be my daily workplace for the year to come. Now, I use this fragment to introduce another large undertaking: an academic study on cross-cultural collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. In this book I will, similar to the passage portrayed above, use fragments from observations and quotes from interviews to portray the everyday work life of project participants. For an entire year I was present in the daily operations of this mega project. I had the opportunity to gather the data for this study by observing numerous work activities, interviewing many employees and participating in a wide variety of events. The aim of the research was to understand how actors make sense of collaboration when operating in a culturally complex project organization.

**Mega projects**

Among the Channel Tunnel connecting the United Kingdom with France, the Empire State Building that once was the tallest building in the world and the Dutch Delta Works protecting the country from floods, the American Society of Civil Engineers listed the Panama Canal as one of the seven wonders of the modern world. From these seven, the Panama Canal is not only the oldest, but also the mega project that needed the most years (34) to complete construction. In 1880, French engineers started to build a water passage across Panama. Nine years later their effort ended in failure as a result of mismanagement, devastating diseases, financial problems, and engineering mistakes. In 1904, the United States took over and, led by Theodore Roosevelt, breakthroughs in medicine, science, technology and engineering supported the United States to finish a spectacular piece of construction. The opening of the canal, on August 15, 1914, was history's greatest engineering project.

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1 American Society of Civil Engineers, www.asce.org (last visited, October 8, 2012).
Introducing the Field

marvel and a victory of man over nature that would not be matched until the moon landings (Parker, 2009).

Serving as milestones in mankind’s development, national triumphs and technical advances, mega projects are a ubiquitous part of our everyday life. However, the construction processes of these mega projects often fail to meet expectations as they suffer from cost overruns, delays, and deficit in terms of quality and user satisfaction (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, & Rothengatter, 2003; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). In the building of the Panama Canal, the French had to deal with an earthquake, fires, floods, epidemics of yellow fever and malaria, and, additionally, they had insufficient funds, faced a huge amount of corruption and lacked the engineering knowledge to finalize the endeavor (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977; Parker, 2009). In 1889, the French attempt came to a tragic ending after more than a billion francs—about US$ 287 million—had been spent and accidents and diseases had claimed over twenty thousand lives (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977). In contrary to these disappointing numbers, the Americans constructed the Panama Canal years later within time and under budget. In a period of ten years, the construction project was finalized six months ahead of schedule with a final price of US$ 352 million, which was US$ 23 million below the estimated costs (McCullough, 1977).

Since the opening of the Panama Canal, in 1914, numerous other mega projects around the world have been constructed, but many projects complete with less positive numbers than the Panama Canal construction. Often, these projects experience issues with regard to realizing on time, in budget and to scope. In Amsterdam, for instance, the construction of a new metro line was budgeted at € 1.4 billion and scheduled for completion in 2011. Severe technical problems as well as administrative difficulties obstructed these plans. Recent figures show that costs have already reached € 3.1 billion and the year for expected conclusion is now 2017 (Soetenhorst, 2011). Also the Boston Central Artery/Tunnel Project, commonly known as the ‘Big Dig’, became known for its cost increases and time inflations. Initially budgeted at a cost of US$ 2.56 billion, the project costs increased up to US$ 14.8 billion, more than five times the original estimate (Greiman, 2010). For both projects, and these are merely examples of many other contemporary mega projects, the public expressed concerns of the affordability and efficiency of these
undertakings and some parties suggested to cease the construction. In Amsterdam, the municipality has been held responsible for the problems in implementation of the metro line and the alderman in charge had to resign. Such a social impact is typical for megaprojects, which can be characterized by their large scale, the long development process and the high number of participants. Other common features are the high-risk technological innovation, its economic and environmental impact, and the large capital needed to realize the entity (Pitsis, Clegg, Marosszeky, & Rura-Polley, 2003; Van Marrewijk, 2007; Warrack, 1993).

The problematic performance of infrastructure projects has attracted academic attention (see for example Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Polley, & Marosszeky, 2002; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Van Marrewijk, Clegg, Pitsis, & Veenswijk, 2008; Warrack, 1993). While these studies mainly concentrate on themes such as policy making, contracting, expected outcomes, risks and project performance, it appears that both academics and practitioners feel the need for more insight into the ‘people’ side of project management (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). Although traditional research on projects and the management of projects continues to be devoted to upgrading project performance through social factors, an exception is found in Pryke and Smith’s relationship approach, focusing on “(…) the way in which relationships between people, between people and firms, and between firms as project actors can be managed” (Pryke & Smyth, 2006:21). They state that collaboration between people has a significant and prominent effect on project success. Others acknowledge this statement, arguing that the quality of relationships is a key factor in successful project outcomes (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Pitsis, Kornberger, & Clegg, 2004). Hence, megaprojects can be perceived as complex social settings due to likely tensions regarding unpredictability, control, and interaction between project partners (Bresnen, Goussevskaia, & Swan, 2005a; Cicmil, Williams, Thomas, & Hodgson, 2006). Furthermore, mega projects always require a combination of skills, knowledge and resources that are organizationally dispersed. Therefore, an important trait of mega projects is the diverse cultural background of its participants.
Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Collaboration between different partners such as public administrators, construction companies, engineers and subcontractors is considered a critical factor for successful project outcomes (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). These partners all retain their own values and work practices composed by their country of residence, sector and profession, which can deeply affect collaboration. In line with this, when people participate in a project organization, their identities are still deeply embedded in their home organizations, their profession and other groups that they dwell from in their life (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). Consequently, numerous cultural differences and similarities, as well as distinctive practices and differing values and interests for participation, emerge when firms and people come together in a project organization.

The field of research on culture has long been influenced by frameworks portraying the differences in practices and preferences between countries on a national level of analysis and how these frameworks enable comparisons between countries (Primecz, Romani, & Sackmann, 2011). Culture, however, cannot be implicitly defined in terms of nationality, nor can such frameworks predict or describe what happens when people actually come together, interact and collaborate with each other (Primecz et al., 2011). Assuming that all inhabitants in one nation and all managers and employees in an organization share the same cultural values would ignore significant themes as social variation, diversity and power relations among or between nations and organizations (Søderberg & Holden, 2002). Accordingly, such an a-contextual and a-political understanding of culture, as has been followed by the dominant approach in cross-cultural research, fails to see the processes of culture construction and distinction drawing (Ybema & Byun, 2009). Recognizing that characteristics of national cultures alone are insufficient for understanding how organizational actors draw upon and deploy cultural differences and similarities in their everyday work practices, several scholars included a tradition of interpretative research in cross-cultural management studies (Boyacigiller, Kleinberg, Philips, & Sackmann, 2004). Instead of comparing cultural aspects, these scholars are interested in cultural interaction and the impact of culture on the organizational life (Sackmann...
& Philips, 2004). An additional stream in this research field aims at unraveling the insiders’ perspective to understand how actors socially construct their everyday work life, while taking into account the complexities, contradictions and paradoxes that cultural realities mean for individuals, groups and organizations (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). As such, the field on culture research is moving towards perceiving organizations as a multiplicity of cultures in which members develop a shared set of assumptions within the organization setting, but, at the same time, carry various sets of assumptions acquired outside the organization (Boyacigiller et al., 2004). Hence, recent research efforts in this field view culture as something that is emerging from interactions among people while they make sense of the context in which they live and work (e.g. Mahadevan, 2012; Mayer & Louw, 2012; Van Marrewijk, 2010b; Ybema & Byun, 2009).

In the daily practice of mega projects, actors continuously translate and negotiate their values, practices and interests. Project participants translate social debates and abstract notions of public values into their own idiosyncratic interpretations and priorities for certain values change over time (Veeneman, Dicke, & De Bruijne, 2009). Generally, public values are the outcome of political debate and negotiation processes between public administrators, private organizations, interest groups, experts or executive agencies engaged in or affected by a policy of public service (Charles, Dicke, Koppenjan, & Ryan, 2007; Van Gestel, Koppenjan, Schrijver, Van de ven, & Veeneman, 2008). Examples of public values are affordability, efficiency, transparency, accountability, reliability and effectiveness. Veeneman et al. (2009) portray public values as relatively abstract terms that change towards more concrete goals in the stages of the decision-making processes. In other words, public values are not perceived as static, but rather as dynamic concepts that may change over time. Furthermore, public values are not considered to be universal, but dependent on context (Charles et al., 2007). In the academic debate on safeguarding public values, much attention has been given to the top-down implementation of public values (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; De Bruijn & Dicke, 2006; Van Gestel et al., 2008; Veeneman et al., 2009). Interestingly, Van der Wal (2008) identified the differences and similarities between values in public and private organizations and found that problems as a result of conflicting values seldom occur. Nevertheless, his study reveals
that it is still unclear what happens when organizations and individuals are explicitly confronted with differences and similarities between their respective interpretations of values. Moreover, little attention is paid to how public values are translated and negotiated in the process of collaboration where an abundance of cultures, but also a wide variety of ideas, and interests and expectations come together (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Huxham, 1996).

Taking these developments into account, this study seeks to explore how project participants collaborate in mega projects. From a bottom-up approach it focuses on how project participants enact public values in their daily work environment. Since this includes studying the project participants' everyday organizational life, at the micro level, explicit attention is paid to the practices of collaboration. Emphasizing on action and interaction, on the details of work, research on practices examines the internal dynamics in the organization and is interested in what people actually do and say (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003a). In line with Nicolini et al (2003a), practices are perceived as ways of action that are relational, mediated by artifacts and always rooted in a context of interaction. A practice is comprised of three features: (1) it involves the cooperative effort of human beings and is extended in time and bounded by rules, (2) every practice entails a set of ‘internal goods’: outcomes that can only be achieved by practicing in the practice itself, and (3) joining and participating in a practice involves trying to achieve the standards of excellence that count in the practice at that time (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). The interaction between actors leads to practices that sustain collaboration. Gherardi notes: “participation in a practice entails taking part of a professional language game, mastering the rules and being able to use them” (Gherardi, 2000: 216). Geiger (2009) stresses that practicing is not an individual cognitive resource, but rather something that people do together. Moreover, he verifies that practicing is a process of continuous enactment, refinement, reproduction and change based on tacitly shared understandings within the practicing community (Geiger, 2009). For Nicolini et al. (2003), practices are a bricolage of material, mental, social and cultural resources. To make sense of a practice, actors need to unravel the phenomena out of the undifferentiated flux or raw experiences and conceptually fix and label it, so that the practice can become a shared understanding for communicational
Chapter 1

exchanges (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). In a short period of freeze, which is called bracketing, practices are iteratively developed because actors instinctively apply their tacit knowledge and prior experiences to the flow of interactions (Weick et al., 2005). Engaging in reflection-in-action, actors try to coherently accommodate new understandings (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). Gradually, their routine practices then change, extend and provide opportunities for further changes (Tsoukas & Chia, 2010). Essentially, practices reproduce norms and values, but in the process of translation and negotiation, new practices are generated (Geiger, 2009). As such, when collaborating in a cultural complex work environment, like the project organization, actors shape and reshape their cultures, values and practices to make sense of their everyday work environment.

As this study’s focal point is to gain an insiders’ perspective and understand how project participants make sense of collaboration in their daily work, thus, aiming to focus on the micro level of the project organization, an ethnographic approach is most suitable. This anthropological approach is based on close contact with the everyday life of a studied society or group for a fairly long period of time, concentrating on cultural issues such as shared meanings, common practices and mutual symbols (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). In organizational settings, the anthropological approach can be useful to investigate lived experiences and to understand formal and informal dynamics (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). The researcher engages with what people do and how they talk about what they do without losing sight of their organizational context and how they make sense of this context (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009). As an ethnographer, I gathered a myriad of voices from inside the organization by observing, interviewing and participating in the project. Instead of delivering an aerial picture taken from the outside, I could portray a detailed picture of what actually happens in the project organization. In the third chapter of this book I will further elaborate on the methodological design of this research. At this moment, I would like to emphasize that this study does not seek to relate the effect of collaboration to the outcome of a project, nor does it start with theory abstracted from action, it rather takes a more inductive approach to research that focuses on the way in which practices are translated, negotiated and initiated in the daily work life of organizational actors.
This research is part of the Next Generation Infrastructures Foundation (NGInfra) that represents a large international consortium of knowledge institutions, market players and governmental bodies aiming to improve our vital infrastructures. As part of the theme Public Values, the project ‘Cultural Change in the Infrastructural sector’ addresses the necessity from both public and private parties to develop “new forms of efficient and effective cooperation between parties with very different cultures in highly complex environments such as large construction projects” (NGInfra, 2012). This study is an essential element of an extensive research project that is initiated to investigate the possibilities to meet this goal.

**Problem Statement and Outline**

Following the disasters and crises that occurred in many mega projects, of which the Amsterdam Metro Line and the ‘Big Dig’ are just but a few examples, and in addition to the existing body of literature in project management, both academics and practitioners express the need to obtain a better understanding of the everyday practices of project participants. Underscoring this demand, Söderlund (2004) recognizes that limited interest is paid to the actual work practices and performance of project members and he calls for more in-depth studies on the role, style and function of project management. Furthermore, Bresnen et al. (2005a) take the request a step further by arguing that the critical social science perspective needs to be incorporated in project management research. They suggest to seek for understanding of project organization and project management itself, rather than for the impact that social factors have on project outcomes (Bresnen et al., 2005a). Accordingly, Cicmil and Hodgson (2006) express the need to explore how the relationship between individuals and collectivities are being produced and reproduced, and how power relations create and sustain social reality in projects. Their research group proposes a focus on the ‘actuality’ in project organizations and suggests to strive for the lived experiences of its participants (Cicmil et al., 2006). What is more, the notion that mega projects involve a high number of participants residing from various organizations, each bringing their own idiosyncratic practices to the project, requires a focus on cross-cultural collaboration. In fact, it is striking that in the environment of executing mega...
projects, where collaboration is essential, little attention is paid to how collaboration comes about, what can affect the collaboration and how a collaborative relationship could be enhanced. As such, it makes for an interesting and relevant topic to study the practices of collaboration in a mega project.

This study offers a deeper insight into cultural complexity of collaboration in a mega project and provides a better understanding of how collaboration between project participants becomes established. It argues that, to understand how project participants make sense of the cultural differences and similarities they encounter in their work environment, it is useful to look at how actors translate and negotiate practices, (public) values and interests. Studying the project participants’ everyday organizational life in the Panama Canal Expansion Program will provide insight into the practices of collaboration that emerge in their cultural complex work environment. The objective of this study is to illustrate the internal dynamics between participants within a project organization, and how this affects collaboration in a mega project. This objective is translated into the following central research question:

How does collaboration manifest itself in the daily practices of project participants in the Panama Canal Expansion Program?

As mentioned, the majority of studies on projects and the management of projects focus on tools and techniques to enhance project performance and seek to understand projects from a macro approach. They aim to develop ‘best practices’ and contingency models to improve project outcomes. Minimal academic attention is paid to the implications of the nature of a project organization, in which people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds come together, and how these actors deal with the complex work environment on a micro level. As such, this research will focus on the following aspects. In the first place, this study will explore how these academic concepts are discussed in contemporary debates. Second, this study will focus on project participants at different levels of the project organization (such as management, operational staff, stakeholders, media, etc.) and the way they make sense of the cultural differences and similarities they encounter in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. This will lead to the identification of the practices of collaboration
Introducing the Field

that the organizational actors across different levels within the project organization translate, negotiate and, perhaps, initiate. Finally, I will elucidate the cultural dynamics that appear in the everyday work life of the project participants. These aims can be translated into the following four sub questions:

1. How are project management, cross-cultural collaboration and practices debated in the current academic literature?
2. How do actors make sense of the cultural complexity in their everyday practices?
3. What kind of practices of collaboration can be identified in the Panama Canal Expansion Program?
4. How can we explain the cultural dynamics that appear in the project organization?

Encouraged by the high impact of mega projects on society and the fact that more scholars indicate cultural differences as a cause of project failure (e.g. Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006), this research provides more insight into the cultural dynamics of the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Mega projects are considered as complex social settings, and in recent years themes as policy making, contracting, risks and expected outcomes have been studied extensively (see for example Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Warrack, 1993). Following the demand to gain academic insight into the cultural aspects in mega projects there is a quest for empirical studies on the actors’ practices and understandings in projects (Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Söderlund, 2004). It is in this area, the actuality of mega projects, that this research will make its major contribution.

Taking a practice-based approach on mega projects, this study concentrates on how collaboration comes about in these complex social settings. Since the results of mega projects show that collaboration does not live up to its promising prospects (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005), insight into the impact of cultural complexity on collaboration is highly relevant for understanding and improving project results. A focus on the practices of collaboration of the organization gives insight into how actors deal with disparities in values and interests, and illustrates how project
participants make sense of and reflect upon their practices in their everyday work environment. Furthermore, the ethnographic nature of this study contributes to the current academic debate on collaboration as it gains insight into the social processes of cross-cultural collaboration and illustrates what actors actually do when they collaborate. The outcomes of this study can support project organizations to adapt to the cultural complexity and thereby help to prevent delays and cost overruns in mega projects. By studying the actuality of projects this research sheds light on the practices of collaboration that occur when actors with a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds, interests and experiences come together and interact. Overall, this research will provide beneficial input to more satisfactory processes and outcomes of mega projects.

This dissertation is structured as follows. In the first part of the book, I present the foundations for this study. In chapter two I portray the analytical framework evolving around the theoretical key concepts of this study and I emphasize that a focus on the everyday life in a project organization requires a practice-based approach. In chapter three I elaborate on the research methodology and methods of the study that fit this approach. I explain that this research builds upon social constructionism, a philosophy of science that perceives the social nature of reality as something that is socially constructed by human beings, rather than as something that is naturally given. In this chapter, I furthermore describe how the data was gathered and analyzed and how the process of writing developed. Finally, this chapter provides a reflection on my experiences and role in the field. In chapter four I introduce the context of the research setting. After a brief history on the Panama Canal, I describe the Expansion Program, its components and the organizations that were at the heart of this study. The project owner, the organization Autoridad del Canal de Panamá (Panama Canal Authority) is presented first, followed by a short description of the consultancy firm CH2M Hill. Furthermore, we get acquainted with the consortium Grupo Unidos por el Canal (United Group for the Canal) and its separate organizations: Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA.

The second part of the book comprises the empirical data and its analysis. This part begins with an interlude, depicting the award ceremony that marked the starting point for the partners of Grupo Unidos por el Canal to collaborate in the execution
of the Third Set of Locks project. In chapter five I illustrate the collaboration between the organizational actors of *Grupo Unidos por el Canal* and expose various practices of collaboration that emerged within the project organization. The portrayal of how collaboration became manifest within *Grupo Unidos por el Canal* continues in chapter six. In this chapter I demonstrate the practices that the project participants enacted, shaped or initiated when building a collaborative relationship amongst them. In the last empirical chapter, chapter seven, I outline the collaboration between the *Autoridad del Canal de Panamá* and CH2M Hill. More specifically, I introduce chaperoning, a practice aimed at the guidance and supervision of learners in the field of project management, and how actors perceived this practice.

The third part of the book is dedicated to further analysis of the data and the conclusions of this study. In chapter eight I first answer the research questions that were set out to guide this study. Thereafter, I draw conclusions and present a collaboration continuum portraying how the practices of collaboration affect the development of a collaborative relationship between project participants. In addition, I reflect upon this study and provide suggestions for future research. Finally, this dissertation ends with implications for practitioners.

**Cross Culture Work**

Before moving to the next part of this book, I would like to take this space to elaborate on its title: *Cross-Culture Work*. This study contributes to a stream of research that perceives culture as something that is socially constructed, affected by the actions of actors and their interactions. Earlier, the academic fields of research on institutional theory and identity theory shifted their attention from structure to agency, incorporating the notion of how the action of actors has an impact on, respectively, institutions and identity. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), for example, claim that institutional theory should focus on establishing a broader vision of agency in relation to institutions. They state that the study of institutional work concerns “the practical actions through which institutions are created, maintained and disrupted.” In a similar line of thought, identity research moved towards a more situational approach. Schwalbe and Schrock (1996) explain that identity work refers to anything
that people do, individually or collectively, to give meaning to themselves or others and, as such, is largely a matter of signifying, labeling and identifying. Similarly, I claim that the field of culture research should change its view from a fixed notion of culture and set differences between cultures towards a perspective on culture that acknowledges that culture is something that is constructed, affected by the actions and interactions of its actors. Following this idea, the concept ‘cross culture work’ highlights the intentional and unintentional actions taken in relation to culture, some highly visible and dramatic, others nearly invisible and mundane, to make sense of and give meaning to culture. Criticizing frameworks based on national culture comparisons (e.g. Hofstede, 1980), cross culture work reorients its focus towards the interaction between cultures and involves practices, processes, strategies, as well as ambiguities, inconsistencies and, sometimes, resistances. Particularly, using the language of work to describe what is going on in cultural interactions reminds us that the construction of culture and social reality are an achievement; they do not just happen but need interaction between people to be accomplished.
Part I
Going to the Field
Chapter 2
Practices of Collaboration in Mega Projects
Introduction

The research approach for this study, as formulated in the first chapter, builds on the social constructionism philosophy of science. Based on this view of reality, this chapter presents the theoretical background to the central question under study - how collaboration manifests itself in the daily practices of project participants in infrastructural mega projects. In short, this chapter is about practices of collaboration. In this chapter I will put forward concepts and ideas that make studying the internal dynamics within a project organization possible. One of the central themes throughout this study is the connection between the ‘practice turn’ in project management research and the various organizational cultures that come together in a project organization. I highlight that, to study everyday life in a project organization it is required to focus on practices. For writing this chapter I have been particularly inspired by previous studies on practices in project management (Blomquist, Hällgren, Nilsson, & Söderholm, 2010; Hällgren & Söderholm, 2011), practice-based studies (Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003b) and cross-cultural collaboration (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Huxham, 1996; Sackmann & Philips, 2004). First, I will give an overview of the debate around project management research and elaborate on the practice-based approach. Thereafter, I will explain cross-cultural collaboration and give insight into the academic debate on cross-cultural management. My aim is to emphasize the importance of a focus on the various cultures that come together in a project organization and to underscore that a practice approach is helpful for understanding cross-cultural collaboration among project participants.

Developments in Project Management Research

Mega projects have been managed since the history of mankind. Examples such as the Maya cities in Mexico, the pyramids of Egypt and the Khmer temples in Cambodia prove that our history is full of extraordinary engineering achievements and remarkable undertakings that illustrate human's capacity to accomplish challenging, complex projects. Although project roles and tools, such as the position of the project engineer and the well-known Gantt chart existed in the early 1900s, language
Practices of Collaboration in Mega Projects

directing towards contemporary project management does not seem to be used before the early 1950s (Morris, 2011). The technological advances of engineering in the 1940s/1950s, and in particular the US military and defense sectors in this period, shaped project management as a problem-solving method using various types of techniques and methods to deliver high-profile mega projects (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). As such, project management, and also project management research, would fall very close to optimization theory and applied mathematics, and therefore, be part of the engineering discipline (Söderlund, 2004). With its intellectual roots in engineering science, this theoretical tradition of project management research is mostly concerned with planning techniques, tools for optimizing project performance and methods of project management (Söderlund, 2004). It focuses on developing the best practices to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of project management and deliver projects in time, on budget and within scope. Another theoretical tradition of project management research finds its intellectual roots in social sciences and is interested in project management as a social practice, studying the organizational and behavioral aspects in project organizations (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Söderlund, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). Researchers within this second tradition perceive projects as a phenomenon of organizing and attempt to explain the art and practice of managing projects. Until the 1960s however, the technicist approach, using quantitative techniques within operational research, had led the field of project management research. Following this period, the design of projects and project management spread into the business world, and beyond. By the late 1960s and early 1970s ideas on organizational integration and task accomplishments had begun to attract serious academic attention (Morris, 2011; Winter, Smith, Morris, & Cicmil, 2006). Simultaneously, many executives found themselves persuaded to manage projects for the first time and, as a result, more conferences were organized and project management associations such as the Project Management Institute (PMI) and the International Management Systems Association (also called INTERNET, now the International Project Management Association, IPMA) established (Morris, 2011). Interestingly enough, numerous mega projects from this period showed negative performance. The nuclear power industry, the oil and gas industry, and even the US weapons program experienced massive problems of projects that did not perform...
Accordingly (Morris, 2011). Academics started to criticize the discipline for its ‘hard’ systems model emphasizing on the planning and control dimensions of project management. Their critique revolved around the discipline’s failure in dealing with the increasingly front-end work, the comparable view on projects and the lack of attention for human issues (Winter et al., 2006). As a solution to the criticism, Human Resource Management and the expansion of Information Technology were incorporated into the project management discourse. Operational Research resurfaced in the 1980s and 1990s, which resulted in project control methodologies such as project planning systems, project monitoring models, and project communication models (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). As a result of structuring the project management knowledge of researchers and practitioners, the PMI initiated the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK). Originally classifying six knowledge areas, namely: (1) scope management, (2) time management, (3) cost management, (4) quality management, (5) human resource management, and (6) communication management, it later added three more: (7) risk management, (8) procurement management and (9) integration management. Soon after, the IPMA and other project management associations around the world followed with similar models for managing projects (Morris, 2011). Since then, business and management researchers as well as educators have been engaged in the field of project management, which became widely recognized as a ‘multidisciplinary subject’ (Winch in Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006). Researchers from disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, business administration, pedagogy, organization theory, industrial engineering and sociology also became interested in projects and the management of projects. It was mainly in this period of time that academics explicitly perceived projects as temporal, organizational and social arrangements that should be studied in terms of their context, culture, conceptions and relevance (e.g. Kreiner, 1995; Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Packendorff, 1995). In the early 2000s, worldwide, project-based work became accepted as a dominant organizational response to the challenges of managing projects in a complex world (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). Simultaneously, the project management community developed to be more ‘business driven’, better technologically qualified, more commercialized, and more reflective (Morris, 2011). Project management became, and still is, the core competence of many firms.
In academic circles, researchers became more aware of projects as unique and fascinating organizational phenomena. Shifting away from the traditional understanding, the Scandinavian School of project studies introduced a more sociological perspective to the field of project management. Arguing that too much effort has been dedicated to clarifying the reasons for project success and failure, this group of scholars claims that we need to know more about the internal dynamics in project organizations, such as: the ‘action’ and ‘temporariness’ between its participants (Söderlund, 2004), the experiences of multi-cultural project teams (Mäkilouko, 2004) and the projects’ environment (Engwall, 2003). With these attempts to move the field of project management research forward, the body of knowledge has slowly developed towards more interest in the behavior of project participants, a topic that was previously underrepresented in project management literature. In line with this, Morris et al. (2011) recognize the development of a ‘third wave’ in project management research; the first wave being the theoretical tradition focusing on normative tools and techniques to improve project performance, and the development towards contingency models and thinking in projects as temporary organizations as the second wave. The third wave is characterized by: (1) its interest in the theoretical foundations and history of project management; (2) a focus on the importance of its social setting; (3) a recognition for the relation between organizations and projects; and therefore (4) an interest in the link between projects and strategy and innovation; (5) respect for the role of governance and control within and across organizations; (6) better acknowledgement of the role of leadership and the challenges for developing trust and competence; and (7) perceiving projects as unique, complex organizations (Morris et al., 2011). Although Cicmil and Hodgson (2006) appreciate the notable influence of the Scandinavian School on project management literature, they argue that the school remains too conservative in its ambitions. In their aim to open new trajectories for the field of project management research, Cicmil and Hodgson suggest a more critical approach and see the need for a wider picture of what goes on in projects and in the management of projects. The scholars express the need to explore how the relationship between individuals and collectivities are being produced and reproduced, and how power relations create and sustain social reality in projects (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). As such, they claim that
project management research should focus on the ‘actuality’ in project organizations and should strive for the lived experiences of its participants (Cicmil et al., 2006). Morris (2010) agrees that future project management research should aim to stay close to practitioners, but warns researchers not to go ‘soft’ by perceiving projects primarily as organizational phenomena. He stresses that the pendulum in project management research may have swung too far towards the field of social scientists and encourages researchers to emphasize on the projects’ purpose, creation and delivery (Morris, 2010). Yet, in contrast, various researchers believe that this pendulum can reach even further; they argue that the integration of social science perspectives to the field of project management has not gone far enough. Grabher (2002) for example, inspires researchers to investigate the paradox that project participants have to deal with while working in a temporary project and being affiliated with a permanent organization. Others suggest to dig into social aspects such as collaboration and knowledge integration among project participants (e.g. Dietrich, Eskerod, Darlcher, & Sandhawalia, 2010; Sydow, Lindkvist, & DeFillippi, 2004). Furthermore, Bresnen and his colleagues (2005) seek to gain deeper insight into the social complexities of (construction) projects and project management by taking a social science perspective on problems that typically occur in projects. They, however, go further than finding an understanding of the impact that specific social factors might have on project performance, but problematize the project organization and the management of projects itself (Bresnen et al., 2005a - emphasis original). Van Marrewijk, too, emphasizes that the field of project management research needs to be expanded with perspectives from social sciences and introduces an anthropological approach to projects (Van Marrewijk, 2009). In his studies, he unravels five cultural themes for managing complex projects; (1) cultural stratification; (2) cultural diversity and local representation; (3) situational behavior and power relations; (4) practices of cultural collaboration; and (5) spatial setting and materiality. Van Marrewijk (2009) argues that project execution can be enhanced when participants gain more insight into the cultural practices that affect the project organization and highlights that cultural themes need to become more dominant in the management of projects. This is closely in line with recently noted directions for future project management research. Scholars demand more focus on the internal dynamics of projects; that is, to
study the project participants’ behavior, they express the need to study projects from “within” as well as by its context, and suggest longitudinal studies that can deliver empirical illustrations of what is going on in the project organization (Jacobsson & Söderholm, 2011; Morris et al., 2011; Winter et al., 2006). A more detailed empirical examination of practitioners and their values, practices and expectations, as well as a more international perspective, outside the Anglo-Saxon economies, can further develop the field of project management research (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011).

The Practice Turn in Project Management Research

The introduction of the ‘practice turn’ (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & Von Savigny, 2001) is one step forward in studying projects and the management of projects (Blomquist et al., 2010; Bresnen, 2009; Hällgren & Söderholm, 2010; Van Marrewijk, Veenswijk, & Clegg, 2010). Emerging as an important approach to understand social phenomena within and between organizations, the practice turn gave rise to an increasing amount of attention and research around practice-based studies, a more general label for the multiplicity of studies evolving around the notion of situated working practices (Gherardi & Perrotta, 2011). By ‘bringing the work back in’ scholars in this field aim to develop better images of post bureaucratic organizing, to resolve existing theoretical dilemmas or, essentially, to enhance the understanding of organizing itself (Barley & Kunda, 2001). With a focus on organizing, not the organization, as Weick (1979) demanded, research on practice emphasizes on action and interaction, on the details of work, and seeks to explain a specific phenomenon by studying what people actually do and say (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Nicolini et al., 2003a). Practices are perceived by arrays of activities, but there is no cohesive definition available explaining what a practice is. Barnes (2001) suggests to use the following description:

Practices [are] socially recognized forms of activity, done on the basis of what members learn from others, and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly. (Barnes, 2001:19)
He recognizes that this is a very broad explanation of practice, but emphasizes that it therefore might prove to be useful. Swidler (2001) narrows this definition down by adding that the essential element of practices, and, at the same time, the feature that differentiates practices from most habits, is that they are the infrastructure of repeated interactional patterns. She states that practices “remain stable not only because habit ingrains standard ways of doing things, but because the need to engage one another forces people to return to common structures” (Swidler, 2001:85). Although this distinguishes practice from habit, the description leans towards understanding practice as a routine. Organizational routines (see Becker, 2004 for an extensive literature review), however, are strongly associated with structure, stability and rigidity, while practices encompass the role of human agency (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) distinguish three features that constitute a practice: (1) a practice involves cooperative effort of human beings and is extended in time and bounded by rules, (2) every practice establishes a set of ‘internal goods’: outcomes that cannot be achieved in any other way than through participating in the practice itself, and (3) joining and participating a practice necessarily involves attempting to achieve the standards of excellence operative in the practice at that time. Most practice researchers jointly belief that phenomena such as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science, power, language, social institutions, and historical transformation take place and are components of the field of practices (Schatzki, 2001).

Representatives of various schools of thought, such as philosophy, sociology, anthropology and discourse analyses, to name a few, made contributions to the current understanding of practice in organization studies. To unravel the diverse traditions of thoughts about the practice theme, Nicolini et al. (2003a) highlight three major roots that contribute to the work around studying practice in organization studies. The first tradition is based on how Marx perceived the notion of practice. From his perspective, thought and world are inseparably connected through human activity (Nicolini et al., 2003a). Practice is viewed as the product of specific historical conditions formed by previous practices and converted into new practices. Marx also introduced the idea that, for a full understanding of the meaning of human action, one needs to focus on the entire context of that action (Nicolini et al., 2003a). Thus,
one can only fully understand the meaning of practice when the interrelated actions, behaviors and context are taken into account. The second tradition evolves around phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. The phenomenological tradition recognizes that activities such as work, learning, innovation, communication, conflicts over goals, their interpretation and history are co-present in everyday organizational practice (Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini et al., 2003a). Social interactionism focuses on micro-level interaction, as it believes that, to understand human action, knowledge can only be accessed through interaction. Hence, to understand a practice, one needs to become a member of the group, community or local culture, and is required to participate in the interaction and engagement with the local web of interpretative, meaning-making processes (Nicolini et al., 2003a). The third tradition that supports the notion of practice evolves around Wittgenstein's legacy stating that language is mainly a practical and social undertaking (Nicolini et al., 2003a). For this tradition, participation in a practice is only possible by taking part in a professional language game, mastering the rules, and being able to use them (Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini et al., 2003a). In sum, these three traditions illustrate that the notion of practice derives from various traditions of thought, which explains why there is no unified practice theory or practice-based approach (Gherardi, 2009; Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, & Yanow, 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003a).

Due to such diversity in schools of thought on studying practices, scholars often list overlapping factors, notions or challenges that practice researchers experience and encounter. Miettinen and his colleagues, for example, express that the following features are dominant in practice research: “the embodied nature of practice; knowledge as a way of acting and using artifacts, rather than only as verbal representations of world; and the significance of material objects and artifacts for practices” (Miettinen et al., 2009:1312). In a similar vein, Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) note three key elements in practice-based studies: (1) situated actions are consequential in the production of social reality, (2) dualisms are rejected as a way of building theory and (3) relationships of mutual constitution are significant. Or, less abstract, practices shape and are shaped by social reality, analytical oppositions should be perceived as independent concepts, and phenomena are always related to each other. Taking these key elements in account, practice can be studied from
different perspectives. In earlier work, Orlikowski (2010) distinguishes three ways of engaging with practice in research: (1) an empirical focus that studies practice as a phenomenon, referring to what happens ‘in practice’ as opposed to what is expected from ‘theory’; (2) a theoretical focus that takes practice as a perspective, identifying a powerful lens for studying a particular organizational phenomena; and (3) a philosophical focus on practice, representing the ontological primacy of practice as fundamental to producing social reality. When focusing on the empirics of practice, organizational phenomena are viewed as dynamic, ongoing, everyday actions (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). The theoretical focus of practice is interested in the mutually constitutive ways in which agency is shaped, but also produces, reinforces and changes its structural conditions, and, from a practice ontology, it is understood that practices produce organizational reality (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011).

Although views on practice and its connection to activity may differ, most scholars underscore that the potential of the concept practice is to explain complex organizational phenomena as they occur and thus, to understand what people actually do, how they do it, and under what circumstances actions are carried out (Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003a; Orlikowski, 2010). Within organization studies, the practice turn rejects any positivist position and instead takes a social constructionist perspective, arguing that ‘reality’ is constructed in the social interaction among people (Geiger, 2009; Gherardi, 2000). This perspective focuses on practices as collective endeavors and is interested in actions and interactions, the objectives and language used in social interactions and the specific meaning that actions give to artifacts and situations (Nicolini et al., 2003a). Practices are viewed as a *bricolage* of material, mental, social and cultural resources and considered as ways of actions that are relational, mediated by artifacts and always rooted in a context of interaction (Nicolini et al., 2003a). Geiger (2009) recognizes that practicing is not an individual cognitive resource, but rather an activity that people do together. Moreover, he verifies that practicing is a process of continuous enactment, refinement, reproduction and change based on tacitly shared understandings within the practicing community. In the process of interaction practices are translated and negotiated, but also new practices are generated (Geiger, 2009).
Geiger’s view on practices implies that practices are dynamic and loose, but the ongoing flow of activities contains a momentary stability in which actors make sense of the situation. Weick et al. (2005) refer to this moment as an incipient state of sense making, which he calls ‘bracketing’. To make sense of a practice, phenomena have to be “carved out of the undifferentiated flux of raw experiences, and conceptually fixed and labeled so that they can become common currency for communicational exchanges” (Weick et al., 2005: 411). In their everyday activities, actors select (or bracket) a portion of streaming circumstances into words and categories to give meaning to what is happening. As Orlikowski (2002) argues, actors are purposive and reflexive, and continually monitor the ongoing flow of action -that of their own and that of others- and the social physical context in which their activities are constituted. Reflexivity, to reflect on one’s behavior as an observer, is guided by one’s preconceptions and previous experiences, and influences how one makes sense of new events. Interaction with the outside world as well as humans’ intrinsic ability to interact their own thoughts, guide the actor to draw new distinctions, imagine new things and create new understandings (Tsoukas & Chia, 2010). This means that actors enact the ongoing stream of events and stimuli in their environment and, based on their own interpretative framework, create their own (socially constructed) realities (Duijnhoven, 2010). Based on the work of Schön, Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) termed the moment that actors step out of their routine to focus on how it can be reshaped as ‘reflection-in-action’. With an emphasis on in, not reflection-on-action, they underscore that in the midst of the action actors are reflexive about their practices and able to readjust their routinized actions into new practices. To further explain the concept, Yanow and Tsoukas use the example of improvisational theatre where the phrase ‘in the moment’ refers to the spontaneously change of actions in respond to the rapidly moving situation (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). They denote four elements of improvisational theatre to illustrate reflection-in-action. Firstly, improvisation is a collective practice consisting of working together, interacting together and building on “extended, prior conjoint experience and mutual, collective, inter-knowing (as well as self-knowledge)” (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009:1345 - emphasis original). Secondly, improvisation takes place ‘in the moment’, which relates to a focus on the matter at hand. Thirdly, there is no planning involved
at this moment. Although improvisation draws on a great repertoire of practiced moves and rehearsals, no reasoned considerations of actions is done in the moment itself. Fourthly, practitioners build on what was just said or done in the previous scene, elaborating on what is already known. Hence, like actors in improvisation theatre who are ‘in dialogue’, practitioners reflecting-in-action focus on what he or she is in the midst of doing, with the available tools, materials and fellow actors, to deal with the particular set of circumstances presented at a certain moment. This might appear as on-the-spot improvisation to outsiders, but is in fact a context-specific, embedded judgment about what will work best in specific circumstances, based upon a repertoire that has been rehearsed -practiced- over time (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). Consequently, actors make sense by “turning circumstances into in a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (Weick et al., 2005: 409). When bracketing, actors step out of their routine to give meaning to what is occurring and focus on how their practice can be reshaped to become a new orderliness situation. They interact with others and themselves at the same time while being mindful of earlier patterns of actions. In this process, “established generalizations may be supplemented, eroded, modified, or, at any rate, interpreted in oftentimes unpredictable ways” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2010: 573). While doing so, actors come to make sense of their practices in ways that both constrain and provide opportunities for new practices (Helms Mills, 2003).

Bjørkjeng et al. (2009) find three essential mechanisms for the becoming of new practices. Firstly, employees construct formal and informal boundaries in which activities are still perceived as legitimate parts of practice. Secondly, actors continuously negotiate and reinterpret what they perceive as competent practicing. Thirdly, physical materials are intertwined in practicing and included as essential elements of a practice. Through these mechanisms employees of diverse cultural backgrounds construct new practices that actors experience as meaningful and useful (Jackson & Aycan, 2006). While it might seem that practices are accessible, observable, measurable or easy to define, paradoxically, practices are rather hidden, tacit and often difficult to define in linguistic propositional terms (Corradi, Gherardi, & Verzelloni, 2010). Bjørkjeng and his colleagues (2009) add that practice is everything, and thus nothing, and claim that, for substantive specificity, particular practices need to be studied; practices of collaboration for example.
Recently, the practice approach has entered the field of project management research. With a focus on the increasing complexity in mega projects, this approach can give more insight into what is actually going on in project organizations and how project participants make sense of the various cultures and practices that come together in their everyday work setting. As such, the projects-as-practice approach emerged.

Projects-as-Practice
As described earlier, the new research agenda for project management research requires a closer focus on both the outside (its context) and the inside (the internal dynamics) of project organizations. Subsequently to the traditional approach that studies the developments of systems, tools and methods for better project performance, and the process-oriented approach that includes the human element in project management research, the introduction of the practice turn is an illustration of the ‘third wave’ in project management research. That is to say, when the primary interest is in the micro activities, the daily practices of project participants, the process approach cannot provide a clear answer (Hällgren & Söderholm, 2010). Consequently, the daily practices become an important source of inspiration to the project management researcher (Morris et al., 2011). Both inspired by practices and as an answer to the plea for more research on the internal dynamics of project organizations, several scholars introduced practice-based thinking to project management studies (e.g. Blomquist et al., 2010; Bresnen, 2009; Hällgren & Wilson, 2008). One such case in point is Bresnen’s study (2009), which illustrates the value of applying the practice-based perspective to the field so that a deeper understanding of the lived experience of project participants can be achieved. Instead of following the theoretical tradition of project management research, Bresnen (2009) shows that there is another way of studying how practices are translated and negotiated in situ and how knowledge and learning is situated in practice. What is more, Scandinavian researchers created the ‘projects-as-practice’ framework (Blomquist et al., 2010). This framework focuses on the actor, its actions and activities, rather than on systems and models and how these can be applied to projects (Blomquist et al., 2010). Essentially, the projects-as-practice approach is interested in what is actually going on in project settings when values, beliefs, experience and expectations come together. Blomquist
and his colleagues (2010) argue that more fine-grained analysis of micro activities and a bottom up analysis of what actors actually do when they work in a project organization will make a significant contribution to the understanding of projects and the field of project management research. The practice turn in project management research concentrates itself in the ‘doings and sayings’ of actors in projects.

Although the project-as-practice framework is appreciated for bringing two worlds together, project management research and practice-based studies, its interpretation of practice differs from how practice is understood in this thesis. Drawing on strategy-as-practice (see Whittington, 1996; 2006 for introduction), Blomquist et al. (2010) emphasize three core concepts in their framework: praxis, practitioner and practices. Praxis refers to the actions of a project participant, such as what he or she does in a certain situation and how certain methods and techniques are applied. Practitioner signifies to the individual who performs the actions, like the project manager. And practices are the taken for granted notions embodying the ‘things we do around here’, such as the norms, values, rules and (unwritten) policies within a community. In this sense, practice is seen as an ‘empirical object’ and scholars in this stream of practice research focus on the activities of the practitioner, or rather, their aim is to verify how actors translate strategic directions into their everyday practices (Corradi et al., 2010). Whereas in this thesis, practice is interpreted as a ‘way of seeing’, which refers to seeing how actors undertake their everyday actions within a constantly evolving context and understanding the ‘situatedness’ of practices (Corradi et al., 2010). As such, the project-as-practice framework remains, like strategy-as-practice, within the tradition of mainstream, functional research, while, in this thesis, a more critical approach on practice is followed.

Despite its differing fundamentals, the project-as-practice framework contains various elements that are valuable for my research. To start with, Hägglund and Söderholm (2011) list several important assumptions motivating the framework, of which four inspire this study. First of all, to understand the actions and activities of project participants, the projects-as-practice approach focuses on the practices and their meaning in a specific social setting. Second, the framework does not perceive projects as a pre-defined organizational unit with hierarchical relations; it prefers to observe projects as the constantly renegotiated sum of activities of the actors involved.
Third, it is not the outcome of project activities that is under study, but rather the way in which an activity is performed and the underlying assumptions that belong to this activity. And fourth, projects-as-practice research examines the phenomenon under study more closely, which is, although depending on the questions that are asked, mostly done with ethnographic research methods. Accordingly, projects are not perceived as a commodity, but as a bundle of communities and intertwined practices, and thus treated as something one can do instead of something one can have (Blomquist et al., 2010). Furthermore, from the perspective of this framework, projects are not about systems and planning, but about people using the systems and making these plans. To understand certain project activities, the behavior of its participants is essential (Hällgren & Söderholm, 2010). Hence, an in-depth understanding of the project activities and how participants behave in the various situations as well as how they create a mutual or opposing understanding of their work, is of great value for anyone interested in project management (Blomquist et al., 2010). Finally, the projects-as-practice approach provides detailed insight into those specific elements that are usually overseen and/or perceived as irrelevant for further attention (Hällgren & Söderholm, 2011). Or, as Van Marrewijk (2009) aptly portrays, we need to turn everyday (project) activities into exotic practices.

As shown above, the field of project management research is gradually developing towards a greater interest in what is actually occurring in projects, and researchers express the need to better understand the daily activities of project participants. The projects-as-practice approach allows us to gain deeper insight into how actors make sense of, and respond to, the complex, culturally diverse and ambiguous project setting. Projects often contain a high number of participants residing from various organizations, each bringing their own idiosyncratic practices to the project, which requires an intensive inter-organizational collaboration; a cross-cultural collaboration. Arguing that the quality of collaborative relationships is a key factor in successful project outcomes, various scholars plea for more in-depth understanding of collaboration in project organizations (e.g. Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Dietrich et al., 2010; Pitsis et al., 2004; Van Marrewijk, 2005). Furthermore, the increasing popularity of joint ventures and other collaborative forms of organizing in the field of project management has brought collaboration as a
topic right to the heart of contemporary management research (Winch, Millar, & Clifton, 1997). Interestingly, the academic debate on cross-cultural management is also gaining interest in the practices that occur when actors work together. One such example is the recently published book *Cross-Cultural Management in Practice: Culture and Negotiate Meanings* by Primecz et al. (2011). This edited volume represents illustrations and insights on how organizational actors deal with cultural complexity in the everyday (inter-) organizational collaboration. Moreover, the conveners of the sub-theme I attended at the EGOS colloquium in Helsinki urged the need for ‘more empirical research and well-grounded theorizing’, and indicated that focusing on ‘how collaboration is accomplished and what actors actually do’ should open ‘the black box of collaboration’. This research applies both research debates; the projects-as-practice approach is taken into account while studying cross-cultural collaboration in a mega project. Hence, the following section will elaborate on cross-cultural collaboration and project management, followed by a brief overview of the ongoing academic debate on cross-cultural management.

**Cross-Cultural Collaboration and Project Management**

When studying collaboration, we should have a clear sight on what ‘collaboration’ actually is. Originating from the Latin root words *com* and *laborare*, collaboration basically means ‘to work together’ (Merriam Webster Dictionary). Also the Dutch word *samenwerken*, which literally means ‘working together’, neatly captures the intention (Huxham, 1996). The search for a more comprehensive definition leads to a maze of different interpretations of the term itself, as an enormous amount of vocabulary is used to describe inter-organizational arrangements that are perceived as collaboration. From the field of project management research, Dietrich and his colleagues define collaboration as “a recursive process where people or organizations work together in an intersection of common goals by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus” (Dietrich et al., 2010:60). Barbara Gray’s (1989) influential

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2 Kristina Lauche, Hans Berends and Anne-Laure Fayard convened sub-theme 56: Practices of Inter-Organizational Collaboration: Designed or Emerging?! at the 28th EGOS Colloquium in Helsinki, Finland, from July 5-7, 2012. During the kick-off session of the sub-theme they emphasized the need for opening ‘the black box of collaboration to see how collaboration is accomplished and what actors actually do’ and plead for ‘more empirical research data and well-grounded theorizing’.
work provides a more robust explanation of collaboration. She defines collaboration as “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (Gray, 1989:5). A more practical definition is given by Himmelman (1996). He states that organizational collaboration “is a process in which organizations exchange information, alter activities, share resources and enhance each other’s capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose by sharing risks, responsibilities and rewards” (Himmelman, 1996:22). However, frequently used interchangeably, terms as cooperation and coordination have close connotations with the term collaboration. Often termed as the ‘3C’s’, Keast et al. (2007) place the three terms on a scale of relationship intensity. Short-term and informal relations characterize ‘cooperation’, in which organizations maintain a fragmented relationship for the sake of sharing information at a low level of risk (Keast et al., 2007). ‘Coordination’ is found at the middle of the continuum. Here, the level of relationship between organizations requires a higher degree of effort, commitment and often, more formal structures and activities are developed, resulting in mutual benefits and shared risks (Keast et al., 2007). Following Keast et al. (2007), ‘collaboration’ requires a strong and intense relationship between organizations that involves sharing resources, aligning activities and actually working together, but also brings about a high degree of risk and the need for commitment and trust among participants. Collaboration is the strongest form of relationship between organizations and therefore appears on the other end of the relationship intensity scale (Keast et al., 2007).

Preliminary work on the nature of collaboration was undertaken by Huxham and Vangen (2004). They draw our attention to two concepts that are central in their exploration: collaborative advantage and collaborative inertia. Collaborative advantage captures synergy and refers to an achievement that could not have been attained by any of the organizations acting alone (Huxham, 1996; Huxham & Vangen, 2004). It provides the purpose of collaboration and, as such, defines a high value and ambitious form of collaboration; its intention is not to gain advantage over another party, but to obtain advantage for all participants (Huxham, 1996; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). The second concept, collaborative inertia, captures the opposite outcome of collaboration. This concept is used to describe an output of
collaborative arrangements that fails to meet expectations. It illustrates situations in which collaboration makes only hard-fought or negligible progress, and where stories of pain and hard grind were fundamental to successes achieved (Huxham, 1996, 2003; Huxham & Vangen, 2004; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Thus, collaboration that is hindered and resulted in disappointing outcomes relates to collaborative inertia, and collaboration that led to optimistic outcomes for all participants is termed collaborative advantage.

Collaboration takes place in complex situations that are filled with ambiguity, uncertainty and conflicting environments (Huxham, 1996; Pitsis et al., 2004; Vaaland, 2004; Van Marrewijk, 2005). To generate collaboration in such a context, participants are required to translate and negotiate the different work practices and cultures that are brought together. Differences in national, organizational and professional culture can aggravate collaboration in project organizations because seemingly straightforward practices and assumptions may be carried out quite differently in other organizations (Huxham, 1996). While many scholars recognize that collaboration is a key element in project management research, it is surprising that much of the research on projects does not stress the importance of partners bringing their own cultural perspectives to the organization. Sackman and Friesl (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007) argue that “when people join a project team, their individual identities are still rooted in the various home organizations, their profession and other groupings that they take part of in their life.” Hence, in this form of working together, actors enter an arena in which they need to combine their cultures and work practices, and let go of some of their traditional beliefs and methods.

Various academic scholars have indicated that collaboration between different partners is a critical factor for successful project outcomes (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Vaaland, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). Mega projects, even those in Mayan times, always require the need to combine skills, knowledge and expertise, and collaboration is the strongest formula to succeed. In fact, collaboration in mega projects is inevitable; representatives from numerous organizations have to work together during the execution of a project, even though they might be competitors in other work environments (Leufkens & Noorderhaven, 2010; Van Marrewijk, 2005). Besides their temporary nature, project organizations
Practices of Collaboration in Mega Projects

consist of complex patterns of interactions between its various partners, each guided by their own established ideas and distinct practices (Bresnen & Marshall, 2011; Engwall, 2003; Grabher, 2002; Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). Moreover, each partner has its distinctive interests and its own perspectives on the interests of other participants in the project. Although tasks, means and goals may not be clearly defined at the start of a project, partners mutually rely on each other (Dietrich et al., 2010). Such contradictions and tensions, as well as those of a deeper nature like culture, behaviors and interactions, can jeopardize collaborative efforts within project organizations (Josserand, Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2004). Also, the temporality of a project can decrease the commitment of partners involved to focus on collaboration in the project organization (Leufkens & Noorderhaven, 2010). Thus, collaboration between partners from different (national, organizational and professional) cultures adds another layer of complexity to projects and the management of projects. Being the strongest relationship between organizations, collaboration often appears to be most difficult to achieve. Significant examples of problems of inter-organizational collaboration in project organizations are portrayed in the construction sector. Being criticized for its insufficient project performance, lack of integration, confrontational attitudes, and its pronounced blame culture, the construction sector is obliged to strongly focus on extensive inter-organizational collaboration (Dietrich et al., 2010; Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011; Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008).

Existing research on collaboration in projects often focuses on elements that can enhance a collaborative relationship between partners. Pitsis et al. (2004), for example, reveal essential building blocks for inter-organizational synthesis. Themes as trust, leadership, culture, contract and power capture synthesis, and, according to the authors, only through synthesis organizations can survive, succeed and innovate in complex project environments (Pitsis et al., 2004). In addition, Cicmil and Marshall (2005) studied a procedure called ‘two-stage tendering’, which aims to improve team integration in the construction sector. They discover that this procedure is insufficient to solve problems evolving around contradictions between partners, adversarial cultures and the lack of collaboration over time (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005). Furthermore, Dietrich et al. (2010) determine several factors influencing collaboration in the multi-partner projects. Based on earlier empirical studies on collaboration and
knowledge integration they reveal eight factors that have a direct influence on the quality of collaboration, among those are trust between actors, commitment to the project, cultural proximity and expectations (Dietrich et al., 2010). However, scholars rarely address how project participants manage their efforts for collaboration, nor do they reveal how the characteristics of the project organization shape the actors’ daily interactions (Jones & Lichtenstein, 2008). Thus, the suggestion to seek for insights in practices of collaboration (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010), and the call for more in-depth research on the dynamics of collaboration in project organizations (Bresnen & Marshall, 2011), are in place. Besides, since little is known about the cultural diversity and its intended and unintended consequences to the micro level of mega projects (Ainamo, Artto, Levitt, Orr, Scott, & Tainio, 2010), implementing the debate on cross-cultural management can enhance our understanding of cultural complexity in project organizations.

Cross-Cultural Management Research

The field of cross-cultural management is generally divided into three streams of research, each with their own interpretation of the concept culture (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Sackmann & Philips, 2004). The first stream, labeled as ‘cross-national comparison’ (CNC), associates culture directly with nation or country. Research in this stream is guided by the search for universally applicable dimensions that can help managers in dealing with cross-cultural situations (e.g. Hofstede, 1980). Following the positivistic paradigm, research methodologies in this stream are mostly quantitative and large-scale, treating culture as a variable and assuming that someone’s nation or citizenship is the all-embracing source for identification (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Sackmann & Philips, 2004). This perspective is still the leading approach to cross-cultural management, however, while comparing national cultural levels on a general level, such frameworks lack the ability to explain what happens when people actually meet and interact with each other (Primecz et al., 2011). The assumption that all inhabitants in a nation and all managers and employees in an organization share the same cultural values entails ignorance towards social variation, diversity and power relations among or between nations and organizations (Søderberg & Holden, 2002).
The CNC perspective might reveal cultural differences, but without knowledge on the everyday practice, it fails to explain interactions, cultural clashes or the lack thereof (Primecz et al., 2011). Given these limitations, this view on cultures seems rather limited and may no longer fit the cultural realities that exist in current organizations and projects (Sackmann & Philips, 2004).

The second stream in cross-cultural management research, called ‘inter-cultural interaction’, is highly influenced by anthropological researchers who introduced a different perspective on culture (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). The inter-cultural interaction (ICI) perspective views culture as “socially constructed” and recognizes the notion of organizational culture as something that an organization ‘has’, rather than something an organization ‘is’ (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Smircich, 1983). Following the interpretative paradigm, researchers in this stream believe that reality is socially constructed, which implies that different actors can define reality differently (Boyacigiller et al., 2004). This stream aims to unravel how organizational actors make sense of their social world and how culture is negotiated in their daily interactions. This view on culture has wide implications for the research questions and methods applied in this stream of research. Instead of focusing on comparison, the ICI perspective is interested in bicultural interaction and the impact of culture on the organizational life (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). Furthermore, the methods of choice in this stream are qualitative and ethnographic, providing detailed descriptions of the complexity of everyday organizational life (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Sackmann & Philips, 2004). An example in this stream of research on cross-cultural management is a study on ‘negotiated culture’ in a German – Japanese joint venture (Brannen & Salk, 2000). Brannen and Salk (2000) found that a newly, negotiated culture evolved in this binational joint venture; a culture that reflects neither of the two national cultures, but a culture that is a mutation of both, containing parts of each incorporated culture as well as some elements of its own making (Brannen & Salk, 2000). However, the scholars acknowledge that national cultural traits do not provide a trustworthy forecast for the issues and differences that are likely to emerge when intercultural organizations are formed, and they recognize the need to incorporate situational factors to understand culture formation in an organization (Brannen & Salk, 2000).
Due to developments such as technological advances (e.g. the Internet), the ever-growing global workforces and changes in the political, economical and societal context, a third stream in cross-cultural management research emerged: the multiple cultures perspective (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). Followers of this stream agree that in this multicultural society people can no longer be recognized only by their national citizenship or country of origin (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Jacob, 2005; Sackmann & Philips, 2004; Søderberg & Holden, 2002). Culture does not equal to nation, it is seen as a bundle of explicit and tacit assumptions commonly held by a group of people, guiding their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and behaviors that, through social interaction, are learned and passed on to new members of the group (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). From this perspective, organizations are recognized as a multiplicity of cultures in which members develop a shared set of assumptions within the organization setting, but simultaneously carry various sets of assumptions acquired outside of the organization (Boyacigiller et al., 2004). Thus, all types of cultural groupings may occur and co-occur within an organizational setting. Research questions and methods in this stream aim to “identify the culture(s) impacting the organization at any given time, around any specific issue, in any particular circumstance, and to any certain degree” (Boyacigiller et al., 2004:131). In this endeavor, researchers try to unravel the insiders’ perspective to understand the social constructions of the central actors in the selected research context, which contributes to the acknowledgement of the inherent complexities, contractions, and paradoxes that cultural realities mean for individuals, groups and organizations (Sackmann & Philips, 2004).

Another subsequent perspective in cross-cultural management research is imposed by Jacob (2005), who states that hybridization is a useful point of departure to study cultures in organizations. In line with Boyacigiller et al. (2004), she opts to breakaway from the ‘snapshots of a country’s orientation’ and urges scholars to view countries as a wide variety of cultural mixtures (Jacob, 2005). This perspective identifies cultures as dynamic constructs that change over time as they are shaped and reshaped through interactions with other cultures in which people, reflectively and unreflectively, insert new meanings and practices (Shimoni & Bergmann, 2006). While perceiving the complex interplay between culture and management as a continuous evolving dynamic, this perspective sees people as ‘hybrids’ who simultaneously hold...
membership in different cultural groups (Jacob, 2005). Furthermore, this perspective recognizes that the culturally heterogeneous context of countries is reflected in the hybrid practices of actors. Shimoni and Bergmann (2006) underscore that is not sufficient to be aware of the presence of different cultures within the same space, as the multiple culture perspective does, but claim awareness for the new developments achieved through encounters between these cultures. In this line of thought, the world is understood as an arena of cultural negotiation and contestation, in which cultural interactions, translations, borrowing, or mutual enrichment happens (Shimoni & Bergmann, 2006).

In order to understand cross-cultural management in practice and to gain deeper insight into how people make sense of this world, researchers in the domain claim that a focus upon interactions and practices in situ is needed (Primecz et al., 2011; Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). Primecz et al. (2011) emphasize that specific attention to the influence of context upon interaction, the significance of interaction, the latent power struggles and many other aspects that influence the practice of cross-cultural management should be highlighted. Also Boyacigiller et al. (2004) underscore that a broader understanding of culture and its consequences in practice can take the field of cross-cultural management forward. Further knowledge on the impact of multiple cultures in a project organization can expand and enrich the skills and practices of participants in dealing with cultural complexity at the various organizational levels, and, it can teach us how to deal with cultural differences so that collaboration between cultural groups can be established (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). However, besides emphasizing on cultural differences, there is an equal need to study the cultural similarities that exist in organizational contexts (Jacob, 2005). Such a dual emphasis can support managers in understanding other cultures, act accordingly and reduce the risk of blunders (Ofori-Dankwa & Ricks, 2000). Thus, the field of cross-cultural management research can be further developed with a focus on how actors deal with and make sense of the cultural differences and similarities they encounter in their everyday life worlds.

Following this research angle, project organizations are perceived as carriers of numerous separate, overlapping cultures and project participants are seen as actors who continuously hold membership to some of these cultural groups (Boyacigiller et
In the context of cross-cultural collaboration, where many cultures interact and various organizational routines come together, actors draw on past cultural experiences and develop new understandings and practices that enable them to make sense of and live in a world where change commonly occurs (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Hibbert & Huxham, 2010). Through repeated interactions, project participants develop new common understandings that reshape and define their collaborative relationship (Philips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000). Thus, collaboration in a project organization is not just a matter of discarding old meanings and practices, it is more a matter of negotiating new meanings, developing new practices and adjusting existing work processes (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011). Studying these practices of collaboration can enhance our knowledge on the complexity that underlies collaborative situations and may unravel the practicalities of these situations, of what is actually going on in cross-cultural initiatives (Holden, 2008; Huxham, 2003).

To Conclude

This has been a theoretical chapter about practices of collaboration in mega projects. The argument in this chapter has been that project organizations consist of a variety of cultures, interests and distinct practices that participants bring to their everyday work setting. To understand how cross-cultural collaboration manifests itself in such a temporal, large-scale and complex work environment, a practice-based approach is suggested. With a focus on the daily practices of collaboration this study aims to give insight in the internal dynamics of a project organization.

I started the chapter with an overview of the debate on project management research directing towards a deeper understanding of the ‘people’ side of project management. Away from the traditional stream in the project management domain, several scholars claim the field needs to be expanded with perspectives from social sciences (Bresnen et al., 2005a; Dietrich et al., 2010; Van Marrewijk, 2009). Introducing the practice turn in project management research is such a step forward (Blomquist et al., 2010; Bresnen, 2009; Hällgren & Söderholm, 2010; Van Marrewijk et al., 2010). When elaborating on the practice-based approach, I portrayed that this
perspective seeks to explain a specific phenomenon, like collaboration, by studying what people actually do and say. Focused on the micro-level interactions, the practice-based approach is interested in the action and interaction between and among actors and concerned with the details of their everyday work activities (Nicolini et al., 2003a). Practices shape and are shaped by social reality, they are a construction of social interaction, and in this process of interaction practices are translated and negotiated, but also new practices are generated (Geiger, 2009). I emphasized that, in the midst of practicing, a momentary stability occurs in which the reflexive actor, with the available tools, materials and fellow actors, makes sense of the particular set of circumstances presented at that specific moment. In this short period of freeze, practices are iteratively developed as actors instinctively apply their tacit knowledge and previous experiences to the flow of interactions they encounter. Engaging in reflection-in-action, actors try to coherently accommodate new understandings as their webs of beliefs and habits of action are continuously reweaving (Tsoukas & Chia, 2010; Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). The routine practice then gradually changes, extends and provides opportunities for further changes (Tsoukas & Chia, 2010). Hence, I argue that Geiger's view on practices is too dynamic and loose, as a stable moment is necessary to make sense of the stream of experiences, in which actors can shape and reshape their practices.

With the projects-as-practice framework a practice-based approach is incorporated in the field of project management research (Blomquist et al., 2010; Hällgren & Söderholm, 2011). This framework concentrates on what is actually going on in project settings when values, beliefs, experiences and expectations of participants come together and develop around the study of actions and interactions, behaviors and activities of project participants. Moreover, I have portrayed that, in mega projects, collaboration is inevitable. Being the strongest form of relationship between organizations, various scholars argue that collaboration is a key factor in successful project outcomes and plea for more in-depth research on collaboration in project organizations (e.g. Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Dietrich et al., 2010; Pitsis et al., 2004; Van Marrewijk, 2005). According to Huxham (1996), collaboration in project organizations is intensified by differences in national, professional and organizational cultures as practices and assumptions in the temporary
organization might be carried out differently than in other organizations. Little is known about how project participants deal with collaboration or about how the characteristics of the project organization shape the actors’ daily interactions (Jones & Lichtenstein, 2008). To gain understanding about cross-cultural collaboration in project organizations, I therefore included the debate on cross-cultural management research. Following the multiple-culture perspective, this study sees organizations as a multiplicity of cultures in which members develop a shared set of assumptions with the organizational setting, but at the same time take various sets of assumptions outside of the organization (Boyacigiller et al., 2004). Organizational members are seen as “hybrids” that simultaneously hold membership in different cultural groups (Jacob, 2005). Interestingly, also scholars in the cross-cultural management domain indicate the need for a focus upon interactions and practices in situ (Primecz et al., 2011; Sackmann & Friesl, 2007).

Bringing these developments together, I follow Bresnen and Marshall’s (2011) argument stating that a deeper understanding of cross-cultural collaboration in projects can be obtained by examining how everyday practices are translated and negotiated into new practices. With a practice lens, I focus on practices of collaboration and aim to give insight into the internal dynamics around the cultural complexity that occurs in a project organization. Before moving to the empirical data I will describe the way this ethnographic research has been designed and conducted, and portray a picture of the research setting under study.
Chapter 3

Ethnography in Practice
In this chapter I will describe the methodological choices and strategies for my research on the practices of collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. This methodological chapter provides a framework for understanding how data was gathered and analyzed, and, how the process of writing developed. Following chapter one, which gave insight into the research problem and formulated the research question, chapter two provided the presentation of this academic study with a theoretical framework. In this third chapter I explain the philosophical grounding of the research design to clarify my account on the social world and on how we should study this world. I describe the process of gaining access to the Panama Canal Expansion Program, followed by a description of the ethnographic research methods undertaken in this project. Next, I elaborate on the process of generating, analyzing and writing up the data. To conclude this chapter, I present a detailed account on my background and personal experiences reflecting on my role as a researcher in this study.

**Knowledge Claim**

An incredible number of choices are involved in crafting a research design. In bringing the research question, methodology and methods together, these choices guide the work that the researcher carries out. This study’s search for practices of collaboration in the everyday life world of project participants leads to ontological and epistemological assumptions supporting ethnographic research. Concerned with what there is to know about the world, ontological questions deal with whether or not social reality exists independently of human conceptions and interpretations; whether there is a shared reality; and whether or not social behavior is guided by generalizable ‘laws’ (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Epistemology is connected with ways of knowing and learning about the social world and addresses questions about the basis of our knowledge and how we can know about reality (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Determining how one studies the social world, a broad range of methodological approaches can be found. Among others, positivism, social constructionism and critical realism are three overarching philosophies of science (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). In their search to understand human behavior, the three approaches follow
quite different beliefs concerning the assumptions, foundations and implications of science. For a long time, positivism, which refers to forms of research that rest on realist ontology and objectivist epistemology assumptions, was the dominating philosophy of science (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). In this approach, the social world consists of facts that already exist and are observable; the researcher’s task is to classify, operationalize and measure social phenomena abstracted from their context to make precise and statistical assessments (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). In contrast to positivism, social constructionism perceives reality as something that human beings are socially constructing and, as such, inspired many streams in social sciences (Yanow, 2006). In this approach, the social nature of reality is not seen as something naturally given, but rather constructed through the interactions between people and their intersubjective interpretations. Here, the metaphor ‘construction’ is misleading because construction refers to a deliberate activity, while social constructions, especially in the sense of social constructionism, are not planned activities (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). Yet, the term suggests that natural phenomena are not just social, but intentionally planned or manipulatively created: they are human fabrications, and the disclosure of these fabrications is an important aspect of social constructionism (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). Research building upon this philosophy is mostly interested in how the construction of reality is carried out and provides conceptual grounding for interpretive methods (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010; Yanow, 2006). Social constructionists believe that all our knowledge is socially constructed, while for positivists, knowledge is based on factual data. Critical realism, on the other hand, shares ground with both positivism and social constructionism as it builds upon the idea that there is a world independent of human beings and that deep structures in this world can be represented by scientific theories (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). Radically different from positivism and social constructionism, however, is that critical realism not only aims to explain reality, but also wants to change it.

3 There is a certain linguistic confusion about the concepts ‘social constructionism’ and ‘social constructivism’ (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). In some fields of inquiry one of the terms is dominant, while other fields use the terms interchangeably. In this study I have chosen to follow ‘social constructionism’ as represented in the work on The Social Construction of Reality by Berger and Luckmann (1966).
In this study, my approach to research fits within the community that articulates a constructionist ontological and interpretive epistemological scholarship. From this perspective, social realities are perceived as actively constructed, culturally and historically contingent, laden with moral, public and personal values; and with the researcher as an active participant in the process of social construction (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Ybema et al., 2009). These philosophical underpinnings about social realities logically hold particular methodological positions. In their recently published book, Schwartz-Sea and Yanow explain the constructionist-interpretivist methodology, commonly referred to as “interpretive” research, as follows:

[It] rests on a belief in the existence of (potentially) multiple, intersubjectively constructed “truths” about social, political, cultural, and other human events; and on the belief that these understandings can only be accessed, or co-generated, through interactions between researcher and researched as they seek to interpret those events and make those interpretations legible to each other (2012:4).

Meaning making is the essence of interpretive research. Researchers seek to grasp the concepts and meanings of the actors under study and aim to understand how actors make sense of their worlds. And since sense-making is always context dependent, interpretive research is concerned with contextuality (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Paying close attention to institutional context, historical background, power relations and societal discourses contributes to understanding the ways in which actors make sense of a situation. As such, in interpretive research it is required to emphasize both the individual and collective meanings that actors attribute to specific situations (Duijnhoven, 2010).

Central to the interpretive approach is that researchers are in the field -up close and in person- to discover the actors’ daily practices and to observe and interview their respondents’ lived experiences. However, the researcher’s ‘repertoire of interpretations’ limits the possibility of making certain interpretations, as some interpretations are given priority over others, and other interpretations do not even appear possible (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010:273). As a result, researchers in this community need
to be reflexive about their personal meaning making processes (Ybema et al, 2009; Schwartz-Sea & Yanow, 2006). Reflexivity here means that the different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements that are interwoven in the process of knowledge creation are taken into account. This, according to Shehata (2006), entails the researcher being self-conscious about her role as ‘positioned subject’ in the field. Being personally reflexive, as a specified version of being reflective, involves introspection: a deep inward gaze into the study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). This calls for the utmost awareness of how the researcher’s idiosyncratic characteristics, the importance of language and prejudice, the research community and society as a whole impact the scientific endeavor. The idea behind reflexive interpretation is to depict these aspects more clearly in the research process and the presentation of the study. Weick (1999) points out that a limited notion of reflexivity can lead to narcissism, self-indulgence, and paralysis. He warns that “attention to self-as-theorist can become a drag on theory development, when that attention becomes an end in itself” (Weick, 2002: 893). Reflexivity, thus, is not about making the researcher central to the study. It, however, allows the researcher to delineate the ways in which very specific instances of their personality affect their research accounts and the knowledge they generate on the bases of those accounts; reflexivity, therefore, strengthens the researcher’s personal responsibility for the study (Humphreys, 2005; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

Organizational Ethnography

The constructionist-interpretive methodology of this study informs various methods, or particular tools, through which research can be carried out or enacted (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Following this study's aim to gain an insiders’ perspective and understand how project participants make sense of collaboration in their everyday work life, an ethnographic approach was most suitable. Ethnography requires the researcher to be there, at the scene under study, to participate in the life world of her respondents, to built a relationship with them and to come to understand the common sense, everyday, spoken and unspoken, tacitly known ‘rules’ to be part of that environment (Ybema et al., 2009). Adopted from anthropology, as the study
of (sub) cultures, ethnographic research methods have been used in sociology as well (Van Maanen, 1988). In organization studies, using ethnography to unravel the intricacies of everyday organizational life is not a new approach either. In the 1920s and 1930s the Hawthorne studies applied, besides their quantitative point of departure, ethnographic research methods to find out whether employees would become more productive in higher or lower levels of light at their workplace (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Much later, after a shift towards quantitative research methods such as survey research and statistical analyses, towards the 1980s, qualitative methods like ethnographic research received renewed attention in the study of organizations (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Ybema et al., 2009).

Equally to ethnography, the aim of organizational ethnography is to study social and cultural phenomena in action, but specifically in an organizational setting. Since the complexity of everyday organizational life and social interaction cannot be reduced to sterile experiments having control over its variables, ethnographers go out in the field to gain more understanding of how people make sense of social reality. With a particular focus on the extraordinary-in-the-ordinary, its purpose is to grasp, in specific situations, “how work is organized and how that organizing organizes people” (Ybema et al., 2009:1). With an ‘anthropological frame of mind’, the organizational ethnographer needs to be modest and open to the new worlds and new meanings, and should have the “constant urge to problematize, to turn what seems familiar and understandable upside down and inside out” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992:73). Scholars in organization studies, with various disciplinary backgrounds, have increasingly applied ethnographic research methods to a variety of organizational settings (Van Marrewijk, 2010a). The anthropologist Orr (1996, 2006), for example, followed service technicians for copier machines to understand their work practices and how they talk about their work. Kunda (1992) conducted ethnographic fieldwork to explore how culture was used and experienced by members of the engineering division of a high-tech corporation. Furthermore, different from a technological environment, the sociologist Fine (1996) produced a rich portrait of the life of kitchen workers. Another form of organizing was studied by Venkatesh (2008), who immersed himself in the everyday life of a gang, and Mears
(2011) who, while working as a model, gathered an insiders’ account of the fashion industry.  

Organizational ethnography typically involves prolonged observation over time, engaging with what people do and how they talk about what they do, while being sensitive to how actors make sense of and give sense to the organizational context (Ybema et al., 2009). Ethnographic research combines the fieldwork methods interviewing, observation and the close reading of documentary resources, which are key in the interpretive tradition of social sciences (Van der Waal, 2009). Other characteristics of organizational ethnography are found in its potential to highlight emotional and political aspects of the work setting and to describe the wide variety of voices and interpretations about this everyday organizational life. Furthermore, related to the interpretative research’s goal of building context-sensitive knowledge and to the acknowledgement that scholars have a personal repertoire of interpretations, the researcher’s ‘positionality’ is vital (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Ybema et al., 2009). Ethnographers need to proactively reflect on their own meaning making processes and describe their personal characteristics as these contribute to generating access to research situations, or block them, and can shape and affect the data generation, analyses, and its subsequent knowledge claims (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

The product of ethnographic research is a written account that gives readers the sense of ‘being there’ (Bate, 1997). Through thick descriptions the researcher conveys actually having been there, while such a detailed account also makes the reader feel he or she has been at the scene. Nicolini’s (2009) metaphorical movement of ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ of the research field illustrates that no ethnography is written in a vacuum (Van Maanen, 1988). In fact, it highlights the iterative alternation between the researcher’s closeness to the actors and their practices and her distance to recognize how these practices are immersed in a thick texture of connections (Nicolini, 2009). The interpretive ethnographer writes her account in an “intelligible and transparent style to stimulate the readers to actively engage in the interpretation of processes of human behavior and knowledge generation” (Duijnhoven, 2010:61). Hence, by conveying qualities of familiarity of the persons under study and their ways

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4 An more elaborate bibliography is presented by Yanow and Geuijen (2009), who applied three criteria for a work to be an organizational ethnography: method, writing and sensibility.
of knowing and doing in a certain context, an ethnography is more like a window into the everyday experiences of organizational actors than that it is a page in a book (Bate, 1997). Based on a countless amount of strategic choices, like how to present the data, what voice to select and what quotations to use, the writing style in this book closely links with what Van Maanen (1988) termed ‘confessional tales’. This style of writing is distinguished by stories about gaining access to the field, fables of fieldwork rapport, mini melodramas of hardships endured (and overcome), and accounts of how fieldwork affected the researcher and vice versa (Van Maanen, 1988). Consequently, this writing style demands reflexivity. As a means of enhancing the representational richness and reflexivity of this qualitative study, reflexive personal vignettes provide insight in the researcher’s idiosyncratic taken-for-granted understandings of the social world (Humphreys, 2005). Such transparency lays bare any fallacies or pitfalls that might have surfaced during the study, but it also results in higher quality research material and a sharper focus on the phenomena under study (Van Marrewijk et al., 2010).

As portrayed above, conducting ethnographic research is very much a personal process and demands personal authority. It is therefore highly important to offer an “idiosyncratic mode of sense-making” (Chia, 1996:56) that includes a transparent and rich explanation of the steps taken and the choices made. As much as possible, I will do so in the following paragraphs. First, I will elaborate on how the research case was selected and accessed. I will then describe my research practices, followed by an account on the process of analyzing and writing up the data. In the last paragraph I will look back on my role as a researcher in the entire process.

**Selection of and Access to a Mega Project**

In search for a case that would allow me to study the practices of collaboration in an infrastructural project organization, I started with an online search. Since I had adopted an interpretive approach and the ethnographic research methodology in particular, only a small number of cases could be studied. One mega project would be sufficient, as it consists of various separate research cases and can deliver an overwhelming set of data. However, the mega project should be under construction
during the fieldwork period, between July 2009 and July 2010. I did not aim to study practices of collaboration in retrospect nor was it my intention to study a project that had not passed its kick-off date yet. Furthermore, I searched for projects that a) contained international partners, b) I could obtain access to and c) allowed a longitudinal study suitable for the research budget. Ten mega projects ended on a short list (see Table 3.1).

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<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Galileo</td>
<td>Development of an European navigation satellite</td>
<td>Noordwijk, Netherlands</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>North/South Line</td>
<td>Construction a new metro line in Amsterdam.</td>
<td>Amsterdam, Netherlands</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Maasvlakte 2</td>
<td>A land reclamation project to construct a new port adjoining the Maasvlakte</td>
<td>Rotterdam, Netherlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>NUON Energy Station</td>
<td>Construction of a new energy station.</td>
<td>Groningen, Netherlands</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Caofeidian New Coastal City</td>
<td>Development of an ecological coastal city in Northern China</td>
<td>Caofeidian, China</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Panama Canal Expansion Program</td>
<td>Expansion of the current Panama Canal with the building of a new set of locks.</td>
<td>Panama City, Panama</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Fehmarn Bridge</td>
<td>Construction of a bridge over the Fehmarn Belt to connect Germany and Denmark</td>
<td>Germany - Denmark</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Palm Islands</td>
<td>Construction of the three largest artificial islands in the world.</td>
<td>Dubai, United Arab Emirates</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Sheringham Shoal</td>
<td>Construction of the UK's fourth largest offshore wind farm.</td>
<td>Norfolk, United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Export Gateway</td>
<td>Deepening the navigation channel to the Port of Melbourne</td>
<td>Melbourne, Australia</td>
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</table>

To further the selection of the research case, three principles were taken into account. The first principle was the location of the mega project. My supervisors and I had discussed the possibilities to study a project outside of the Netherlands and I was open to that opportunity. Following Hodgson & Muzio (2011), we preferred projects outside of Anglo-Saxon economies, and in a region where mega projects had been insufficiently explored in the literature. Due to this principle, the projects in the Netherlands as well as those executed and studied in the UK, Scandinavia...
and Australia were erased from the short list. The second principle in the selection process was of a more practical concern; the spoken language in the mega project should be one that I master or could quickly acquire. Conducting an ethnographic study in an environment where one does not understand the local language well enough to capture verbal communication, such as informal conversations, makes the process of gathering data extremely complicated. As a result, the mega project in China was deleted from the short list. The third principle involved accessibility and acceptability. Ethnographic studies require that, at least in principle, the researcher is granted access to all actors, meetings and documents. Furthermore, it is important that the researcher can be accepted in the society under study and is allowed to move around freely in the daily project environment. As we could not guarantee this would be the case in Dubai, mainly because we had no contacts there, that project was also erased from the short list. One of my academic supervisors did have strong connections contact with the Dutch Ministry of Public Works and Water Management (Rijkwaterstaat, further abbreviated as RWS), a company that has a knowledge-sharing relationship with the Autoridád del Canal de Panamá (Panama Canal Authority, further abbreviated as ACP). I visited my supervisor’s contact at RWS and received contact details from his connections working in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. An extensive email exchange on the research topic and the practicalities around this study finally resulted in green light to conduct my research at the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Also, I remained in contact with RWS as they included me in their knowledge-exchange program with the ACP.5

The Panama Canal Expansion Program met all three principles for the selection of the research case: the project is located outside of the Netherlands and based in an area (Central America) where only few mega projects have been conducted or studied before. The project language is English and my, at the start of the fieldwork, intermediate level of Spanish would be convenient in the Spanish speaking Panamanian society. The ACP had granted access to its actors and documents, and agreed to provide me with a workstation and other facilities needed.

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5 Besides their support for obtaining access in project organization, RWS was not involved in the research nor did RWS play a financial role in this study.
Obtaining Access

On July 8, 2009, I arrived in Panama. A few days later I had my first day in the office of the Panama Canal Expansion Program, located in building 739 at the ACP compound in Corozal Oeste in Panama City. Before coming to Panama I had been in contact with the Environmental Department of the Expansion Program, but soon after my arrival I discovered that their expectations were different than my research intentions. They hoped I would study the local communities and how the Expansion Program and the changes around the Panama Canal affected them, while my main interest was on the internal dynamics of the project organization. Nevertheless, I was warmly welcomed and learned much from the department's employees about the ACP organization, the plans for expanding the waterway and their perspectives on the whole. I was often invited for field visits and enjoyed exploring the project with my respondents. The environmental engineers took me under their wings. They helped me through the bureaucratic process of organizing my formal access to the project organization (it took us two weeks to get an ID card and an email address), they supported me in finding a place to stay and they introduced me to their colleagues in Building 739. I joined them for lunch, was taken to the Administration Building (ACP headquarters), received tours on the project sites and was asked to help them with some translation work. Friendships were built.

As part of the process to receive an ACP identification card, I was asked to sign a Student Agreement and had to deliver various documents proving that I was affiliated with VU University, who my supervisor was and how I was covered by insurance during my stay in Panama. As a result of this process, I was perceived as a student within the ACP. At first, that did not seem to be a problem, but after a few weeks it became apparent that this status would not give me access to the respondents that I wished to speak to. An example from my research journal portrays that I felt stuck:

My talk with [my contact person] was not motivating at all. I learned that doors are kept closed and that I won't get access to the management level. [My contact person] tells me that I should keep an eye out for [the program director]'s car. If that is parked at the back entrance of the building, I have to tell [my contact person] so that he, if there is time (I doubt it) can go and see whether [the
program director] wants to meet me. In addition, when I proposed to go to building 740 (where more people work on the Expansion Program, it’s located across the street), [my contact person] tells me that I first need to write a formal document to ask for an appointment. Argh! It makes me angry, if [my contact person] would just allow me to call the persons that I wish to meet, I’m sure I can get to an appointment, or something…. I think [my contact person] felt that I’m upset, but he just nods… What should I do? (August 2009, Research Journal)

This excerpt from my research journal illustrates that my patience was put to the test. I had been within the project organization for six weeks only and I felt I was not making any progress. However, I had explored the project sites, learned more about the company and familiarized myself with the organization and its employees. A few weeks later, when RWS visited the ACP for various knowledge-exchange workshops, the doors to my research field actually opened. I was invited to be part of workshops and arrived at the office wearing a suit. The ACP employees noticed my change of attire and made remarks like: “wow, you are part of the delegation, the important people…” (Rosa, Informal conversation, September 2009) and “What? You are not a student?” (Gilbert, Informal conversation, September 2009), were often heard that day. The employees that I had wanted to speak to for the last months attended the workshops and heard about my research focus; some gave me their business cards, while others actually invited me to meet them in their office. At a welcoming party for RWS, the ACP Program Director asked me in a friendly manner: “Were they hiding you in the basement?” (Informal conversation, September 2009), stating his surprise for meeting me only two months after my entrance to the organization. Attending these workshops proved to be very fruitful, as I wrote in my research journal: “I feel my status has changed, I am accepted” (September 2009).

Slowly, the contact with the Environmental Department dissolved. I had now access to the project from various angles and I was allowed to attend the weekly Third Set of Locks Project Management Team meetings as an observer. Now that access was secured, my presence became more legitimate and I was left to my own devices. That was exactly what worked best for me. I regularly visited the project site offices, started to schedule interviews and became acquainted with more ACP
personnel and CH2M Hill consultants. At the same time, the Dutch Embassy helped me to gain access to Grupo Unidos por el Canal (further abbreviated as GUPC). This consortium, consisting of the companies Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA, had just won the tender for the design and construction of the Third Set of Locks project. My contact person was interested in my study and connected me with GUPC’s Project Director, who quickly gave me a green light to conduct my research within the consortium. Since GUPC was a contractor for the ACP, I could have asked ACP to support me with access to the project organization of GUPC, but to assure my impartiality I deliberately chose the path of asking for the assistance of the Dutch embassy. From October 2009 I had access to all main parties in the Third Set of Locks Project: the ACP, with the American consultancy firm CH2M Hill as their advisors, and GUPC in the role of contractor.

**Ethnography in the Field**

As this study aims to understand the insiders’ perspective and to illustrate the internal dynamics between participants within a project organization and how they deal with collaboration in their everyday work life, the choice for an ethnographic research methodology naturally followed. An important point about an ethnographic study on the practices of collaboration is that it must be done in the situation in which collaboration normally occurs, that is, collaboration must be seen as a situated practice, in which the context is part of the activity (Orr, 1996). Hence, to study practices in their original setting and to understand how project participants experience cross-cultural collaboration, the main research methods have been interviewing and (participant) observation. In addition to the observations and conversations, a document study provided different kinds of data to the study. Together, these methods allowed me to capture a broad understanding of the project participants’ perceptions and their daily practices of collaboration.

The fieldwork period took place from July 2009 until July 2010. As described above, I obtained access to all central parties of the project organization, that is, the management had allowed me to conduct my study in their work field. However, obtaining access to the various groups inside the project was another hurdle. I had to
negotiate access in different groups, and although that went more smoothly within
the ACP after the visit of RWS, gaining access within GUPC appeared much more
difficult. In the first months of the fieldwork it was important to be seen, to be talked
about and to be recognized. I was recognized easily, as one CH2M Hill manager
remarked when we met: “Ah, you are that blond girl with the red backpack that I
saw walking to the ACP the other day!” (Fieldnotes, September 2009). The manager
immediately knew that I was a stranger: I had blond hair, which is not often seen in
Latin American countries, and I was walking on premises of the ACP, a place where
people drive to go from A to B, even if walking would be faster. From July to December
2009 I spent all my time within the ACP and CH2M Hill. During those months GUPC
was establishing itself in the country and the project. The transformation (from tender
phase to execution phase) was ongoing and project execution was commencing.
GUPC brought employees from Europe and hired various expats from all over the
world; in such a variety of persons I did not stand out. Since most employees had
seen me in the organization from when they arrived, they assumed I was part of their
company. From January to July 2010 I was mainly present in GUPC’s offices and more
employees learned about my background and research intentions. Throughout these
months I continued visiting the ACP and CH2M Hill to make sure our relation stayed
in tact. Table 3.2 provides an overview of my presence in the research field.

Table 3.2 Overview of presence in the research field

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Receiving a green light is just the start of doing research. From this point onwards
it is necessary to get to know your respondents and they need to get to know you.
I accepted almost every invitation that came from the friendships created, which
led me to fancy dinners with diplomats as much as to Friday afternoon drinks in
a dark underground bar. During office hours, I tried my best to assimilate and fit in the community. I learned that many people would bring lunch to the office, so I started to do the same. At midday, I would arrive in a canteen full of people and stick around until the last person had left; there was always somebody to talk to. Others would usually go out for lunch, so after a while I started to join this group of employees. This assimilation allowed me to get to know respondents personally, and sometimes we would meet someone that was also working for the ACP or the Expansion Program (Panama is a small country), which often led to a new respondent in my study. Furthermore, I made sure my presence was known. I was there according the ACP office hours, from 7.15 am to 4.15 pm, and regularly visited the project offices on site. Visiting a site started with organizing a way to get there and thinking about whom I could ask for a ride to travel to the project site. As I had been present in the Project Management Team meetings I would usually ask the project manager of the office I wished to visit for a ride. He would either offer to pick me up in the morning or organize a ride for me. These car rides provided me with first insights on the project or with a chat on the personal experiences of the project participant. After arrival at the project office I was usually left at the receptionist who would take care of me. I was shown around the office, introduced to its employees and given a space to work from.

I started by just being in the office. At the ACP offices I was provided a desktop and a cubicle, at GUPC there was always a desk that I could use to work from my laptop, and with that came the first contacts with my respondents. I began by initiating extensive interviews in a conversational style. In these interviews I learned about the Expansion Program, the ins and outs of the organization and the respondents’ own perspective on the whole. I became part of several groups in the project organization and developed a number of friends who invited me to be part of their social lives. I also made an appearance at numerous public activities that the ACP organized: presentations, special events (such as *Día del Niño Canalero*⁶), sport activities and training sessions. With the friends I made, both in the ACP, CH2M Hill and GUPC, I was invited to more private parties, such as dinners, birthday parties and weekend outings. However, questions and comments about my position and intentions were

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⁶ The Canal’s Children’s Day is organized on a yearly basis and invites children from all over the country to come and see, learn and explore the Panama Canal.
inevitable and there have been occasions in which I felt I had to defend myself. I recall one meeting in the GUPC organization, a staff meeting, which I described in my research journal as follows:

When Jack and I enter the meeting room, some people are seated already. It’s about 4.30pm and the meeting should start as soon as the management team arrives. We take seats at the large meeting table, next to Annabelle, who immediately is protesting against my presence. ‘You can not use this’, she says. ‘You cannot write about this. In fact, you should not be here!’ I’m surprised about her comments, but Jack gestures I should not reply. He is seated in between Annabelle and me, turns his back to her and starts to talk to me: ‘just ignore the lady, she always has something to complain.’ When the Program Leader enters the room and sees me, he nods. I take it as an approval for being present at the meeting. (Research Journal, June 2010)

This ‘auto ethnographic vignette’ (Humphreys, 2005), a personal story illustrating the researcher in the social context, exemplifies I was taken by surprise about the remark that I was not supposed to observe the meeting. At that moment, I had been studying GUPC’s project organization for about six months, I had interviewed Annabelle extensively and was present in earlier staff meetings as well. Furthermore, comments like “are you spying on me?” (Celso, informal conversation, April 2010) or “are you picking my brain again?” (Sergio, informal conversation February 2010) could not be avoided. The following excerpt from my research journal shows how I dealt with such comments.

Bart stated: “Karen is doing a study on interpersonal relationships in this project for VU University in Amsterdam. And she’s always hoping that I will tell her something, but I wisely keep my mouth shut.” We all laughed and I replied saying that this too is information. (Fieldnotes, May 2010)

In this situation, the person, with whom I had a good relationship, introduced me to colleagues of his home organization. Like in this situation, and many others, a
laugh or a joke clarified tense situations. In some other occasions I had to deal with such comments more seriously, ranging from lengthy explanations about my research intentions to writing a detailed interview request. Compared to the ACP and CH2M Hill employees, it cost me more time to win trust among GUPC respondents, which I tried by convincing them that two sides of the coin needed to be studied to provide a holistic account on collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program.

**Interviewing**

Interviews were conducted with project participants from all levels within the Panama Canal Expansion Program. I conducted interviews with workers, engineers, supervisors, administrative personnel and high level managers to understand their daily practices, their ideas, feelings, experiences and beliefs about collaboration, the project, and other issues they believed were important to discuss. With the permission of the respondents, I made audiotapes of the interviews. I always explained to them that with the use of a voice recorder I could focus on what was said instead on what I should be writing down. Anonymity was granted and the voice recorder was put on the table, so that the respondent could see it. One interviewee pressed the pause button during an interview, because he wanted to use a swear word. I noticed that several respondents felt uncomfortable with the voice recorder and therefore might not reveal everything there was to say. In such instances I asked the respondent whether I should take away the recorder, or I would visibly turn it off and ask a few more questions to see whether the respondent then would open up. One person agreed to the use of the voice recorder, but admitted she did not want to see the machine because that would make her nervous. One lawyer made sure to pronounce a disclaimer on the tape before the interview started. Two other respondents did not allow me to record the interview, so I made notes of these conversations.

The more formal interviews were conducted in the office of the employee or in a meeting room. Informal interviews took place at the respondents’ workplace or during a car ride when the respondent had to go somewhere or while I was shown around the project site. Also during dinners, at work-related parties such as BBQ’s, going away parties and season festivities, or in more casual settings like weekend outings, carnival celebrations and tourist activities, I was able to gather research data.
I always carried my research journal along and sought for private spaces to write down comments and remarks.

Typically, interviews had an open character allowing respondents to give a spontaneous insiders account. After a short introduction about the purpose of my research and the interview, I would ask respondents to tell me about their role and responsibility in the project organization and how they perceived collaboration in their work environment. I would continue asking questions on topics that interested me most and invited the respondent to provide concrete descriptions of practices, scenes or events and his/her own thoughts and feelings (Weiss, 1994). Following my research question, I was mostly interested in stories related to cross-cultural collaboration in their everyday work life. Themes like language use, management style, perception of time, work attitude and trust in collaboration surfaced from the data. Reflecting the cumulative process of interviews, these topics were related to issues that previously caught my attention.

Out of a total of eighty-five interviews, three were not recorded. Table 3.3 gives a detailed overview of the amount of interviews per case.

### Table 3.3 Amount of interviews per organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH2M Hill</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacyr</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impregilo</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan de Nul</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSA</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUPC</td>
<td>19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>85</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This number reflects the interviewees who were not affiliated with any of the home organizations, but had a contract with GUPC.

Following the project’s official language, interviews were conducted in English. However, it turned out that during most interviews ‘Spanglish’ (a combination between English and Spanish) was spoken, because many respondents were native Spanish speakers. Four native Dutch speakers were interviewed in the Dutch language. In addition, four interviews were held in Spanish, but, unfortunately, these dialogues did not reach the same level of depth. I transcribed several interview recordings.
myself, but transcription of the majority of the interviews was outsourced to speed up the process. Since research transcription is different than regular transcription (such as business transcription) I invested some time in writing out a clear set of instructions for the transcriptionist. These instructions included a list of (Panamanian) names and places that often occurred in the interviews and an overview of jargon used by respondents. As the how of what is being said is almost as important as the what, the verbatim style of transcription was required. Besides every word and sound on the recordings, also non-verbal communication such as laughter and pauses had to be transcribed. Furthermore, the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality statement to secure that all material, both recordings and transcripts, were kept confidential and were deleted at the end of the project. To verify the accuracy of the transcripts, I asked the transcriptionist to complete one interview as a test. Due to background noise (mostly caused by heavy trucks passing by) or the respondent’s thick Spanish or Italian accent, nine interviews could not be fully transcribed. In those cases I summarized the conversation in detail.

The interviews provided me with a multitude of information about what inclined people to enact the practices they do, how and when they do it. Also, their aims, lived experiences and tacit knowledge about collaboration in the project organization were main factors of interest. However, it is not just a matter of asking what disposes people to enact, or not to enact, practices, as if they are like tools in a toolbox and it is just about explaining when and why someone is picked out; the relationship of practices and people is much more intimate and profound than this (Barnes, 2001). Therefore, to study practices, a mix of interviewing and observation is essential.

**Observing**
This study's interest in the lived experience of the actors in mega projects has led to participant observation (Yanow, 2006). This research method provides data on how cross-cultural collaboration actually comes about in action, and how practices are produced, reproduced and negotiated via collaboration. Hence, one can best gather information about the daily practices and routines of project participants by living and participating in the community and being open to the events and interactions under study (Roessingh & Smits, 2010; Van der Waal, 2009). And thus, I moved to Panama...
for the fieldwork period. In the first month I was based in a hostel located relatively close to ACP’s premises in Corozal Oeste. With the kind help of the ACP employees, I was allowed to stay in an apartment of the ACP transit quarters in Balboa for the remaining fieldwork period. This area is located behind ACP’s Administration building and at the foot of Ancon Hill. Constructed by the Americans when working on the canal, these buildings were used to provide accommodation to military officers and their families. Now, most buildings are turned into offices; the government rents the majority, but the building I lived in is still used to temporarily house consultants supporting the ACP. My neighbors were the personal driver of ACP’s Administrator and his family, a consultant from the United States and, for four months, a Dutch student of Delft University of Technology. The Balboa area contains a former high school, a postal office, a theatre, a fast food restaurant, ACP’s sport facilities and a strip of grass surrounded by palm trees measuring the size of a lock chamber in the canal. By living in this area, I was daily confronted with both the history and current developments of the Panama Canal. I often made use of the sports facilities and found a silent place to work in the beautiful library. In the second half of the year, with help from GUPC, I could make use of a rental car, which gave me much more flexibility to visit meetings and events in various project offices.

As Silverman (2007) suggests, the ethnographer’s gaze demands two things: being able to locate the mundane features of extraordinary situations and to identify what is remarkable in everyday life. As such, I participated in regular daily activities as well as in more special events in the everyday work life. My degree and the kind of participation depended on the activity or event, sometimes participating as a researcher alone, and only observing the event, while at other activities I would act as a situational participant (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Observing the practices of collaboration among project participants involved going with them to the project sites, joining them in meetings and participating in informal festivities. I accepted invitations eagerly and was able to observe daily work routines, workshops, and meetings at various organizational levels as well as the more unofficial practices of collaboration. I furthermore participated in informal gatherings such as lunch and coffee breaks, hallway conversations and company celebrations. Moreover, I invited respondents to reflect on their work in a private setting, such as a dinner or a lunch,
and asked various people to select pictures representing what collaboration meant for them. During or directly after all events I took field notes and transcribed them to my computer the same day, or as soon as possible.

The ACP and GUPC each had their own project site offices, based on the Atlantic side (in a town called Gatún) and Pacific side (in Cocolí) of the Panama Canal. I spent two full weeks at each site office and tagged along with employees at different levels in the project organization, e.g., foremen, engineers, and project managers. I participated in meetings of different collaborative relationships and was allowed to attend a few top-level meetings. In between interviews and meetings there was a lot of time to wander through the labyrinth of cubicles. During these walks I remembered the posters in the hallway, took pictures, and encountered employees who were open for a chat or invited me to see the project's progress in the field. Wandering around in GUPC's offices felt different, as a more hasty work environment prevailed. GUPC's offices did not have cubicles, but buildings were divided into various department rooms. Most of my time was spent in an office frequently visited by employees who needed supplies or general assistance. This way, many project participants noticed my presence and some showed curiosity about my position. It was often after meetings or during lunchtime that I could connect with GUPC project participants. CH2M Hill employees, all based in the ACP offices, seemed to best understand the purpose of my research, probably because the research topic is more discussed within their home organization, and therefore they were open to speaking up and allowing me to observe in their work environment.

The special events I observed were, among others, pre-construction meetings, the project award meeting for PAC 4, and trade missions between the Netherlands and Panama. In addition, I participated in the knowledge-exchange workshops between the ACP and Rijkswaterstaat, the One Team, One Mission dinner party, CH2M Hill's safety training and GUPC's introduction course for new employees. Additionally, I obtained a broader view of the canal’s operations by visiting the Miraflores Locks Visitors Center regularly, by going on a tugboat and working as a line handler.\(^7\)

Observational notes range from hallway comments and office drawings to extensive detailed descriptions of an event of space. At meetings, for example, I would

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7 An ethnographic account of my experience as a line handler in the Panama Canal was published in Essay, the magazine for the Faculty of Social Sciences at VU University, Volume 17, Edition 1.
take note about what was being said and how comments were portrayed, e.g., facial expressions and gestures, but I would also make drawings of the décor and seating arrangements. In addition, I would keep an eye out about what happened after the meeting: informal groups were often formed for further discussion, either staying in the meeting room or moving to a private office space. In addition, I kept notes of my personal reflections on the everyday life as a researcher in a separate research journal.

Reading
To support data from interviews and observations, a documentary study fed this research with more contextual information on the Panama Canal Expansion Program. This involves the study of existing documents and documents produced during the fieldwork period, to understand their substantive content and to illuminate deeper meanings revealed by their style and coverage (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Table 3.4 provides insight into the type of documents that I gathered per organization.

Table 3.4 Type of documents per organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Document types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACP</td>
<td>Website, Intranet, emails, company brochures, newspaper articles and cartoons, presentations, policy documents, annual reports, organization charts, contracts, tender documents, studies on Panama Canal, historical photos, maps and articles, videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH2M Hill</td>
<td>website, company booklet, presentations, studies, ACP agreement documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacyr</td>
<td>Website, newspaper articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impregilo</td>
<td>Website, newspaper articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan de Nul</td>
<td>Website, newspaper articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSA</td>
<td>Website, newspaper articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUPC</td>
<td>Website, newspaper articles, presentations, emails, contracts, tender documents, organization chart, videos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the first phase of the research I extensively explored the Internet to learn about the waterway and its infrastructural mega project. Once in the field, I got access to ACP’s Intranet and the e-mail system. Just like all the ACP employees, I received an International Press Review in my inbox everyday. This email contained links to articles written about the Panama Canal, which was very helpful for me as it indicated how
much interest there is for the canal, its operations and expansion project. Articles and cartoons in the local newspapers gave insight in what is being said about the canal's development, while the companies' webpages, brochures, presentations and annual reports illustrated how the organizations portray themselves. Contracts, proposals and tender documents described the contractual relationship between the ACP and CH2M Hill and between the ACP and GUPC, as well as between Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA. Respondents helped me gather documents about their organization by sending me internal correspondence, meeting reports, and the Little Yellow Book, a small booklet capturing the values on which CH2M Hill was built (Howland, 1982). Just like earlier studies on the Panama Canal, such as the Environmental Impact Study (Vallarino, Galindo, & Brenes, 2007), the Master Plan (ACP, 2006a) and theses by other researchers (e.g. Rosales, 2007; Versteijlen, 2010), books about Panama (e.g. Harding, 2006; Porras, 2005) and the history of the Panama Canal (e.g. Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977; Parker, 2009) as well as articles found in the ACP's Archives, recent publications by Wikileaks (e.g. Jiménez, 2010; Wikileaks 2010) and local newspapers (e.g. La Prensa) provided me with a broader perspective on the Expansion Program of the Panama Canal.

Although I immersed myself in the project organization, I am aware that my access to the dense social network and the informal aspects of the organizational life in the Panama Canal Expansion Program was limited. Some events that were interesting to me occurred at inaccessible places or I found out about them afterwards: off-site meetings, private, after office hours and after meetings discussions, secret one-on-ones, and so forth. Certainly, access to the field is never unlimited; one continuously needs to negotiate and renegotiate, develop and maintain, her place in the field (Duijnhoven, 2010; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2009). I was flexible to adjust to the environment and quickly built working relationships with project participants. Most of my contacts were engineers, middle managers and their subordinates. I was able to find a place in their networks and build relationships with people from various organizational levels: workers, secretaries, engineers, supervisors and top-managers. To validate my findings, I presented my (preliminary) results and conclusions to respondents in Panama and to project managers working in other infrastructural mega projects.
Besides Third Set of Locks Project I also had connections with participants from other projects of the Panama Canal Expansion Program. To broaden my focus on cross-cultural collaboration in this mega project, I arranged for two students from the Master program Culture, Organization and Management at VU University to participate in my research project. Lieke Rijnders and Catelijn Schönfeld came to Panama in February 2010 and each conducted a three-month ethnographic study of an excavation project in the Expansion Program. Lieke studied the on-going Pacific Access Channel 3 (PAC3) project, while Catelijn focused on the start-up of the Pacific Access Channel 4 (PAC4) project. The students interviewed respondents at all levels of their project organization, both at ACP’s side as well as at the contractor’s side, and conducted extensive participant observations. They did an excellent job and I am grateful for their participation in my study8.

Analyzing and Writing

During the fieldwork period I gathered a wealth of empirical data: interview transcriptions, observational notes, pictures, newspaper articles, presentations, video clips, policy documents, website material, brochures, memos, reports, and so forth. To identify and process the relevant information from the endless amount of documents, I saved the documents according to date, organization (ACP, CH2M Hill or GUPC) and the general topic of the document in a folder indicating the type of data (interview, meeting, research journal, media, etc.). Organizing the data in this manner helped me to maintain an overview of the documents collected and to find a document again in a later stage of the research. All interviews and observational notes were uploaded in the Qualitative Data Analysis Software Program ‘Atlas.ti’ (version 6.2). In this content analysis program I read and interpreted each text sequence in order to assign a label to it. Labels emerged intuitively and, similarly, were construed from the data. A classified text could be a phrase, a few sentences or as much as a paragraph. During this process I continuously went back and forth between documents questioning under which label data could be placed and to compare new data with material that

8 In the presentation of my research findings I have not used any of the students’ research data. Nevertheless, their presence in the field and the discussions we had about the research field were fruitful for the development of my research.
already had a label. To make sure that labels remained comprehensible to me, I added memos explaining their meaning and how I intended using them. Essentially, I used two kinds of labels: those directly found in the material and those I constructed from the material (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). While the list of labels expanded, ideas developed and categories for the labels surfaced. Shifting the labels around in all possible ways refined the initial coding structure, and, keeping the everyday practices in mind, I tried to think of possible ways to connect the categories. Subsequently, I attached theoretical concepts and comments to the categories and wrote memos on the possible connections between categories. This process of coding is a very time consuming process; it involved a highly intensive analysis – word for word, line by line and paragraph by paragraph. To save time I therefore decided not to upload and code all other documents gathered, but to start writing up the ideas and returning to these documents when needed. Hence, observational notes and contextual document were not included in the content analysis program as I had these on top of my mind and, following my structure of saving the data, were easy to find when required. In the empirical chapters I will illustrate the main categories from my analysis through presenting quotations typical of many others in the data set.

Although a book is read from the beginning to the end, writing often starts in the middle. As such, I started writing up the empirical chapters first. Following the research aim to illustrate how project participants translate and negotiate practices and to portray internal dynamics with regard to collaboration within a project organization, an ethnographic writing style was adopted. Only elaborate descriptions of the practices of collaboration can provide an in-depth understanding of the cultural complex processes within the project organization. Through thick descriptions of the everyday work environment, and its context, ethnographic writers intend to explain the actors’ behavior as well as to make this behavior meaningful to an outsider. It is therefore important to pay attention to the rich layers of meaning and symbolism that characterize human behavior and social phenomena (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). It should be noted that, just like the practitioners they write about, scientists are practitioners who want to persuade their public (Van Hulst, 2008).

For a long time I aimed at illustrating the data in three collaborative relationships that can be found in the Panama Canal Expansion Program: (1) ACP with CH2M
Hill, (2) Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA forming GUPC together, and (3) ACP with GUPC. However, in the writing process it became clear that it would be more interesting to write up the data with a stronger emphasis on the practices of collaboration itself, and finally I decided to structure the dissertation in the way it is presented in the following chapters: portraying practices of collaboration within GUPC (Chapter 5 and 6) and between ACP and CH2M Hill (Chapter 7). Figure 3.1 illustrates the final research cases in this study.

Since interviews were conducted in various languages, I translated the interview parts to English when cited in the dissertation. Moreover, following the standardized approach (Blauner in Weiss, 1994), some quotes had to be adjusted to enhance readability. That is, in this study I have no means to question the respondents’ language skills nor do I want to disturb the reader with language errors in speech marks. It is important to note here that words not belonging to the respondent have never been attributed to the respondent. Cleaning up speech is solely done to make the respondent’s statements accessible to the reader, because absolute literal transcription of respondent’s words can interfere with understanding them (Weiss, 1994). To give an example of how such editing is done, two examples follow:

![Diagram](image-url)
The examples illustrate that without losing the meaning of the text, marginal corrections improved its readability. In Example 1 I enhanced the flow of the sentence and adjusted the tense of the quotation so that it was in line with its context. In Example 2 I changed the text from a passive form to a more active form and included information enhancing the readers comprehension. In addition, to safeguard the anonymity promised to actors in the field, names and positions used in the dissertation are fictitious. Although I aim displaying the data transparently and writing clearly and comprehensibly about the field, I find it more important to make sure that respondents come to no harm by what is written. I changed names and altered positions by trying to either find a substitute position involving similar kind of work or by using relatively vague positions, such as seen in the examples above: a Pacific Engineer Impregilo is not the original position of the respondent. This ‘position’ reflects a general direction into the actor’s occupation and indicates the organization to which the actor is related: this respondent is an engineer whose home organization is the Italian participant in GUPC, Impregilo. In some instances, however, it seemed illogical to disguise the identity of the respondent, as his or her name and position are publicly known. In these cases I still covered the actor’s name and position, but stayed closer
to the original data. At first, I also tried to protect the names of the organizations under study, but, because the Panama Canal Expansion Program and its participating organizations receive so much attention, I soon understood this was pointless.

When I finished an empirical text about the collaborative relationship between the ACP and CH2M Hill, I sent it to several key respondents to receive feedback from the field as well as to show my style of writing. Bringing written material back to the respondents is called ‘member-checking’ (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Ybema et al., 2009). This is not done for checking quotes, but moreover to make sure that I fully grasped the insiders’ perspective on a certain event or organizational policy. I wanted their input on my text, but simultaneously aimed at illustrating the manner in which data would be portrayed, because an ethnographic writing style was new to many respondents. I tried to create awareness of novelistic texts and the use of quotes and personal stories propagating the research data and outcomes. My respondents recognized my interpretations, agreed to most of them and were surprised by the dynamics I unraveled. This work was also presented to my supervisors, practitioners and academic colleagues at conferences, and finally, published in an academic journal (see: Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012). Ultimately, a draft of the complete dissertation was sent to key respondents from the ACP, CH2M Hill and GUPC.

It appeared to be highly important to continuously stay in touch with the field. In November 2011, for example, I received a call from one of my key respondents in Panama; he had read what a journalist had written about collaboration in the Third Set of Locks project after interviewing me. Although the caller agreed with my words, and those of the journalist, his boss summoned him to ensure the text would be erased from the article. I was given two options: I could either contact the journalist myself to request removal of the text or the company itself would take action. I opted for the first choice as the latter might have resulted in a ban to publish this thesis. This event clearly illustrates the sensitivity of the research and exemplifies that participating organizations are not ready to openly discuss the topic. Furthermore, it shows that remaining in contact with the field is essential to discuss journalistic reporting and presentation of ethnographic research outcomes (Denzin, 1997).
Although in this chapter research activities such as generating, coding, analyzing and writing the data are divided into separate paragraphs, in practice these activities are intertwined in a more interpretive and inductive process: prior experiences shape one’s understanding of new experiences, and the new understanding is the starting point for subsequent experiences (Yanow, 2006). Fieldwork seems to be a particular activity, because it is separated in time and space, but in fact, analysis starts in the field and continues throughout the writing process and presentation of the research (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Hence there is no one-way street between the researcher and the object of study: the two affect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010). In the previous paragraphs I have tried to be as reflective and transparent as possible about the research activities, but what is missing is an account on my personal background and the role as a researcher. This will be described in the following paragraph.

About me: the researcher

As with picture taking, one can capture an image from various viewpoints. The picture that I portray in this dissertation is taken from where I have been standing and based on my perspective and interpretations. It is very much possible that if someone else would have been present at the same place and time, the picture would have come out differently. Influenced by the personal meaning making processes of its taker, a picture is very much a personal account. As such, the researcher and her research are inextricably bound up with each other. In ethnographic research, therefore, the researcher is the primary research instrument and a detailed account on my background and personal experiences can enhance the reader’s understanding of the tool I was in this study (Humphreys, 2005).

My cultural background as a Dutch female, raised in a Western society, educated in Human Resource Management (Ba.), with academic training as an Organizational Scientist (MSc.) as well as my specific upbringing influences my understanding of the research setting. This background has affected the choices I made and supported me in gathering data for this research as well as signaling the cultural practices that exist and emerge in collaborative relationships (Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012). It is,
however, important to note that I have no technical background, neither have I ever worked in an infrastructural megaproject before. To a certain extent, this has been beneficial, as most of the time I did not understand what engineers were talking about when they talked numbers or studied drawings, instead I had to ask them to explain those to me, which they all generously did and I felt this was helpful in winning the confidence of the engineers. Yet, the lack of a technical background was also a burden as my notes omitted things that seemed obvious in the field but were less so when reading them from behind my desk.

Being a stranger in the field, which is a strength of ethnographic research, helped me seeing certain phenomena as remarkable while those are not so to insiders (Czarniawska, 1998; Ybema & Kamsteeg, 2009). On the other hand, my presence also had an effect on the project organization, as it seemed that the term ‘organizational culture’ received more attention than before. One case in point is the ACP Program Director’s presentation to a group of Dutch entrepreneurs and the Dutch Minister of Foreign Trade⁹, in which he openly spoke about cultural differences and the struggles caused by the cultural gap between the ACP and the GUPC organization (Fieldnotes, January 2010). Nevertheless, being part of the field for such a long time sometimes resulted in a tendency that I took over the insiders’ language and did not recognize the extraordinary within the field anymore. The assistance of my supervisors and colleagues has been of high value in calling my attention to the interesting material I gathered.

The Latin American culture, Panama’s society, its historical background and the male dominated construction sector roughly characterize the research setting. Being a foreign, white, female researcher in this setting was peculiar. At various instances respondents would act surprised when I told them I was 27 years old, as for them, conducting a Ph.D. study is what careerists only do towards the end of their career. The experiences I gathered when travelling South East Asia (in 2004) and South America (in 2005) were beneficial in connecting with research respondents as they often resided from or had visited places where I had been; this helped us start a conversation. In 2007, I conducted an ethnographic study among the Mennonites in Belize (see: Smits, Nabben, & Kok, 2009), and learned that although having another

⁹ During the Parliament Balkenende IV, from 2007 to 2010, Frank Heemskerk was ‘Staatssecretaris van Economische Zaken’, a title that outside the Netherlands translates as ‘Minister of Foreign Trade’.
background or personality than my respondents, I could easily blend in the research community. This appeared not to be any different in Panama: I was closely involved with Panama’s society and the employees of the project organization.

Respondents from all levels in the organization reacted friendly and warmly when seeing me. I felt that within GUPC I was perceived in a more business-like manner, while within the ACP I was treated more informally. I think this happened because the ACP and CH2M Hill employees got to know me better due to various organizational activities in which I participated, and, as a group they had been together for a longer period of time. Within GUPC, I was new, but also everyone else was new to each other. It took GUPC employees a little longer to realize that I was not reporting to the ACP, but rather had a ‘neutral’ position. Yet, I could not get rid of the ACP status entirely. I continuously had to explain who I was and what my position was in the project. At the same time, in other contexts I enjoyed the ACP status. When being stopped by the police, for example, showing my ACP ID card always helped me to pass their control posts more quickly.

Furthermore, the different office environments came to be reflected in the way I dressed. Initially, my European outfits might have distinguished me, but I tried to minimize this by observing the dress code in the offices and shop in local stores. I noticed that in the ACP offices, where CH2M Hill employees were also based, the dress code was fairly neat: people would wear suits and blouses. GUPC’s dress code came across as less formal, since many employees would wear jeans and t-shirts. As a result, I dressed accordingly. If I had planned a field visit, I had to wear jeans, sneakers and a t-shirt. Depending on other activities I had planned for that day, I would either wear or bring such an outfit.

My blond hair and blue eyes gave away my non-Latin descent. As much as I blended in the research community, I also remained an outsider for having such different looks and background. In some occasions, this made me feel uncomfortable. Once, in an interview a GUPC respondent started by saying that he would not be able “to be questioned when I looked at him like that”. In this particular situation, I remained silent for a minute, continued the interview and ‘ignored’ the remark. In another interview I asked the respondent to get me in touch with his supervisor, which he teasingly refused to do so, but then said: “your eyes make me weak” and
gave me the details I requested. This same person learned that the Dutch have a habit of greeting a person with three kisses on the cheeks, and would always ask for two more than is Panama’s habit. Only once I felt uncomfortable: in a car ride with an ACP respondent, who, as it soon became clear, did not take me out to check out a situation in the field, but was highly interested in matching me with his son. Nonetheless, no respondent ever crossed a line, never did I feel threatened, yet these occasions reminded me of my strangeness. On the other hand, there also were moments in which I felt that my appearance was an advantage. When encouraging people to reveal information, for example, and when entering ACP’s premises without ID card guards would always let me pass. Of course, I never know for sure whether this was an effect of the distinct looks, or whether it was the friendly female face that helped me gain access and persuade people to speak in the mostly male dominated research environment.

As mentioned, a few months into the research the contact with the Environmental Department dissolved. This also resulted in a new workplace for me; I was located in an office further away from the headquarters for the Expansion Program. Still in close distance to the headquarter buildings number 739 and 740, a three-minute drive or a ten-minute walk, my desk at office building 600 felt far away from the scene. At first, however, I wrote about my new workspace:

Wow, this is great! A view over the Canal! Research-wise this office is a little far away from the Third Set of Locks employees, but I can walk over there anytime, I have my access to the buildings and to the people. At the same time this seems to be a nice and quiet place to work on my interviews and notes. (December 2009)

A couple of months later, my enthusiasm decreased as I found out that the offices in this building were mostly empty. Compared to the lively 739, silence in building 600 at times felt painful. I felt as I was tucked away from the action. Nevertheless, this office also gave me more space to move around freely, and helped me remember that I was lucky to be at such a special place: I could see ships passing through the Panama Canal and occasionally, a little bird would accompany me at my window,
or a toucan would pass by. In the end, moving to this office never really affected my position within the project organization under study, as long as I actively kept developing and maintaining the relationships built. In fact, I think that moving to this office triggered my friends to come up with a nickname for me, *la muñeca que pasea* (the doll that travels), referring to the notion that I was always going somewhere, always visiting places and people; they would always encounter me in different places in the organization. I never stopped exploring.

As mentioned, being a stranger in the field has its advantages. However, it also counts for various limitations. Language, gender and time are the three major limitations I encountered in this study. As a consequence of my anxiety to speak Spanish, I started out conducting interviews in English, which was perfectly possible within the ACP and CH2M Hill. Although I proved to understand the majority of informal conversations held in Spanish, I took private Spanish lessons for a semester at *Universidad de Las Americas* (UDELAS) and followed group lessons at *Español en Panamá* (EPA) for one month to further master my Spanish language skills. My Spanish quickly improved, which was highly appreciated by respondents, and when I gained more confidence, I could conduct various interviews in Spanish. Limitations with regard to being a female researcher in the male dominated environment mostly came to the fore in never being ‘one of the guys’; I was always ‘the researcher’, ‘the Dutch girl’ or ‘the professor’. Time limitations for this study are related to my presence in the field. I could only be present in the project for the period of one year, due to which I did not attend the tender phase and could only follow the years to come from a distance.

At its core, fieldwork is a long social process of coming to terms with a research community and its culture. It is a process that begins before a researcher enters the field, with preparation, and continues long after leaving the field (Van Maanen, 1988). After I left the field as a researcher I stuck closely to the developments of the Expansion Program via the news on the Internet10, contact with key respondents and regular visits verifying my data and preliminary analyses. As portrayed in this methodological chapter, ethnographic research is a highly personal endeavor. As such, what is presented in the following chapters is based on my idiosyncratic interpretations of the research community and its related context.

10 ACP maintains accounts on Twitter and Facebook and I often visited the websites of the ACP and GUPC.
Chapter 4

The Panama Canal: a look back to look forward
Introduction

After a noisy take off this sight puts a smile on my face: Panama! I accepted an invitation to fly in a Cessna plane over the country and now I glance outside the airplane window. The sun casts its beautiful rays as it climbs higher in the morning sky. The green colors of the jungle are brightened, the white sand of the beaches is lightened and the sky shows its bright blue colors. For a second, the reflections of the sun in the ocean blind me. As the plane leans over to make a sharp curve, I have a good view of the country’s Pacific shore. There it is, from high up in the air I can clearly see how the Panama Canal cuts its way through the land. Via a wide entrance the waterway curves around the mountains to find a way to the other side of the country. When we slowly descend, the numerous dots in the ocean shape into cruise ships and cargo vessels waiting for their turn to sail through the Canal. Where beach and rainforest color the left side of the Pacific entrance, Panama City starts on the right side. While carrying the Inter-American Highway, the Bridge of the Americans connects the two pieces of land together. A dense construction of housing starts immediately after the bridge. Recreation area Calzada de Amador points out: three islands that are connected to the mainland. This picturesque causeway, lined with palm trees, was built with excavation material during the construction of the canal. Formerly part of a military base, the area now offers a wide variety of restaurants, a magnificent view on the city and the Pacific entrance of the canal. Locals and tourists enjoy the paved sidewalk for a leisurely walk, or come to bike, skate or jog while enjoying the scenic views.

When we fly above the coastline I recognize some of the high-rise buildings and the pilot points at a building in a shape of the letter D. “That is done by Trump. Donald Trump,” he informs me. Many other buildings around it are under construction and various others seem to be desolate. The pilot explains that most residence buildings are used as a second home for wealthy citizens of the United States, Canada and Europe; only a few weeks a year these apartments are in use. I gaze around while we follow the canal until we reach the Gatun Locks, where the waterway meets the Atlantic Ocean. The San Blas Islands are also located at this side of the country. Home to the Kuna Indians this archipelago consists of numerous small islands. “About 365,” says the pilot, “one for each day of the year.” And he turns the plane to make our way back to the airport.
Safe and sound I set foot on Panama grounds. Up in the air the climate was fresh, but as soon as I step out of the plane I feel a blanket of humidity wrapping around my body; I like to think of it as a warm embrace of welcome. Welcome back, there is so much more to explore about this country and its Canal! (Fieldnotes, November 2009)

Panama. Bordering with Costa Rica and Colombia, Panama connects Central America with South America (see Figure 4.1). Due to the geographic location of the Isthmus of Panama, the country has long been coveted as a place where the Atlantic and Pacific oceans should meet, and, with the Panama Canal, they finally do.

In this chapter I aim to portray the context of this dissertation. I will first lay out the history of the Panama Canal, a story in which the country’s history is inextricably bound up. Second, in relation to the Panama Canal operations, I will discuss the goal and plans for the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Also, I will briefly elaborate on the components in this infrastructural mega project. Third, the main parties in the Third Set of Locks project, and those in my research, are outlined.

Figure 4.1 Map of Panama (Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin)

History of the Panama Canal

In 1513, when Vasco Nuñez de Balboa discovered the Southern Sea (later known as the Pacific Ocean) and realized how close this ocean is to the Atlantic Ocean, the history of the Panama Canal began. From that moment onwards there had been
talks about a shortcut through Central America, but it required certain advances in engineering, among other things, to actually construct this alternate route. Three hundred years later, discussions about where a canal ought to go developed into a choice between Nicaragua and Panama. While the debate continued, Colombia allowed a group of entrepreneurs from the United States of America to build a railroad across their province Panama. After their experiences in Panama, however, the railroad builders argued for another location for the canal as, for them, “Panama was the worst place possible to send men to build anything” (McCullough, 1977: 36). Despite these experiences, an international congress, which was attended by the world-famous Suez Canal engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps, voted for a sea level canal in Panama. Known after 1869 as ‘The Great Engineer’, de Lesseps, who in fact had no technical background or experience in financing, took command of the enterprise to build a sea level canal in Panama (McCullough, 1977).

The French Attempt

The work in Panama was an immensely larger and more baffling task than Lesseps had performed at the Suez Canal (McCullough, 1977). Different than in Suez, the climate in Panama was not only hot but with humidity reaching 98 percent at times, suffocating. While digging at Suez had been through a flat level dessert, in Panama the workers encountered hard rock and clay. Another important difference between Suez and Panama was the rainfall, in Suez it rained about nine inches a year, while rainfall in Panama was measured in feet\(^1\); ten feet or more on the Caribbean slope and five to six feet in Panama City (McCullough, 1977). As a result of the heavy rainfall, digging proved to be much more difficult in Panama and the threat of diseases was very high. Panama appeared to be the most difficult place to construct a canal: there were thick jungles full of snakes, mosquitoes that carried malaria or yellow fever, deep swamps and a heavy mountain range (Parker, 2009).

De Lesseps and his crew spent eight and a half years fighting against the jungle, a battle they lost. An earthquake, fires, floods, the continuous epidemic of yellow fever, a huge amount of corruption and, on top of this, insufficient funds and unfortunate engineering decisions converged into a tragic ending of the French attempt (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977; Parker, 2009). In 1889, de Lessep's venture fell: more than

\(^1\) One feet equals 12 inches.
a billion francs—about US$ 287 million—had been spent, accidents and diseases had claimed twenty thousand lives and the project organization *Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interoceánique de Panama* went bankrupt (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977). The lesson learned from the French undertaking was that the construction of a canal went beyond the capacity of any purely private enterprise, it had to be a national undertaking, and the United States of America appeared to be the one nation ready to mount such and effort (McCullough, 1977).

**The American Victory**

When Theodore Roosevelt became the President of the United States of America in 1901, he was determined that a canal was the vital, indispensable path to a global future for the United States (Ives, 2010; McCullough, 1977). For both commercial as well as military vessels it would significantly improve shipping time, lower shipping costs, and avoid passing through the often-dangerous weather at the tip of South America. Furthermore, a two-ocean navy would not be necessary when the two coasts would be connected. A canal would demonstrate American power to the world and enhance the nation’s identity as a supreme authority (Greene, 2009). Despite intensive lobbying and heavy discussions about where this canal had to be built, in Nicaragua or Panama, President Roosevelt finally decided it had to be Panama (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977).

There was just one obstacle: Panama was a small province of Colombia and the Colombian constitution prohibited any sovereignty to give away any part of the country, which is exactly what Roosevelt had in mind. He had learned that a group of Panamanian elites had plotted a revolution for years and he decided to support this group to declare its independence under the protection of the United States (Greene, 2009). On November 3rd, 1903, a coup gave birth to the Republic of Panama. Soon after this bloodless revolution Panama and the United States signed the Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty. This agreement evoked a whirlwind of controversy as it gave astonishing rights to the United States, while it eliminated any independence of the Republic of Panama (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977). The treaty granted the United States effective sovereignty over the ‘Canal Zone’, a ten-mile wide swath

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12 United States of America will be further abbreviated as United States, except for when I use direct quotes of authors.
that stretched clear across the isthmus and cut the country in two. It gave the United States the right to purchase or control any land or building regarded necessary for the construction of the canal and allowed the United States to intervene anywhere in the republic to restore public order “in case the Republic of Panama should not be, in the judgment of the United States, able to maintain such order” (Greene, 2009). In three ways, the United States dominated the isthmus and created a great degree of dependency for Panama (Harding, 2006). First, a dual-tier payroll system was implemented paying the Americans in gold coin, but Panamanians, and other workers, in the less-valuable silver coin. Gold workers earned high wages and terrific benefits, including six weeks of paid vacation leave and one month of paid sick leave every year, plus a free pass for travel within the Zone, while silver workers received no benefits, were fed unappetizing food and were housed in substandard shacks (Greene, 2009). Second, racism effects treated Panamanians as second-class citizens excluding them from public life by signs like “whites only”. The racial hierarchy nourished and legitimized a segregation system into the society of the Republic of Panama (Greene, 2009; Parker, 2009). And third, after accepting the American dollar as a legal tender in Panama the government’s hands were tied, as it could not make its own monetary policy. Hence, on paper the canal was in Panamanian hands and under control of the United States, yet, in practice, the Canal Zone was treated as a sovereign territory where American laws and power were supreme (Harding, 2006). Later, this treaty became a contentious diplomatic issue between Panama and the United States.

The Panama Canal construction project attracted people from all over the world. It promised the return of prosperity surpassing the French era and there was no doubt it would be completed (McCullough, 1977). Labor agents targeted the Caribbean islands for workers and attracted at least twenty thousand Barbadians and an almost equal amount of West Indians to travel to Panama and sign a contract with the government of the United States (Greene, 2009). Although the project drew mostly migrants from this region, thousands of others from Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru, India, China and Europe also packed their suitcases for the Canal Zone. Even higher numbers of people from the United States were attracted by the prestigious job for the federal government, the adventure and good payment. Under
supervision of army doctor Colonel William Gorgas doctors and sanitary inspectors fought yellow fever and malaria; all streets in Panama were cleaned, pools were drained and waterways oiled to get rid of the disease-carrying mosquitos (Parker, 2009). As conditions in the isthmus improved, after 1906, more American women packed their bags for Panama so they might work as nurses, secretaries or provide a home for their husbands (Greene, 2009). Acting as a global magnet, the canal project drew families away from their home countries and set in motion extensive changes concerning migration, labor supply and the allocation of economic wealth and social status.

Various towns arose in the Canal Zone, most of which had American sections, but also labor camps for various ethnic groups emerged. The ‘Zone’, as it was often referred to, took on an identity and “became a community, or, rather, a cluster of communities” (Friar, 1996:7). American residents made up the core of permanents residents in the zone and became known as ‘Zonians’, who lived in a quasi-utopian paradise where virtually everything was subsidized by the United States (Harding, 2006). In stark contrast to life in Panama, the Americans lived in great luxury, as American food, music, housing and entertainment were omnipresent in the Canal Zone. Residents of the Canal Zone lived under the American law, had their own police force, court system, and even stamps (Friar, 1996). However, a strong segregation system that was based on race created big divides between canal employees. The unequal education system, for example, provided good quality schooling for American children. White schools were housed in new buildings, well staffed and equipped so that performance corresponded to that of schools in the United States, while non-white schools were housed in rundown buildings, staffed by less trained teachers who had to oversee high amounts of pupils and received low-quality facilities (Parker, 2009). The color line cut through every facet of daily life in the Zone (McCullough, 1977). Furthermore, relations between canal builders and the local Panamanian population was uneasy from the start of the project. To the Americans, Panama was a land of dark, ignorant, undersized people who disliked them and showed very little appreciation for all that was being done for them (McCullough, 1977). Panamanians, on the other hand, were hostile against the Americans and resented their power, and they saw the ‘Gringo’ as loud, arrogant, impolite and
excessive drinkers (McCullough, 1977). On its peak, about forty-six thousand people lived in the Canal Zone and since everyone had to be an employee of the Panama Canal Company, the Zone had no unemployment, no poverty and almost no crime (Friar, 1996). The ‘state Panama’, as it was often perceived, was deeply extended into the lives of the residents of the Canal Zone and the Republic of Panama, and a firm boundary was established between the two (Greene, 2009).

The construction of the Panama Canal officially took ten years, from May 1904 to August 1914, and overlapped with the tenure of three chief engineers. The first engineer, named John Wallace, only stayed on for the first chaotic year in the isthmus. John Stevens, the second engineer, played a key contribution by pleading for a lock rather than a sea-level canal. He remained on the job for two years. The final engineer, George Washington Goethals, oversaw most of the construction of the Panama Canal and stayed on the job until completion of the project (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977; Parker, 2009). With newer and bigger machinery, like the steam shovel, an enormous international workforce and a solution to fight malaria and yellow fever, the United States constructed the Panama Canal with its three locks (one 1-chamber and one 2-chamber lock at the Pacific side and one 3-chamber lock at the Atlantic side): Gatún, Pedro Miguel and Miraflores, each named after the village where it was built (Del R. Martinez, 2009). The design and construction of the locks was the most spectacular aspect of the project (Greene, 2009). An artificial lake, Gatun Lake, was created so that ships could pass the canal at 26 meters above sea level, through the narrow Gaillard Cut. The costs of the project had been more than four times what constructing Suez Canal had cost and were enormous for those days; no other construction effort in the history of the United States paid such a price in dollar or in human life (McCullough, 1977). This project took more than 5,000 human lives and totaled US$ 352,000,000 in expenditures, which, taken together with the French expenditure summed up to a cost of US$ 639,000,000 (McCullough, 1977). Six months ahead of schedule, and with a final price that was actually US$ 23,000,000 below what was estimated in 1907, the construction of the Panama Canal was finished (McCullough, 1977). In 1914, nearly 34 years after the first shovel hit the ground, its gates opened for the first vessels to pass (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977; Parker, 2009). This moment was a symbol to Americans, and to
the rest of the world, letting them know that the United States had firmly established itself as the most powerful nation on earth.

Ownership of the Canal

After August 15, 1914, when the canal was officially inaugurated with the passage of steamship Ancón, the supervision of the waterway remained under American administration. The opening ceremony celebrated America’s triumph and the capstone project characterizing Panama. It also signaled the beginning of an almost 100-year relationship between Panama and the United States, ranging from intervention and repression to reconciliation and cooperation (Harding, 2006). Although Panamanians initially embraced the canal construction and hoped to benefit from the American effort, their resentment grew over the years as the promised fruits of the alliance proved sour (Greene, 2009).

In the decades after the opening of the waterway, tensions between Panama and the United States were often stormy and colored by deep conflicts and violence. Fostered by racial differences, notions of honor, respectability and civilization, the relationship between the countries and their citizens was highly problematic (Greene, 2009). Frequently, the United States sent troops into the country to suppress protests and, on the other side, the Panamanian police aggressively stood up against canal employees (Harding, 2006). These frictions illustrated the complex and tense relationship between Panamanians and Americans. Elite Panamanians perceived the presence of the United States and the canal as necessary, expecting it to be a path to modernity and civilization, yet instead of welfare, the project brought Americans who behaved disorderly and uncivilized (Greene, 2009). More and more Panamanians claimed a revision of the original terms of the Hay-Bunau-Varilla treaty, and the steady growth of dissatisfaction and frustration, as it reached its limit, was made known in numerous uprisings and demonstrations (Greene, 2009; Harding, 2006; Llacer, 2005). By means of the 1964 flag incident, Panama’s social volcano erupted.

For years, there had been discussion about whether the Panamanian flag should be flying next to the American flag in the Canal Zone. When the governor of the Canal Zone decided that at specific sites both flags should be flying, a large number of Zonians enraged as they perceived this decision as a symbolic renunciation of U.S.
sovereignty (Harding, 2006). Panama’s flag was flown at various locations, but it remained absent at the Canal Zone’s prominent Balboa High School. On January 9, 1964, a group of Panamanian students entered the Canal Zone to fly the Panamanian flag in front of the school, next to the American flag (Greene, 2009; Harding, 2006; Llacer, 2005). When the Panamanian students met the Canal Zone police, American school officials, students and their parents, a scuffle broke out; tempers flared, the Panamanian flag was torn, and wide-spread rioting followed (Harding, 2006). News of the uprising spread the fighting to Panama’s second-largest city Colón and to other regions of Panama, where demonstrators equally fought troops of the United States (Harding, 2006). Over twenty people lost their lives and several hundreds were seriously injured, but as both parties used the violence to portray the other side as having caused the deaths, an exact number remains unknown. When I spoke about this incident with an American engineer in Panama he ensured that the Americans were not to blame, because his father, who was present at the riots, had told him that the United States had not fired a single bullet in this confrontation (William, informal conversation January 2010). Ensuing the uproar, Panama’s President Chiari broke all diplomatic relations with the United States, while President Johnson praised his troops for “behaving admirable under extreme provocation by mobs and snipers” (Greene, 2009 : 373). To date, January 9 is a national holiday in Panama, known as Martyrs’ Day.

Following the 1964 riots, Panama gained sympathy from around the world for more authority over the canal, which became a turning point in the relations between the United States and Panama (Greene, 2009). Negotiations between the two countries took until 1977, when a new treaty about the Panama Canal was signed. Agreed by Panama’s President Omar Torrijos and U.S. President Jimmy Carter, new treaties promised an end to the United States controlling the waterway, declared the permanent right of the United States to defend the neutrality of the canal, but prohibited the United States from interference in internal affairs in the Republic of Panama (ACP, 2009b; Greene, 2009; Harding, 2006). Particularly, the first treaty mandated the elimination of the Canal Zone as of October 1, 1979, and agreed that the United States would run the administration of the canal until December 31, 1999 (Greene, 2009; Harding, 2006). Significant changes were implemented: a new
The Panama Canal: a look back to look forward

organization, the Panama Canal Commission, was established, with a board of five American and four Panamanians members, and as of 1990, a Panamanian would fill the position of Administrator. Furthermore, the treaty called for more skilled Panamanians, as they would gradually play a greater role in the organization, and it prescribed that Panama would receive a higher amount of canal revenue (Harding, 2006). The second treaty set out the Canal’s permanent neutrality and both countries’ right to defend it (Harding, 2006; Llacer, 2005). Hence, much of what constituted the special relationship between the United States and Panama no longer existed after 1999, and for the first time in 158 years (since the construction of the railroad), the American military was absent in Panama (Gillespie Jr., Mc.Giffert, Grove Jr., & Nelson, 1999).

At the end of the 1980s, after nine years of dictatorship under military governor Manuel Noriega and despite the agreements, the United States invaded Panama. President George H.W. Bush had realized he could not control Noriega, which seemed problematic now that, following the Torrijos-Carter Treaties, the countries were moving towards a joint administration of the canal (Greene, 2009). After large and bloody attacks on Panama City, Noriega surrendered on January 3, 1990 (Harding, 2006). Immediately after the invasion, President Bush declared that he aimed at safeguarding the American citizens in Panama, combating drug trafficking, protecting the integrity of the treaties and the Panama Canal, as the waterway was still under protection of the United States (Greene, 2009; Harding, 2006).

Panama’s road to recovery began. By means of close cooperation and extensive planning among American and Panamanian members of the Panama Canal Commission, working as one team with one mission, the countries worked towards a “seamless transition” of the canal (Gillespie Jr. et al., 1999). In the years towards the transition date, strong criticism regarding Panama’s capability to run the organization of the canal was put forward in American media. Indicating doubt about the local ability it was said that the Panamanians would “dance on the canal’s waters during carnival” and were “never able to run the organization successfully” (Fieldnotes, July 2009). Disregarding such critiques, the United States and Panama intensively collaborated to handover the canal to Panama. At the end of this process, more than seventy percent of all professionals and managers were Panamanian, as the
government of Panama had made provisions for some Americans and other foreign nationals to stay employed with the canal (Gillespie Jr. et al., 1999). The canal's Administrator has been a Panamanian since 1990 and he continued in this role under the new Panama Canal Authority (ACP).

On December 31, 1999, ownership of the Panama Canal was officially transferred from the United States to Panama. A festive public ceremony was held at the Administration Building to mark the start of a new era for the waterway. From this date onwards, the ACP became exclusively in charge of the operation, administration, management, maintenance, protection and innovation of the Panama Canal. The autonomous agency of the government of Panama oversees the Canal's activities and services related to legal and constitutional regulations in force so that the Canal may operate in a secure, continued, efficient and profitable manner (ACP, 2009b). Meanwhile, the United States remains in close relation with Panama. Their collaboration is nowadays characterized by extensive counternarcotic cooperation, support to promote Panama's economic, political and social development, and plans for a bilateral free trade agreement (Sullivan, 2011).

Panama Canal Operations

Throughout the more than ninety years since the Panama Canal opened, a transit today is the same as it was in 1914. As time passed, several improvements have been made: the Gaillard Cut has been widened, a storage dam was built across the river Chagres, and the towing locomotives were replaced by more powerful models (McCullough, 1977). In 1966, lighting was installed along the Canal allowing ships to transit twenty-four hours a day (Friar, 1996). And, due to continuous landslides, dredging remains an ongoing task for the ACP. But fundamentally, the operation of the canal did not change from the day it was opened.

Explaining the operation of the Panama Canal is best done with the support of a figure illustrating the profile of the Panama Canal. Figure 4.2 visualizes this profile. With this picture in mind, I will explain a transit from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, starting at Gatun Locks.
When a vessel approaches the lowest chamber of the locks, the valves at the first chamber are opened so that, by gravity, water flows from the higher chamber towards the ocean. This brings the water in the first chamber at sea level, and at that point the gates open so that the boat can enter the first chamber. The gates close behind the ship and the valves of the second chamber are opened to increase the water level at the first chamber. This way, the vessel is lifted up to the water level of the second chamber. The gates open and the vessel enters the second chamber. When the gates are closed behind the vessel, the valves of the third chamber open. This water flows into the second chamber and raises the ship to the level of the third chamber. The third chamber is filled with water from the lake, so that their water level becomes equal. Then, the gate opens for the vessel to exit the Gatun Locks entering Gatun Lake. Once the largest artificial lake of the world, Panama’s rainwater is stored at Gatun Lake at 26 meters above sea level. From the lake, the vessel crosses the Panama Canal towards the Pacific Ocean. It passes a fourteen kilometer small mountain range known as Culebra, in honor of the engineer who was responsible for this part of the construction project (Ediciones Balboa, 2005).

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13 Culebra means ‘snake’ in English. This metaphor is used to indicate the writhing character of the passage.
To enter the Pacific Ocean, the vessel needs to pass two locks: the one-step Pedro Miguel Locks and the two-step Miraflores Locks. At Pedro Miguel Locks, the vessel is lowered for about 9 meters by bringing the water down to the level of the Miraflores navigation channel. After crossing this 1600-meter long channel, the vessel reaches Miraflores Locks. Here, in two steps, the vessel is lowered to sea level so that it can continue its way to the Pacific Ocean. A complete transit takes about 8 to 10 hours, while the alternative route of 13,000 kilometer around South America’s Cape Horn takes two or three weeks. It is important to bear in mind that ACP pilots are in command of the ships passing through the canal, which means that the ACP is responsible for any harm made to the ships, their personnel or cargo while transiting the interoceanic passage. Interesting to know too is that each lockage uses approximately 197 million liters of fresh water from Gatun Lake that, ultimately, flushes into the ocean.

The chambers of each lock in the Panama Canal have the same size: they are 305 meters long by 33.5 meters wide. Hence, the maximum dimension allowed for a vessel to pass the Panama Canal is 294.1 meter in length, 32.3 meter wide and 12.04 meters for the draft-depth. A vessel that matches these sizes is called a Panamax, as it exactly fits in the Panama Canal. In the lock chamber, vessels of this size only leave about sixty centimeters of space on each side of the dock walls (ACP, 2009b). Although vessels use their own propulsion to pass through the waterway, when they pass through the locks they are assisted by electric locomotives using thick steel cables to align and tow the ships. The objective of the locomotives is to keep the vessels centered in the lock chambers, preventing contact with the concrete walls. Depending on the size of the vessel, four, six or eight locomotives can be used. The sailing direction of the vessels changes every half day. Ships cannot pass each other in the narrow Culebra Cut, it takes time for the last ship to cross this part of the canal before ships from the other direction can arrive. Consequently, daily, the locks are empty for a few hours as no ship passes.

In 2009, almost forty vessels passed through the Panama Canal on an every day basis (ACP, 2009a). A year later, ACP’s annual report showed a decrease of 0.8 percent in transits, which reflected the effects of the global economic crises (ACP, 2010a). With the United States and China as top users of the Panama Canal, most
vessels sail the canal under these flags. To transit the waterway, every vessel is required to pay a toll determined by ship measurement parameters; the average toll paid for a canal transit is around US$ 54,000 (ACP, 2011). To give the reader an idea: tankers and container ships pay about US$ 300,000 per passage, and passenger cruise ships pay even more (Versteijlen, 2010).

To support the development of the country, the ACP annually contributes an amount of money based on the number of vessels passing through the canal to Panama’s National Treasury. In 2011, the ACP Administrator, Alberto Alemán Zubieta, announced that ACP’s contribution had reached a historical record. He revealed that the ACP had estimated to contribute US$ 840 million that year, but expected contributions for 2011 to reach closer to US$ 1 billion (Jordan & Garrido, 2011). At the end of the 2011 fiscal year, the Panama Canal recorded a total transit of 322.1 million tons of cargo, which is a 7.1 percent growth compared to the year before and, at the same time, marked a record of tonnage traffic in the waterway (ACP, 2011). In a widely spread press release about these numbers, the ACP Administrator stated that this milestone proves to be an extraordinary achievement in the 97 years of Canal operations, and he emphasized that the high numbers reflect the ability of Panamanians operating and administrating the maritime trade route (La Prensa 2011). With this statement, the Administrator referred to the criticism Panama received when the transition of the Canal came near, showing pride for the continuing success of the canal. These numbers demonstrate that opponents of the handover, who questioned the Panamanians’ capability to maintain and operate the canal in an efficient, honest and secure manner, were wrong (Parker, 2009). Undoubtedly, the Panama Canal is one of the driving forces behind the growth of Panama’s economy, and because that economy and the country’s population are relatively small, these numbers have a great impact on its development (Winner, 2011). In the following paragraph I will give further insight into the organization managing the waterway.

Autoridad del Canal de Panamá

With nearly ten thousand employees, the ACP is Panama’s biggest employer. The organization is often referred to as a ‘country in a country’, indicating its separation with Panama’s society (Fieldnotes, July 2009). When the United States had ownership
of the Panama Canal, the Canal Zone actually was an isolated area in Panama. Marked by fences, gates and restricted access, the construction and operation of the Panama Canal was disconnected from the country where the work took place. With the transference of the canal, all these official borders disappeared. For the ACP employees, however, these borders remained in existence. When leaving ACP’s compound to go for lunch, for example, they said they were “going to Panama” (Fieldnotes, August 2009). Moreover, the ACP employees feel unique in Panama’s society. They work for an important asset of the country and receive privileges for their affiliation with the canal company (Amanda, informal conversation July 2009). Although the ACP employs a great amount of Panamanian inhabitants, it maintains to be distinguished from their society. Consequently, the ACP puts continuous effort in (media) activities to connect with the people of Panama.

Due to its unique nature, officially established in the Organic Law14, the ACP is financially autonomous, has ownership of the canal’s assets and the right to oversee and control these (Llacer, 2005). Similar to the Panama Canal Commission, the organization is led by an Administrator15 who is appointed for a 7-year term, and can be re-elected for an additional term. The Administrator and the Deputy Administrator head the ACP and are supervised by a Board of Directors with eleven members (ACP, 2009b). The Board of Directors, appointed by the President of the Republic of Panama, is empowered to develop strategies, regulations and policies aimed at promoting and ensuring the competitiveness and profitability of the canal (Jaén Suárez, 2011). Elected by the Board of Directors, the ACP Advisory Board is formed by Panamanian and non-Panamanian professionals with broad experience in the business world and the Panama Canal. Its members represent the world’s transportation, trade, business, telecommunications, constructions and development, academia, and the banking sector (ACP, 2009b). The Advisory Board meets once a year to discuss its views and experiences for a better future of the waterway (Jaén Suárez, 2011). ACP’s higher management is presided by the Administrator, who is the highest-ranking executive officer and the legal representative of the ACP, responsible for the administration

14 ACP’s Organic Law of June 11, 1997, provides the legal framework for the organization and operation of the Panama Canal. The complete law can be found online at: http://www.pancanal.com/eng/legal/law/
15 The term Administrator is used in most of ACP’s communication when referring to its Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
and implementation of the strategies, regulations and policies of the Board of Directors (ACP, 2009b). Partially, the Administrator can delegate his tasks and powers to the Deputy Administrator. Alberto Alemán Zubieta was appointed as the canal’s Administrator in 1990 and served two terms of seven years\textsuperscript{16}. In these years, the Panama Canal proved to be successful in Panamanian hands. According to Jaén Suárez (2011), this accomplishment is due to a) an agreement among all political and social parties to lift the position of the canal to a legal level allowing no political interference in the operation of the canal, b) a new philosophy stating that the ACP should be an independent public organization with high social and environmental responsibility, subject to strict ethical codes, aimed at producing benefits for Panama and delivering the best service for its (international) clients, c) the presence of high qualified personnel, d) a modern and dynamic, technocratic and independent administration, and e) the strong awareness of the historical context. Under Alberto Alemán’s responsibility, the ACP developed an entrepreneurial culture focused on operating the canal as a profit driven business (Rosales, 2007). Correspondingly, the organization started a mega project to expand and modernize the Panama Canal with an extra set of locks. In the following paragraph I will explain this mega project and its components, of which the Third Set of Locks project served as the case for my research.

\textbf{Panama Canal Expansion Program}

The locks are the narrowest points of the Panama Canal and form, both in the flow of the amount of vessels per hour as in the size of the vessels, the bottleneck for its capacity. In 2006, the ACP therefore published the \textit{Proposal for Expansion of the Panama Canal: Third Set of Locks Project}. This document neatly describes the background of the Expansion Program. It elaborates on the history of the plan to further develop the Panama Canal, and states that since the 1930’s, all studies about the widening of the canal agreed that the most effective and efficient alternative to enhance Canal capacity would be the construction of a third set of locks. Lock chambers with bigger dimensions than those of the locks built in 1914 were perceived as the most valuable point for development. In 1939, the United States started the

\textsuperscript{16} As of September 2012, Jorge L. Quijano fulfils the position of ACP Administrator.
construction of a new set of locks that would allow the transit of larger vessels and warships. Due to the outbreak of World War II they had to cease the construction works. Personnel of the United States in Panama had to join the army and most construction equipment was assigned to military tasks (ACP, 2006b). By the end of the war, the United States had lost its interest in expanding the waterway. Its fleet was now so vast that the canal’s original purpose -avoiding the support of a two-ocean navy- had been outgrown (Parker, 2009). Although much use was made for ferrying men and materials for the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Panama Canal had no major upgrades. In the 1980s, according to the proposal document, Panama, Japan and the United States formed a commission that again studied possibilities to further develop the Panama Canal, and again decided that an extra set of locks would be the most appropriate alternative for increasing the Canal’s capacity. Furthermore, the report relates to the ACP Master Plan that envisioned the canal’s future, confirming that a third set of locks is the most suitable, profitable and environmentally responsible way to increase the capacity of the Panama Canal. The expansion of the waterway is estimated at a cost of US$ 5.2 billion and expects to generate approximately 40,000 new jobs during the construction of the third set of locks (ACP, 2006b). Finally, the proposal for the Expansion of the Panama Canal (2006) portrays four objectives for expanding the Canal’s capacity:

1. Achieve long-term sustainability and growth for the Canal’s contributions to the society of Panama through payments to the National Treasury;
2. Maintain the Canal’s competitiveness and its added value as a maritime route;
3. Increase the Canal’s capacity to capture the growing tonnage demand with the appropriate service level; and,
4. Make the Canal a more productive, safe and efficient work environment.

This document formed the foundation for a national referendum and marked the start of ACP’s campaign to vote for the expansion of the Panama Canal. Funded by the government, the ‘si’ (‘yes’) campaign overwhelmed the voters, especially when some people believed that President Martín Torrijos Espino handed out packages worth
US$ 35 to families in the poorer areas of the country in exchange for listening to his speech (The Panama News 2006). Opposition to the project had no such financial support, but managed to voice its opinion through various radio programs, videos, and websites. The website El Centro Informativo Panamá 3000 (The Information Center Panama 3000) led by Roberto Méndez, a Professor of Economics at the University of Panama, for example, published four reasons to reject the proposal: (1) negative outcomes for the economy, (2) lack of confidence in the government and the ACP, (3) health and education should be national priorities, and (4) destruction of the environmental and social security (Méndez, 2006). In an interview Professor Mendez concluded that, based on his economic and financial analysis, the Expansion Program makes no sense, and might even be a bad development for the country (Noriegaville, 2006). He emphasized that the ACP manipulated information for justification of the project and stressed that the organization was too optimistic about the growth in canal transits (Noriegaville, 2006). Martin Rosales, who studied the conflicts between the Panama Canal Expansion Program and the local communities for his Ph.D. thesis, agreed with this counter argument. He concluded that the ACP denied the complexity and contradictions of the expansion project and underscored that a monopolized decision-making process limited the space for counter rationalities (Rosales, 2007). Despite strong objections from various parties, the intense governmental campaign in favor of canal expansion could not be overruled.

On October 22, 2006, the majority of the voters, 76.8%, choose ‘si’ for the Panama Canal Expansion Program (ACP, 2009b; Jaén Suárez, 2011). Although more than sixty percent of the total voters did not participate in the national referendum (Rosales, 2007), this outcome gave the ACP a green light for the Expansion Program. A year later, President Torrijos announced the Cabinet Council’s approval for the ACP to negotiate the required financial support package (ACP, 2009b). Ultimately, in December 2009, these negotiations led to a group of credit organizations17 that guaranteed a total of US$ 2.300 million for the Expansion of the Panama Canal (ACP, 2010b; Alverca, 2012). The mega project contains four key parts covering seven components, which I will describe in the next paragraph.

17 The following institutions invested in the Panama Canal Expansion Program: European Investment Bank (US$ 500 million), Japan Bank for International Cooperation (US$ 800 million), Inter-American Development Bank (US$ 400 million), International Financial Corporation (US$ 300 million) and Andean Development Corporation (US$ 300 million).
Components of the Panama Canal Expansion Program

The entire Expansion Program is divided into four key parts. The seven components, as displayed in Figure 4.3, fit in the four parts of the program. Part 1 covers the design and construction of the Post-Panamax locks. New lock complexes will be built on the Atlantic and Pacific sides of the canal (see Figure 4.3). These complexes will have three chambers with water saving basis, a lateral filling and emptying system and rolling gates (ACP, 2010b). Part 2 of the mega project contains the dry-land excavation. A massive amount of land needs to be removed so that approach channels and space for the new locks can be created. Most excavation needs to be done at the Access Channel to the Post-Panamax Locks at the Pacific side (see Figure 4.3), where, executed in four phases, it is expected to remove 49 million cubic meters along 6.1 kilometer (ACP, 2010b). Part 3 entails the deepening and widening of the canal, at Gatun Lake and the Gaillard Cut, as well as its navigation channels (see Figure 4.3). In order to allow bigger ships in the Panama Canal, extensive dredging is needed for improvement of the exiting approach channels. This so-called wetland excavation is done with a dredge, a machine that removes soil from under the water. Part 4 of the Expansion Program is focused on the improvement to water supply in the canal. The Panama Canal operates on rainwater that is stored in Gatun Lake. With the third lane in the canal, more water will be needed and thus, more water needs to be saved in the lake. So, the water level of the Gatun Lake will be raised with 45 centimeters, reaching its maximum operational level (see Figure 4.3).
The various components of the Panama Canal Expansion Program are divided in numerous smaller projects and contracts. For example, part 2 of the program, which is focused on dry-land excavation, is divided into four projects, called PAC (for Pacific Access Channel) 1 to 4\(^{18}\). In this research, I focus on part 1, the most prestige project within the Expansion Program: the Third Set of Locks project\(^{19}\). Worth US$ 3.2 billion,\(^{18}\) As mentioned in the previous chapter, the students Lieke Rijnders and Catelijn Schönfeld studied, respectively, PAC3 and PAC4.\(^{19}\) Often, the entire Panama Canal Expansion Program is called the Third Set of Locks project. This is confusing for two reasons. First, it seems to refer to the dominant project in the entire Expansion Program, part one, while it directs at the complete Expansion Program. Part one, the design and construction of the Post-Panamax Locks, is the ultimate goal of the Expansion Program, but the other parts and subsequent components are needed to built and operate the new set of locks in the Panama Canal. Therefore, the Panama Canal Expansion Program entails all projects, not just the Third Set of Locks project. Second, when thinking of a third set one wonders what the first two sets of locks are: those at the Atlantic and Pacific? Following this thought, one would think the Expansion Program constructs a third and fourth set, at each side of the canal. ‘Third’ refers to the third lane. Currently, the Panama Canal has two lanes in which boats can transit the waterway, but after completion of this mega project a third lane will be available. In this study I refer to part one of the Expansion Program when stating Third Set of Locks project.
this project is the most costly contract in the total prize of US$ 5.2 billion for this ‘civil engineering wonder’, as the Panama Canal Expansion Program often is called. The objective of the locks project is to design and construct bigger lock chambers with water-saving basins that can reuse the water before it is shed in the ocean. Each chamber of the new locks should measure 427 meters long and 55 meters wide. This would allow giant container cargo ships, called Post-Panamax, measuring 366 meters in length, 49 meters wide and 15 meters for the draft-depth, to pass through the Panama Canal. Figure 4.4 illustrates a comparison between the measurements of the existing locks, the new locks and the ships that can pass through the chambers of these locks.

[Image: Figure 4.4 Measurements of the locks (ACP, 2010b)]

In the new situation, every time a vessel transits, the water-saving basins will save 60% of the fresh water in Gatun Lake, which would be lost without these basins (ACP, 2010b). Instead of shedding all the water to the next chamber, or into the ocean, the water is flooded into the water-saving basis. By gravity, the water flows from the basins back into the chambers. Thus, the new locks will loose 7 percent less water than the existing locks in the Panama Canal. A schematic explanation of the water saving system is shown in Figure 4.5.
In 2009, when I arrived in Panama, the first milestones in the components of the Expansion Program were visible; contracts were awarded for the major projects and tender processes were prepared for subsequent projects to start. Significant advances were seen in the field, where drilling, basting, dredging and digging of the soil showed the first contours of the expanded Panama Canal. In the following paragraph I will briefly illustrate the project organization in charge of the execution of the Third Set of Locks Project.

**The Third Set of Locks Project: ACP and its Partners**

A key component in the Expansion Program is the design and construction of the Atlantic and Pacific Locks. This project is handled by several parties: the ACP and CH2M Hill on one side of the coin and Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC) on the other side. The ACP hired project management consultancy firm CH2M Hill to support and guide the organization of this world-class project. Together they form a project organization portraying the role of the client in the project. GUPC, a consortium consisting of four companies: Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and Cusa, portrays the role of the contractor, as the organization is hired for the execution of the project in the field. In this paragraph I will give an overview of each organization present in the Third Set of Locks project, and thus, under study in this research. I will start with the ACP division and CH2M Hill, followed by the four organizations that joined forces in the consortium GUPC.
ACP

Although ACP’s organization has been extensively described above, I would like to focus here on its division focusing on the Third Set of Locks project. Five departments report directly to the ACP Administrator, of which the Department of Engineering and Programs Management is one. This department counts five divisions that are, in one way or another, involved in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Among these five, the Locks Project Management division is dedicated to the Third Set of Locks Project\(^\text{20}\). This division counts three main sections: (1) the Administration for the Atlantic Locks project, (2) the Administration for the Pacific Locks project and, (3) the Design Administration. Various staff departments support these sections. The Expansion Program is seen as a separate company within the ACP because each department sent representatives to the Department of Engineering and Programs Management. Within the ACP it is said that the employees at Expansion Program are “the chosen ones”, as each department selected its best employees to work on this mega project (Fernando, informal conversation July 2009).

CH2M Hill

CH2M Hill is a well-established consultancy firm in program management, with its headquarters based in Colorado, the United States. In the 1940s, a group of students started CH2M that in 1971 merged with an associate, creating the company CH2M Hill (CH2M Hill 2011). Founded by the need for engineering and consultancy solutions, the company developed into a worldwide organization employing over 23,000 people that provide engineering, construction, and operations services for corporations, nonprofits, and federal, state and local governments (CH2M Hill 2011). Specialized in project management, CH2M Hill has participated in numerous large complex projects around the world. Consultants who play a role in the Expansion Program earlier assisted in projects such as the Tsunami Reconstruction Program in Sri Lanka and Maldives, Evaluation of Building Structures in Iraq, Expansion of the Haifa Port in Israel, Wastewater Treatment Program in Egypt, and in the United States on transportation projects including road design and construction, program management and airport program management, among others. In the Expansion Program, CH2M Hill assists the ACP with the management of the contracts, mainly focused on the Third Set of Locks project.

\(^{20}\)The organization chart in Appendix 1 can give better insight in the structure of the ACP organization.
Sacyr

The Sacyr Vallehermoso Group is officially abbreviated as SyV, and commonly referred to as Sacyr. Sacyr is divided in various business groups, based on the separate organizations these companies once were: construction (Sacyr and Somague), real estate (Vallehermoso), property leasing (Testa), infrastructure concessions (Sacyr Concessions) and utilities services (Valoriza Agua, Valoriza Energy, Valoriza Multiservices and Sufi) (Grupo Syv 2011). The headquarters of the organization are based in Madrid, Spain, but the company is involved in numerous engineering works worldwide and present in more than fifteen countries. The company is mostly known for its knowledge and experience in building highways and tunnels, of which results are seen in Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Costa Rica and Chile. Furthermore, Sacyr is part of a consortium led by the Italian company Impregilo to construct a suspension bridge across the Strait of Messina, a prestigious mega project that will connect the island of Sicily with the Italian peninsula. Interesting to note is that, although Sacyr presents itself as being present in various countries in the world, respondents in the Expansion Program contested these international experiences (Fieldnotes, June 2010). Within GUPC, Sacyr operates as the consortium leader.

Impregilo

In 1959, the merger of the four Italian construction companies Girola, Lodigiani, Impresit and Cogefar created Impregilo Group, headquartered in Milan and listed on the Italian Stock Exchange (Impregilo 2011). Impregilo has made a name for itself as one of the principal actors in worldwide construction, and throughout its history has built thousands of kilometers of communication infrastructure, roads, railroads, bridges, viaducts, tunnels, airports, hospitals and some of the most modern subways, as well as major hydroelectric plants and dams. With over 22,000 employees and operations in more than thirty countries, Impregilo is one of the world’s top-ranking construction groups that currently participates in many large infrastructural mega projects, such as the construction of the Gottard Base Tunnel in the Swiss Alps, the building of hydroelectric plants in Colombia, the construction of the central regional railways in Venezuela, and, in Italy, Impregilo operates as the consortium leader for the prestige project of the bridge across the Strait of Messina (Impregilo 2011). Furthermore, in Brazil the company is one of the major highway and
logistics operators. Respondents have described Impregilo as a company with wide international experience that brought employees with a high degree of technical knowledge to the Expansion Program (Fieldnotes, March 2010).

Jan de Nul
The family owned Jan de Nul Group ranks at the top of the international dredging industry. The company is one of the largest contractors in Belgium and expanding its services in the offshore oil and gas industry, while its environmental division, Envisan, is specialized in soil remediation and ground water redevelopment (Jan de Nul 2011). Jan de Nul, often abbreviated as JdN, has performed large-scale projects in various areas of the world; construction of Palm Jebel Ali Island in Dubai, extension of the quay wall and container terminal in Uruguay, beach regeneration in Mexico, and in Belgium, Jan de Nul constructed Europe’s largest wastewater treatment plant. Armed with about 5,000 employees and an ultramodern fleet containing the world’s most powerful cutter suction dredger (called JFJ De Nul), the largest trailing suction hopper dredger (called Cristóbal Colón) and the rock dumping vessel (called Simon Stevin), among another 50 vessels, the company has executed many international dredging and reclamation projects from start to finish (Jan de Nul 2011). Within GUPC, Jan de Nul is seen as a small, but well organized and experienced player (Fieldnotes, June 2010).

CUSA
Constituted in 1955 by a small group of subcontractors, the company Constructora Urbana S.A.21, CUSA in popular speech, developed into Panama’s leading construction company. Over the years, CUSA has been active in the construction of roads, houses, bridges and infrastructure areas, and it has furthermore played a role in the expansion of cruise and container ports, the rehabilitation of railways, the expansion of the airport and the construction of water treatment plants (CUSA 2011). CUSA was the only local organization participating in the international public bid for the first dry excavation project in the Panama Canal Expansion Program, and won out of thirteen

21 The S.A. abbreviation refers to Sociedad Anónima (anonymous society or anonymous company) indicating a particular type of corporation that is similar to public limited company in the United Kingdom and naamloze vennootschap (N.V.) in the Netherlands.
Asian, European and U.S. consortiums the right to move an estimated 1.3 million cubic meters of sediment and earth on the Pacific side of the canal (Winner, 2007). Strikingly, CUSA’s former Chief Executive Officer, Alberto Alemán Zubieta, fulfilled the position of ACP Administrator for two terms. Besides its participation in GUPC, CUSA also performs other projects for the Expansion Program, such as straightening the Gaillard Cut, and in a joint venture with Jan de Nul CUSA is performing excavation work where the new Atlantic Lock will be built.

**GUPC**

Together, Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA form the consortium *Grupo Unidos por el Canal* (GUPC). This project organization is contracted to design and construct the main component in the Panama Canal Expansion Program: the Third Set of Locks project. Both Sacyr and Impregilo have a 48 percent share in the project organization, while Jan de Nul takes a 3 percent share and CUSA obtains a 1 percent share. Following this deviation, positions in the daily operations of the project organization are arranged. The Works Management Team (WMT) is responsible for daily execution of the project and reports to the Board of Directors, which is based in Europe and represented by an Executive Committee. Sacyr was granted to fill in two high-ranking positions in the WMT: the position of Program Leader and Atlantic Project Manager. The position of Financial Manager and Pacific Project Manager were given to Impregilo. For Jan de Nul and CUSA, two positions were created, so that these companies are also represented in the WMT. In the Executive Committee, managers from each project partner’s headquarter are positioned: two for Sacyr, two for Impregilo, two for Jan de Nul, and one for CUSA. The deviation of shares is also used for how profit and costs should be divided and for the amount of employees that each company can bring to the project sites.

In international politics, the formation of the consortium has been controversial and a highly debated topic. Published via the Spanish newspaper *El País*, Wikileaks portrayed that the Embassy of the United States tried to keep Sacyr, and thus GUPC, from winning the contract for the Third Set of Locks Project (Jiménez, 2010). It is said that the United States aimed for an American-based consortium to win the tender process and therefore tried to damage the image of Sacyr (Jiménez, 2010). Another
cable from Wikileaks suggested that members of the Panamanian government expressed their concern about the Sacyr’s capability to run the Third Set of Locks project properly (Wikileaks 2010). Consequently, there has been quite a lot of external pressure upon the consortium about its performance in this mega project.

For the reader’s comprehension, Figure 4.6\(^{22}\) is included to illustrate how the project participants of the Third Set of Locks project are related to each other. The logo for GUPC was explained when GUPC introduced itself to ACP in a video message. The GUPC Program Leader stated:

Our logo is not just a logo, it is an attitude: we want to work together in the construction of the Expansion Project. (Fieldnotes, October 2010)

This expression indicates GUPC’s awareness for collaboration in the execution of the Panama Canal Expansion Program. In the following, and final, paragraph of this chapter, I will elaborate on how collaboration is a consistent theme in the Panama Canal.

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\(^{22}\) Note that CH2M Hill is not incorporated in Figure 4.6, as in the daily operations they support and represent the ACP, and, at the time this figure was designed, GUPC did not know of CH2M Hill’s presence in the construction project.
Registered Trade Mark

When I first visited the Miraflores Visitors Center, where the ACP proudly presents the Panama Canal, its history and plans for the future to the wider public, the following text attracted my attention:

They\textsuperscript{23} came from many places and spoke different languages. Bringing with them nothing but their desires to work and their hopes, they came together to build the engineering feat that still marvels the world. Most came from Barbados, but also from Martinique, Guadeloupe, Trinidad and Jamaica. Spanish, Italians, Greeks, Hindus, Americans, Armenians, Cubans, Costa Ricans, Colombians and Panamanians also contributed to the effort. They managed to understand each other, started families, made fortunes, and exalted the country. (ACP, Centro de Visitantes Miraflores)

This excerpt illustrates that people from all over the world migrated to Panama to work on the construction of the Panama Canal. Although they spoke different languages and carried various cultural backgrounds, the employees who constructed the waterway found ways to work together and to cope with the differences and similarities encountered amongst them (Greene, 2009). Despite the power relations, differing interests and local circumstances, the canal builders, and also the government and citizens of the United States and Panama built a workable relationship so that the canal could be constructed, operated and maintained.

For the Expansion Program of the Panama Canal, again, people come from around the world to participate in this mega project. They speak different languages, bring an abundance of cultures and, again, need to work together to achieve project completion. Accordingly, collaboration was a recurring theme in its history and remains a daily matter in the contemporary Panama Canal.

In the context of the current practices of collaboration, that are under study in this research, historical pride for the Panama Canal needs to be taken into account. When the construction of the waterway was finished, the United States took great pride in this success. The achievement showed American power, technological know-

\textsuperscript{23} ‘They’ refers to the people who constructed the Panama Canal.
how, determination and managerial organization; it portrayed what the United States could do for the world (Ives, 2010). When the canal was transferred to Panama, the ACP promoted a great sense of pride for the Panama Canal among Panamanians. Later, the expansion of the Panama Canal was narrated to Panama's citizens, and beyond, as highly important for the future of Panamanians, the development of the country and the canal's position in the maritime world; it became a source of pride for most Panamanians.

The Panama Canal has had, and still has, a great impact on the world, and so does the world on the Panama Canal. The international trade patterns shaping the contemporary global economy owe their existence to this very special waterway, which, when expanded, will have a far reaching international impact through the creation of new routes and the opening of new markets (Alverca, 2012). From a national point of view, the canal is fundamentally connected to the Panamanian national identity and pride as well as to the country's ambition for economic growth. Due to this global interdependency, all eyes are focused on this spectacular mega project enhancing the canal's capacity and giving access to a new generation of container vessels. Expected to bring widespread changes and opportunities, the world is awaiting with great anticipation for the completion of the ‘new Panama Canal’. For the ACP employees it is a privilege to work on the “registered trade mark for Panama” (Jaén Suárez, 2011).

CH2M Hill employees also burst with pride for their affiliation with the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Many engineers had read textbooks using examples of the American construction period of the Panama Canal, for them, this engineering endeavor was “the place to be” (Matthew, Interview April 2010). Several engineers gave up their high position within CH2M Hill to join this mega project, while others even quit their jobs at other organizations to be part of the Expansion Program (Fieldnotes, May 2010).

Another project narrative prevailed among the GUPC partners. For most of the GUPC employees, the Panama Canal Expansion Program was “just another project” (Fieldnotes, April 2010). They perceived the project as equal to other projects in their careers and did not share the historical and cultural feelings for the interoceanic passage. Hence, from the start of their collaborative relationship, the
project participants’ emotional involvement in this mega project was distinct. How collaboration came into practice and how the project participants in the Third Set of Locks Project dealt with the cultural complexity in their daily work life is the story of the pages that follow.

Part II of this book is dedicated to the presentation of the empirical data of this study. First, an interlude provides a detailed account of the award ceremony for the Third Set of Locks project, which displays how collaboration between the GUPC partners began. In the chapters five and six I portray how project participants made sense of their everyday work environment and illustrate their practices of collaboration. In the last empirical chapter, chapter seven, we will get acquainted with the chaperoning practices of the ACP and CH2M Hill.
Part II
Knowing the Field
Interlude

Setting the stage for collaboration
The Award Ceremony for the Third Set of Locks Project

It is a warm Wednesday morning, July 8, 2009, when a room in ACP’s Auditorio del Centro de Capacitación Ascanio Arosemena fills up with people. In the American era, this room served as the auditorium of the Balboa High School. Today, the room is used for the award ceremony of the Third Set of Locks Project. Today, the winner of the tender for this project, the biggest part of the Panama Canal Expansion Program, will be revealed.

Two years earlier, the ACP published the tender. As it would be a complex project, requesting various skills and resources, not one company would be able to execute this project alone. Collaboration with other companies is inevitable in mega projects. From around the world, organizations spoke about forming joint ventures, alliances or partnerships and, finally, several consortiums applied for participation in this tremendous undertaking.

Three consortiums made it to the last round: (1) the Bechtel, Taisei, Mitsubishi Corporation, (2) C.A.N.A.L and (3) Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC). On March 3, 2009, the three consortiums handed in their final proposal for the works on the Third Set of Locks project. Sergio, one of GUPC’s representatives, vividly remembered:

We rapidly designed a logo to print on our documents. We weren’t ready yet. But that day, just before the closing hour, we carried twenty-seven boxes of drawings and paper work into the ACP building. (Interview, August 2011)

An official ceremony was held to mark that the ACP received the tender documents of the participating consortiums. After bringing in the numerous boxes containing drawings and documents for the Third Set of Locks Project, each consortium was asked to present its price proposal in a closed envelope. Together with ACP’s target price for the project, these envelopes were locked in a vault, of which only the ACP Contracting Officer and the bank guarded with a key (Interview, August 2011). For the ACP, an intense period of reviewing the technical proposals followed. For the consortium, there was nothing left but to wait. Who will be awarded as contractor
for the Third Set of Locks Project? The account below, based on a video of the event, depicts the award ceremony.

The room counts about 400 seats, all facing the stage. Its walls are decorated with pictures of the Panama Canal. While the press is installing cameras and the last preparations on stage are made, the attendees, all formally dressed, gather and search for a place to sit. The atmosphere is calm and relaxed. Some people shake hands to greet each other, others share stories or send messages with their cell phones. A guard is listening to his walky-talky and the Contracting Officer, seated on stage, reads through the schedule of today’s ceremony.

The ACP is about to disclose the final results of the reviewing process. Consortium members have eagerly waited for this day, because today they will hear how their tender proposal was reviewed. With help of numerous external professionals, the ACP reviewed all drawings and documents explaining each consortium’s plan for the execution of the Third Set of Locks project. Reviewing was done in a hermetically sealed building located in the ACP compound. All reviewers were obliged to register before entering or leaving the building and it was strictly prohibited to carry any electronic devices inside the building (Omar, interview September 2009). The ACP had taken these measurements ensuring that no information would leak to the public.

Photographers take pictures of the consortium representatives, the ACP Administrator is being interviewed, and a journalist tries to capture President Martinelli’s words with a voice recorder. Also, the ACP Board of Directors, the American Ambassador, CH2M Hill consultants, the ACP employees and many other supporters are present. There is not enough space for all the spectators to sit down, so several attendees are standing in the back of the room. When the Contracting Officer announces the start of the meeting, the hum of voices is slowly replaced by silence.
It is the Contracting Officer’s role to control and oversee that the tender process for the Third Set of Locks Project is executed in an honest and transparent manner (ACP, 2009c). It is therefore his task to secure classification for all tender documents, and to chair the Award Ceremony.

After applause the Contracting Officer gives his complements to the consortiums for their patience and clarification during the review process. From each consortium one representative is invited to join him for a visit to the bank. Photos are taken while the group leaves the room and a cameraman follows the group into a white van from the ACP. Under police escort, the group is taken to a building of Banco National, located less then a kilometer away.

Excitement is read from the faces of the consortium representatives. Some straighten their suit and tie when they step out of the van; others have their cell phones ready to take pictures of what is coming next.

Besides the intensively reviewed technical proposals, a price proposal is needed to decide which consortium wins the tender procedure. The price proposals were locked into a vault at Panama’s National Bank and are, today, under supervision of the consortium representatives released from the vault, which is located underground.

After a welcoming handshake from the bank’s General Manager, the group is guided through the building to the vault. Before entering the concealed room, the Contracting Officer needs to sign a registration book on a table standing against a blue wall. As the moment is approaching, more pictures are taken.

Then, with help of an employee of the Bank, the Contracting Officer opens the vault. He uses his key to open the secured box and releases a transparent box out of it. This is a special moment! Numerous pictures are taken, and all consortium representatives pose for a photo with the glass box.

Indicating they were present when the box was removed from the vault, all representatives had to sign a paper before leaving the bank and stepping in the van. The entire visit to the bank lasted about thirty minutes, was registered step-by-step by cameramen and presented to the audience on a big screen in the ceremony hall.
Upon return to the meeting room, the glass box was placed at the center of the stage.

The crowd buzzes with excitement when the group returns. The consortium representatives stay close to the glass box and witness how the Contracting Officer opens it. One by one they review whether their envelope remained untouched. Laughter fills the room when one envelope seems to be stuck in the box. Removing this envelop from the glass box takes extra effort, and when the GUPC representative receives the envelope he says jokingly: “I did not give it to you like that”, referring to the creases in the envelope.

In addition to the price proposals of the three consortiums, the ACP also placed an envelop in this box. This envelope contains ACP’s target price for the execution of the Third Set of Locks project; the total price that ACP analyzed and reserved for the cost of the Third Set of Locks project. Sergio explained to me:

This price is really important, because if your proposal is 15% over the calculated price, it is disqualified from the tender procedure. (Interview, August 2011)

The outcome of the tender procedure depends on both the technical score and the calculated price for the complete construction of the new locks in the Panama Canal. The technical score defines 55% of the final outcome and the price proposal counts for 45%. The maximum score for the technical proposal was 5,000 points. GUPC gained the highest score, 4,088.5 points, but the difference with the technical scores of the other consortiums was relatively small. Therefore, the price proposals played an enormous role.

This is the moment all attendees have been waiting for: the price offers will be revealed! The Contracting Officers is standing behind the stand where the envelops with the price proposals lay on top of the glass box. To open the tightly sealed envelopes scissors were already placed on the stand. While the Contracting Officer opens the first envelope, the people in the room are silent. One could have heard a pin drop!
The Contracting Officer glances into the public; this is an exciting moment for him as much as for all attendees. When he takes out the file, his colleagues verify whether he completely emptied the envelope. The Contracting Officer secures that every page is signed, the bid bond is included and whether no further conditions to the price proposal are incorporated. Then, he reads out the name of the first consortium, the Bechtel, Taisei, Mitsubishi Corporation, and the price they have offered for the project. The Contracting Officer slightly stammers, never before such big numbers were proposed for an ACP project: US$ 4.185.983.000,00.

All consortiums were asked to deliver their total price for the completion of the Third Set of Locks project, and to add a provisional price for the work that the ACP might request during the execution phase of the project.

The number is placed on the big screen so that everybody can read the first consortium's price proposal. Bustle immediately replaces the silence; is this a high price? A low offer? All attendees are curious to find out.

Anxiety is felt in the room when the Contracting Officer continues with the next envelope. The document consists of separate papers, and it seems a little more complicated to hold them together while checking whether all information is there. Again, it is silent in the room. Consortium C.A.N.A.L has presented a base price of US$ 5.981.020.333,00. The provisional price is US$ 0.00. And that causes some fuss in the meeting room.

The score for the price proposal was based on the three proposals that were handed in. The lower the price, the more points received for the offer. C.A.N.A.L demanded a higher price than the Bechtel, Taisei, Mitsubishi Corporation, so they received fewer points. However, C.A.N.A.L's technical score was evaluated with a higher score. As such, the last proposal was of overriding importance.

As it had been stuck in the glass box, GUPC's proposal comes somewhat folded out of the envelope. In contrary to the other proposal documents, this proposal

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24 By signing a bid bond the bidder guarantees the project owner that it will take on the project execution if selected. This ensures the owner that the bidder has the financial means to accept the work for the price they offered in their price proposal.
Setting the stage for collaboration

is presented in a folder, decorated with a cover picture of the future works. The tension in the ceremony hall mounts: who will be awarded as contractor for the Third Set of Locks Project?

The Contracting Officer attempts to state the full price proposed, but halfway through an applause forces him to pause for a few seconds; it is clear that GUPC offered the lowest price: US$ 3.118.880.001,00. The GUPC representatives shake each other’s hands and are congratulated by the people around them.

As mentioned earlier, the price that the ACP had calculated for the works on the Third Set of Locks project plays a significant role: only proposals that do not deviate 15% from ACP’s price can compete in the final part of the tender procedure.

When the Contracting Officer presents the ACP’s estimated price for the project, his sentence is again interrupted by a loud applause, and screams from excitement going around the room: GUPC has won the tender!

Sergio jumps up and shakes hands with his colleagues and full of enthusiasm he hugs his consortium colleague, who is still seated and now nearly falls from the chair. Supporters of the consortium stand up to congratulate the winners; hugs and handshakes come from all over the room. Disappointment can be read from the representatives of both the Bechtel, Taisei, Mitsubishi Corporation and consortium C.A.N.A.L., and the Contracting Officer finalizes the meeting by stating the official end results: the consortium Grupo Unidos por el Canal gained the highest score in the tender process for the Third Set of Locks project.

After the public ceremony a committee of ACP employees (the Price Verification Committee) and the Contracting Officer confirmed that GUPC’s price proposal met the general requirements of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP, 2009d). This event signaled the start of collaboration between the project partners: GUPC was contracted for the execution of the Third Set of Locks Project as part of the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Table I.1 shows how the total score for the tender process is composed and how many points each consortium gained for both the technical proposal as well as the price proposal.
The works include deepening the approach channel to 15.5 below mean low water level, which will require dredging some of the channel. The minimum depth required in the new locks is 225 meters on the Atlantic side and 218 meters on the Pacific side. Following compliance with the bidding process, the ACP awarded the contract for the design and construction of the Third Set of Locks. The winning consortia were determined based on the highest combined score for technical and price proposal as per the process. Following are the companies or consortia and their corresponding price proposals submitted on September 9:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consortium</th>
<th>Technical score</th>
<th>Base Price proposal (US$ M)</th>
<th>Provisional sum price proposal</th>
<th>Funds score</th>
<th>Total price proposal (US$ M)</th>
<th>Total score – price proposal</th>
<th>Total combined score (Maximum 10,000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Base Price proposal</td>
<td>Provisional sum</td>
<td>Funds score</td>
<td>Total price proposal</td>
<td>Total score – price proposal</td>
<td>Total combined score (Maximum 10,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bechtel, Taieb, Mitsubishi Corporation</td>
<td>3,799.5</td>
<td>$4,185,983,000.00</td>
<td>2,980.3</td>
<td>$91,836,670.00</td>
<td>$4,279,819,670.00</td>
<td>2,980.3</td>
<td>6,769.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.A.N.A.L</td>
<td>3,973.5</td>
<td>$3,981,020,333.00</td>
<td>2,585.9</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>$5,981,020,333.00</td>
<td>2,585.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grupo unidos por el Canal</td>
<td>4,088.5</td>
<td>$3,118,880,001.00</td>
<td>4,000.0</td>
<td>$102,751,383.00</td>
<td>$3,221,631,384.00</td>
<td>4,000.0</td>
<td>8,088.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I.1 Total score for tender consortia in Third Set of Locks Project (ACP, 2009d)
Soon after the award ceremony the ACP made the outcomes publicly known. Table I.1 was published on their website, sent to various press agencies and printed in their brochure about the Panama Canal Expansion Program (ACP, 2009d).

The table shows the technical score that each consortium received for their proposal as well as the price they put in for the execution of their project plan. GUPC won the tender process because they gained the highest points. However, the difference between their technical score and that of the C.A.N.A.L consortium is not that big: only 115 points. More interesting is the distinction in the price proposal; GUPC requested a price that is 190% lower than that of its competitor. Furthermore, GUPC’s price appeared to be US$ 300 million lower than the amount that ACP had reserved for the execution of the project. Striking as this is, proposed prices in the infrastructural sector are frequently higher than the budgeted price (Flyvbjerg, Holm, & Buhl, 2002). GUPC’s competitors placed a bid much higher than ACP’s allocated funds for this project, and it was said that GUPC had “left money on the table” (Fieldnotes, 2009).

On July 15 2009, GUPC received an official letter of acceptance to commence work on the Third Set of Locks project (GUPC, 2011). Several official procedures had to be completed before the ACP issued the final order to proceed. A green light came on August 25 2009; from that date onwards GUPC had 1,883 days to complete the works. Pressure to complete the project before this date lies in a fine of US$ 300,000 per extra day, and if GUPC finalizes the execution of the Third Set of Locks Project in less time, they receive a bonus of US$ 250,000 per day (Fieldnotes, September 2009).

The day after…

On the evening of the award ceremony the GUPC representatives celebrated their victory: they drank champagne and had dinner at an upscale restaurant in the Panama City. Sergio recalled an emotional relief after the intense tender process:

I think we were with about ten people, and we had champagne. When I arrived home that night, I cried. That evening, two years of hard work, the excitement of the day and all emotions that came with it put tears on my cheeks. However,
there was no time for further reflection on the tender process, as the project organization had to start up quickly. (Interview, August 2011).

A few days after the award ceremony, Sacyr’s private jet brought all GUPC’s representatives from Panama to Milan, Italy, for a steering committee meeting. This meeting was organized to define the structure and to decide how collaboration between the GUPC partners would go from here. To everyone’s surprise, one of the partners did not show up, which caused uproar within the consortium (Fieldnotes, September 2009).

Frustration grew among GUPC’s partners when their proposed price for the mega project appeared to be low compared to what the other consortiums had requested as well as what ACP had calculated the works would cost. Word goes that some partners of the GUPC consortium did not know the final price proposed until it was publically announced, after the award ceremony, and therefore felt anger and disappointment for the unbeficial financial contract (Fieldnotes, September 2009). Owing to this price conflict, GUPC’s position was stringent from the start; a tight budget would restrain the project organization from being flexible. A project participant remembered:

The top management of the European companies had not been entirely involved in the final stage of the tender process. Only after we won, they heard about the price we had proposed, and that is when the shit hit the fan. (Interview August 2011)

The respondent clarified that when the partners’ top management learned about the final budget, difficulties in GUPC’s collaboration occurred. It is remarkable that for such a prestigious project the top management of a participating company was not involved in the tender process. Accordingly, GUPC’s final price now stipulated the collaborative relationship among its project partners.

The frictions about GUPC’s budget for the execution of the Third Set of Locks Project resulted in tense discussions about how the profit and costs within the endeavor should be divided, which put an enormous pressure on the collaborative
relationship between the partners. Various respondents explained that conflicting ideas about how the project organization should be set up, about the amount of persons that each partner can deliver and about how authority should be allocated created more difficulties with GUPC.

Besides the conflicts with regard to the price proposal and the deviation of profits and costs, complications occurred with relation to the transition from the tender phase to the execution phase. For most participants of the tender process their task was considered to be finished when the final tender was handed over to the ACP. Luis explained:

There was a big organization up to the, I would say, award time. That organization dissolved after July 8 and everybody went back to his or her normal tasks in their different companies. A new organization had to be created for the project execution. (Interview May 2010)

Luis underscored that many employees participating in the formation of the tender proposal were not appointed to the newly created project organization. Few employees, who had prepared GUPC’s tender documents and were closely involved in the development of the consortium’s viewpoints, plans and negotiations, had been transferred to the execution phase of the project. As such, most background information on the proposal disappeared. Moreover, the project philosophy as well as the evolved collaborative relationship among the partners vanished. One of the ‘tender’ employees illustrated:

So, the people who are here now don’t really know, I think most of them haven’t taken the initiative to sit down, take all the paperwork, read it, understand what we planned and how we envisioned this project. Most of the people have not even read the contract; they don’t know the specs that we promised to the client... (Interview March 2010)

Indeed, numerous respondents indicated they had not read the tender documents or the contract that GUPC signed with the ACP. The image came to the fore that the
tender document was stored on a shelf and was only consulted when clashes with the client occurred, for legal aid purposes (Fieldnotes, April 2010). From my observations, it seemed that project participants were too busy starting up the execution works and reserved no time for an in-depth understanding of the tender documents and the contract with the ACP. In the hustle and bustle of commencing the field activities employees leaped in the tasks that had to be completed rather sooner than later, hence activities addressing sharing knowledge and reflecting on the tender phase shifted to the background.

In this interlude I portrayed how a sweet victory left a bitter taste for GUPC. I have described the award ceremony for the Third Set of Locks project, indicating the start of a collaborative process among GUPC partners, and detected two aspects strongly influencing the relationship between the project participants of the consortium. First, the proposed price for the construction of the mega project caused tensions. When participating companies learned this price was much lower than the amount of money that the ACP had allocated for the mega project, frustration amongst the GUPC partners grew. Consequently, intense discussions surfaced about the deviation of profits and costs. Second, the separation between the tender phase and execution phase of the project created difficulties in the project performance. A loss of knowledge and understanding of how the final proposal was constructed occurred, and the project’s philosophy was not translated to the employees in the field.

This interlude gave the reader further insight into the background of the collaboration within GUPC. The context portrayed here is key for understanding the following two empirical chapters, in which I will focus on how collaboration came about between the GUPC project participants.
Chapter 5

Practices within the GUPC project organization:

Diminishing Collaboration
Introduction

In this first empirical chapter I will portray how collaboration was manifested between project participants of Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC). More specifically, I will expose the practices of collaboration that came to the fore within GUPC’s project organization. In the context of the tense and acrimonious situation, project participants looked for something to hold on to. They searched for commonalities, routines and traditions supporting them in understanding the complexity of the project organization. With a focus on their everyday practices, I aim to unravel how actors made sense of, and gave sense to, the GUPC work environment.

This chapter is structured as follows. The first paragraph will portray the metaphors that project participants applied for describing their work environment. These metaphors reflect the context as discussed in the previous chapter and explain how project participants cope with the cultural complexity in the project organization. In the second paragraph I will elaborate on the practice of labeling cultures, which illustrates how project participants make sense of the various cultures coming together on the work floor. By describing the practice of marking boundaries, in the third paragraph, I will demonstrate how spatial settings played a role in the collaboration within GUPC. In the forth paragraph I focus on how actors were searching for structure in their organization. The last paragraph captures these practices into diminishers of collaboration.

Using Metaphors

Representing an object, action or situation, metaphors are used as abstract constructions that enact the development of thoughts and subjective interpretations of the situation. Their figurative comparison symbolizes the project participants’ opinions and feelings about the project organization and provides information about their understanding of the situation. It can help the actors making their intangible thoughts tangible, to highlight certain aspects of the situation or to give meaning

25 I have presented parts of this chapter at the 13th APROS Colloquium, 6-9 December 2009 in Monterrey, at the 6th Making Projects Critical Workshop, 16-17 April 2012 in Manchester, and at the EURAM Conference, 6-8 June 2012 in Rotterdam.
to their experiences. Furthermore, metaphors can change vague ideas and elusive feelings into rich accounts and vivid images. They connote meanings on a cognitive, emotional and behavioral level in a holistic manner (Sackmann, 1989). The analysis of metaphors enables access to the actors’ first-order conceptions of organizational dimensions, it reveals interactions between them and provides a window to organizational identities (Hercleaus & Jacobs, 2008). In doing so, metaphors offer a viable, novel understanding of the project organization. They are a rich source for understanding the actors’ shared views of the project organization and give us insight into the relationship between the project partners and how its actors have experienced this. Within GUPC, I distinguished two kinds of metaphors. Process metaphors symbolized the process of collaboration between project participants. These images, war metaphors, marriage metaphors and the metaphor of ‘climbing a mountain’ signify the project participants’ thoughts and feelings about their mutual relationship. Project metaphors represent the actors’ perspectives on the project organization. Images referring to animals and a governmental institution embodied the project participants’ ideas on the project organization.

**Process metaphor: ‘It’s like a war’**

Illustrating their experiences about their relationship, project participants often used a war metaphor. The Program Leader, for example, revealed:

> It’s like a battlefield. [...] You either shoot or you are dead. [...] In this organization it’s like a war in the sense that it’s strategy, it’s logistics, it’s tactics, it’s…(sigh) politics. You need politics in order to back up your action in the field. [It is] a twenty-first century war. (Interview, December 2009)

The Program Leader referred to the tense situation between Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA, directly after it became known that GUPC had won the tender for the Third Set of Locks project. In this phase, the project partners discussed the final price proposal and debated about how the project organization should be set-up. The heated discussions were described as a ‘battle field’ and, from this moment onwards, the project partners were ‘at war’. Ben, an Impregilo engineer, explained:
At the starting point, it is like in the war. You don’t have time to socialize or, you have, but you don’t do it. You are so embedded in the work and you won’t adjust to each other. […] Like in a war, you have to get there, everybody is running and you have no time. (Interview, June 2010)

Ben denoted that the complexity of the situation did not lend itself for social activities or reflection on the process of collaboration. The war analogy emphasized that the project participants were focused on one single goal, like winning a war, but signifying project execution. Furthermore, the metaphor of war was applied to the everyday atmosphere within GUPC. Sergio, for example, described:

Being in fights between the companies, in which both are right and wrong, I cannot do that anymore. It was like being in a battlefield, seeing the bullets flying around and not knowing in what direction to run. [It was] too much for me. (Interview, March 2010)

Sergio illustrated the complexity of the situation and confessed losing sight of how the organization was structured and how processes were being dealt with. In fact, he stepped out of the organization for a certain period of time to reflect on the internal dynamics within collaboration and to decide upon his position in the whole.

Reflecting several connotations, the war metaphor was applied to describe the collaborative relationship between project participants. First of all, the metaphor symbolized an intense conflict between parties. As other terms expressing a disagreement or a dispute were not sufficient, actors applied the terminology of a war. Second, the metaphor indicated a bloody manner for resolving issues. Using this metaphor suggests that parties were in mortal combat with each other and that no other solutions to settle the dispute were possible. Third, as war often entails international struggles and complicated politics, the metaphor explains the international and political aspect of the situation. What is more, the war metaphor is a longstanding literary term that has been widely used to express the fight of
conflict, as ‘the war on drugs’\textsuperscript{26} and ‘the war on terrorism’\textsuperscript{27} illustrate. Indicating the process of collaboration with such a commonly known reference supports actors in understanding certain actions and interactions. As such, metaphors are powerful weapons in the process of sense making that help project participants shaping their way of thinking, and that of others.

**Process metaphor: Arranged marriage**

Another commonly used metaphor in GUPC’s project organization is the marriage metaphor. Frequently, project participants applied this metaphor to explicate their perspective on the collaborative relationship between the project partners. As Annabelle, the Contracts Officer, claimed:

> Working for joint ventures is like a marriage. At the beginning everything is okay. We are going to get married forever and it is very easy. We understand each other very well. We are in love... And then, you have problems. Often a divorce [follows]. But this marriage cannot be terminated until the end of the project. [...] Projects are like arranged marriages. [...] After the end of this project, we can divorce. (Interview, April 2010)

Annabelle equaled collaboration within a project to a marital status of two people. She made explicit what happens when the relationship does not work out: a married couple can file for divorce. However, she emphasized, this is not a solution in the relationship between the project partners. Bart agreed that a separation of the partners would not be an escape, and he stressed that this option is rather impossible. Nevertheless, he admitted that in the transition from the tender phase to the execution phase the “love between the partners died” (Interview, June 2010). Luis furthermore described the collaborative relationship between the partners as ‘a civilized relationship’, indicated that it is purely a contractual relationship (Interview, May 2010).

\textsuperscript{26} First used in 1971 by the President of the United States, Richard Nixon, the ‘war on drugs’ was launched to reduce illegal drugs trafficking and decrease the use of psychoactive drugs.

\textsuperscript{27} After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the President of the United States George W. Bush announced a ‘War on Terrorism’ to denote a global fight against terrorism.
Applying the marriage metaphor to the collaborative relationship within the project organization advocates an on-going journey, an enduring bond between partners who promise each other to go through the good and the bad together. Furthermore, it suggests that a relationship is an investment for both parties, and that both parties expect to receive something positive in return; it should be beneficial for those involved. As mentioned earlier, the GUPC partners were not connected via a happy marriage but rather stuck in contractual agreements that kept them together. In the daily conversations, project participants used the marriage metaphor with a negative connotation underlining they were condemned to each other. What is interesting to note here is that the marriage metaphor was not only applied to collaboration within GUPC, also between the ACP and CH2M Hill project participants applied this metaphor when illustrating their relationship. Moreover, even beyond the Panama Canal Expansion Program the metaphor is used; it is quite a common metaphor in project management undertakings.

Process metaphor: Climbing the mountain
The Program Leader compared the process of collaboration to ‘climbing a mountain’ (Interview, December 2009). He underscored that the expedition is hard work and difficult at times, but that the goal was easy: reaching the top. Following this metaphor, the Program Leader described the current stage of the project: “we’re just reaching base camp now; storing the tents and moving the oxygen tube” (Interview, December 2009). He implied that the project organization was brought into shape as people were arriving to Panama and project participants were getting acquainted with their new work environment. At the time, GUPC had just accessed building 732 in Corozal Oeste. Several employees, affiliated with the different project partners, had arrived and brought their computers, paperwork and the -Italian- coffee machine in order. The Program Leader emphasized that these steps were important for the process of collaboration. He stressed:

We obviously need to be watching the mountain to try to identify the right paths to the top, to see the design. […] We need to be thinking in the right way and not start in the wrong direction, if we do that we have to go back to start, we will be losing time and energy. (Interview, December 2009)
Equally, Fabricio, the Pacific Works Manager, explained the development of the collaborative relationship between the project participants. He described:

> It is step by step, it is not a matter to build the foundation. That is the big essay. It is like when you climb a mountain. You have to reach 8000. Step by step. (Interview, May 2010)

Both respondents applied the metaphor of ‘climbing a mountain’ to the process of collaboration and denoted the importance of familiarizing with the context of the mutual relationship.

The war metaphors, the marriage metaphors and the metaphor of ‘climbing the mountain’ symbolized the process of collaboration and emphasize how project participants perceived the relationship amongst them. In the following, project metaphors represent how actors gave meaning to the project organization via animal metaphors and the metaphor of a governmental institution.

**Project metaphor: Animals**

Frequently, GUPC project participants used an animal-related metaphor to illustrate their perception of the project organization. Jack, a Service Manager, for example, perceived GUPC as “a bunch of crazy wild animals who run around without having an idea about where they are going” (Informal conversation, April 2010). With reference to wild animals Jack emphasized traits as temper, instinct and distrust. In the same way, his assistant, Elaine, used the animal metaphor when describing the atmosphere in the project organization to me. She cynically wondered:

> Do you see us running around like a bunch of scared rabbits? That’s the craziness about this office. And you have sensed the stress? Gosh, there is so much stress around here... (Informal conversation, March 2010)

In contrast to the wild animals that Jack referred to, Elaine described project participants as scared rabbits. Typically known for being social and friendly, rabbits live in underground burrows, where they hide when being scared. Elaine indicated
here that actors’ remained closely connected to their home organization and feared relating to a new home, the project organization. She furthermore signaled the high level of stress within GUPC, indicating this did not benefit the collaborative relationship. Slightly different, but with a close link to the metaphor of animal, Bart revealed his idea about the managerial level of the project organization:

The goal was to form a Works Management Team [WMT] that would operate as a unity. It should try to find unanimity on certain subjects, the organization chart, the set-up of projects and investment. You understand?

Karen: Yes. However, from what I hear the WMT does not operate as a unity.

That’s an understatement! We’re just a bunch of individuals in the same jungle.
(Interview, June 2010)

With reference to a jungle, Bart directed towards a chaotic environment. Jungles are commonly seen as a place with abundance of animals and vegetation, but also as places with difficult accessibility. Accordingly, the respondents applied the animal metaphor to symbolize their view on the project organization and its internal dynamics.

Another case in point is the metaphor of a circus. When describing his experiences and thoughts about the GUPC project organization, Sergio firmly said:

It’s like a circus here. They are acting like clowns. A bunch of idiots, that’s what they are. (Informal conversation, January 2010)

His reference to a circus suggests that the project organization is colorful and diverse, but not structured. For example, in a circus many things happen at the same time, which makes it hard to keep an eye on everything that is going on. Various strange, funny, scary and amazing events take place in a circus ring, which makes it such a unique place. Hence, Sergio translated his thoughts, experiences and interpretations of the collaborative relationship within GUPC as such. The metaphorical illustration
supported him to elaborate on his thoughts and feelings about the project organization.

Using the animal metaphor entails expressing characteristics of behavior that are commonly known for the animal. Often, animal-related metaphors contain negative attributes of human beings, of which ‘dragon’ (to express evil) and ‘sloth’ (to express laziness) are prime examples. Depending on the specific animal chosen, and its context, the meaning of the metaphor can symbolize a wide variety of meanings. Yet, within GUPC, its explanation usually reflected unfavorable features of project participants or the project organization. Another metaphor reflecting the project organization was a ‘governmental organization’, which I will briefly depict below.

**Project metaphor: Governmental institution**

At another instance, project participants explained the project organization as a ‘governmental organization’. Daniela, for example, expressed her opinion about GUPC by stating that “it’s all very political and it feels like working for the government” (Interview, April 2009). Bart expressed similar feelings about the process of collaboration in the project organization, he said:

> This company, it’s just a group of fighting politicians together... (Interview, June 2010)

With reference to a governmental organization Daniela and Bart aim at the negative connotations characterizing this type of organizations: they tend to be bureaucratically organized. Daniela did not appreciate the atmosphere she encountered in the project organization and she was surprised by the way project participants dealt with issues and problems: “departments continuously throw the ball from one department to the other” (Interview, April 2010). Here, she did not literally mean that a ball was thrown from one office to the other, she used the metaphor ‘ball in court’, which is a figure of speech for responsibility: when the ball is in one’s court, that person is responsible for the next move in a process. Thus, Daniela intended to say that, instead of taking responsibility, project participants preferred to move the problem to another person.
Chapter 5

Metaphors cover a multitude of interrelated meanings. Project participants used metaphors to reflect on and develop shared understandings regarding the process of collaboration and the GUPC project organization. By changing an abstract understanding of a situation or practice into a concrete explanation, a metaphor can capture more than a thousand words (Sackmann, 1989). Therefore, applying metaphors such as war, marriage, animal or the like, implies certain practices and feelings that can be related to the basic meaning of its original context. Metaphors do not only support actors in concretizing vague ideas, they also foster new ways of looking at things and illuminate extant organizational relationships and dynamics, and how this is perceived by its actors (Hercleaous & Jacobs, 2008). The practices of using metaphors gave us insight into how project participants perceived their organization and the internal dynamics within that organization. The metaphors reflect the actors’ thoughts and feelings, as well as their experiences and interactions, and they provided us with an understanding of cross-cultural collaboration in the GUPC’s project organization. In the next paragraph I will explain the practice of labeling cultures, which illustrates how actors clarified the culturally complex work environment for themselves.

Labeling Cultures

In a project organization like GUPC, in which several parties (each carrying their own cultural profiles) come together, it is almost evident that project participants socially construct the cultural differences and similarities they encounter. Often, individuals draw boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ to articulate distinctions indicating a group’s uniqueness and, as such, positioning their collective selves in a unified, superior position (Ybema, Vroemisse, & Van Marrewijk, 2012). When trying to make sense of the cultural complexity they are facing in the workplace, actors tend to create categories representing their own identity and that of ‘the other’. This process of labeling entails differentiating and simplifying, identifying and classifying, standardizing and routinizing the intractable or obdurate into a form that is more amenable to functional deployment (Weick et al., 2005). Translating the complex everyday reality into stark, hierarchical contrasts deploys cognitive representations
of their own cultural group and predisposes actors to distance themselves from the cultural other. In this paragraph I portray how GUPC actors seek to paint a distinctive picture of themselves in relation to how they viewed other project participants, and, more implicitly, how others viewed them. It is not my aim to discuss the ‘real’ cultural differences, but to emphasize the subjective interpretation within the project organization and to show which labels\textsuperscript{28} project participants employed to distinguish ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the process of collaboration.

Within GUPC, I recognized two distinct labels: the national culture label and the organization culture label. The national culture label evolved around the national identities related to the companies involved: Sacyr has its headquarters in Spain, Impregilo is from Italy, Jan de Nul resides in Belgium and CUSA is a Panamanian company. The organization culture label refers to the culture of each company involved, and how others perceived this culture.

**National Culture Label**

In making sense of the complex situation within GUPC’s project organization, actors distinguished themselves based on nationality and stereotypes related to a specific nation. In the project participants’ daily vocabulary, widely known images were used as direct references to signify a certain cultural group. One such case in point is the following example, in which Jerry, the Atlantic Design Manager, described how he experienced working in this international environment:

> The Belgians just go-go and ‘you got to get this and that’; they dispense with the pleasantries. The Panamanians and the Italians, nor the Spanish, are like that. They don’t dispense with the pleasantries, they ask about your family and say “Hello” before they say anything, you know, before they get to business. And that’s not, that is often not the case with the Belgians. (Interview, June 2010)

\textsuperscript{28} The term label and stereotype are used interchangeably. Oxford Dictionary describes the term stereotype as “a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.” The term label is defined as “a classifying phrase or name applied to a person or a thing, especially one that is inaccurate or restrictive” (Oxford Dictionary).
In the example Jerry referred to a national culture stereotype about Belgians, illustrating this nation as straightforward, while he portrayed other nationalities as less rigid and more open for a pleasant talk before going into business. He made it clear to me that the ‘Belgian-style’ of communication was not his preferred way of working together (Interview Jerry, June 2010). Lee, a Contract Officer, stated: “Panamanians work hard at night and then they don’t work during the day” (Interview, April 2010) to picture his perception of the Panamanian work ethic. At another instance, Simon, who was born in Belgium and affiliated with Jan de Nul, illustrated the cultural differences among project participants with regard to work attitude: “The Italians, they are go-getters, more than the Spanish!” (Interview, April 2010). And, about one of his colleagues he stated: “he is Italian, [that means] he tries to find his way around things” (Fieldnotes, June 2010). Both Simon’s comments reflect traits of other cultural groups: ‘the Italians’ as hard working people who rather avoid difficulties, and ‘the Spanish’ as devious. His colleague Pablo, Pacific Engineer for Impregilo and born in Italy, expressed difficulties in working with ‘the Spanish’:

[… ] The Spanish are very full of themselves, you know? Really difficult as well […] They are a little closed, we don’t know nothing about them. (Interview, March 2010)

By labeling according to images of a nation’s cultural characteristics, project participants gave meaning to the variety of cultures coming together in the project organization. Pablo labeled Sacyr employees as ‘the Spanish’ in the project organization. He described them as being “full of themselves” and “closed”, which indicated feelings of distrust for this group. This example, and the ones above, illustrates how project participants constructed meaning and enacted the national culture label. While expressing a negative trait, or at least, a trait that is perceived negatively about ‘the other’, actors, although subtly, implied that the project participants’ own group would act differently or, better. Hence, invoking the national culture label articulates distinctions and results in inclusion and exclusion of participants.

On the surface, the categories ‘the Spanish’, ‘the Italian’, ‘the Belgian’ and ‘the Panamanian’ were easy to detect. However, various actors showed preference for
Practices within the GUPC project organization: Diminishing Collaboration

generalizing these four different nationalities into solely two labels. Actors reduced the idiosyncratic details existing in one group, and attached more general images to a bigger group, resulting in fewer distinct social identities, and a more simplified version of the cultural complexity. As a consequence, ‘the Spanish’ and ‘the Italian’ were labeled as one category, set apart from ‘the Belgian’ and ‘the Panamanian’. Among other aspects, perception of time, hierarchy and communication style were experienced as similar for ‘the Spanish’ and ‘the Italian’ and were therefore generalized into one group. Project participants highlighted these contrasts to indicate labels, as was done by Ruben, an Atlantic Engineer Jan de Nul:

I have worked in many joint ventures before, but here you can clearly see a difference: the Italians and the Spaniards work a lot different than the Belgians. They are less efficient. Yes, they work more hours a day, but they loose a lot of time chatting with each other. Also, they communicate with drama, it’s like a play in a theatre, and they take long breaks. That kind of stuff… (Interview, May 2010)

With a focus on a significant perception of time and communication style, Ruben labeled ‘the Spanish’ and ‘the Italian’ as a different category than ‘the Belgian’. In addition, when I asked him to further verify his statement, Ruben used the national culture label to explain how project participants deal with hierarchy:

When the Program Leader visits the field everyone gets nervous or shy. It does not affect me directly, but I can see that happening with others. They panic. It’s like ‘father is coming and we have to sit straight’. This is a direct effect of the hierarchy that the Spaniards and Italians work with. There is a giant boundary between them.

Karen: What do you mean by boundary?

That there are big boundaries between the various organizational levels. For them it is not common to sit together and discuss an issue. It all needs to go via
a pyramid of power. They have told me they noticed that in our company power relations are not so strict. Even if people from our head quarters come and visit us, we just act normal. (Interview, May 2010)

This excerpt illustrates both the use of the national culture label, expressing how the respondent viewed other project participants, and, more implicit, it portrayed how he viewed himself. Ruben pictured himself as part of the ‘normal’ group, while he labeled ‘the Spanish’ and ‘the Italians’ with features of strong hierarchal relationships in their national culture. As such, he distanced himself from this group, ‘them’, and identified himself with another cultural group, that he called ‘us’.

When dividing ‘the Spanish’ and ‘the Italian’ with ‘the Belgian’, project participants labeled these groups of national culture as ‘the southerners’ and ‘the northerners’. These labels are based on the location of the home organizations in Europe: Sacyr and Impregilo are located in the south of Europe, Belgium in the North of the continent. Tom, who identified himself as a ‘northerner’ stated the difference between the two labels:

Some of us have the tendency to reveal all information there is on a certain topic, whereas I prefer to stick to a simple answer to the question. Southerners should be more aware of that, they don’t realize that what they say might be recorded or used against them. […]. Personally, I prefer to deal with the Northerners where a boss is almost as equal as an employee. In my world we can call our boss by the first name, drink a beer together and discuss difficulties or different opinions we have. For them, that is rather impossible, they call their boss Don or Jefe, it’s much more hierarchical. (Interview, May 2010)

Tom described negative characteristics of ‘the southerners’, their communication style and hierarchical relationship, while they themselves portrayed these traits in a more positive manner:

We southerners are more expressive; those northerners are rather cold and closed. (Informal conversation, May 2010)
With this comment, Luis expressed how he pictured himself and the colleagues he assigned to the same group. At the same time, he illustrated how he perceived the other project participants; he identified them as ‘cold’ and ‘closed’, demonstrating that he does not trust this group. What is interesting to point out here is that at some instances, the labels were not used in the same manner. ‘The Italians’ and ‘the Spanish’ were seen, and labeled themselves, as ‘the southerners’ when talking about traits they had in common. In those instances, they formed a group against other project participants. However, when discussing the attitude to work, for example, the label of ‘southerners’ was not applied. Then project participants focused on the national culture labels to emphasize a distinction between the groups. ‘The Italians’ were seen as go-getters, hard-working people characterized by a strong preference for executing most of the project work on their own. ‘The Spanish’, on the other hand, were pictured as oblique persons who aimed a subcontracting the work so that responsibility did not lie in their hands. Hence, the use of label was situation-dependent.

When seeking to understand their new work environment and trying to deal with the complexity and uncertainty in the organization, project participants found comfort in the use of the labels. As illustrated above, labels referring to nationality and to the location of the country in Europe were passed in review. Additionally, labels with reference to the inheritance of the group members were initiated. Annabelle, a Sacyr employee, affirmed:

We have Latin people and English, Anglo Saxon. They are different and sometimes they forget, how can I say, you think it is not polite. Okay? They are being rude. You think: “they are insulting me” or whatever. […] They are Anglo Saxons, have a more Anglo Saxon way of expressing; so in their reactions it seems they are reluctant. Because they don’t express the reactions as much as Latin’s would do. Yes, we [‘the Latins’] put everything on the table. (Interview, April 2010)

Annabelle connected the Anglo Saxon inheritance to ‘the northerners’ to identify them as a separate group as ‘the Latin’, which related to ‘the southerners’. The same images were used by Jack, a Jan de Nul manager, when he spoke to me about
a conversation he had had with GUPC’s top management. Jack, in his late 50s, was
told by the management team to “get rid of his Anglo Saxon management skills,
because those were too organized and too structured for operating in this company”
(Fieldnotes April, 2010). When we had lunch he immediately put this in effect:
“They literary told me to become more Latin. That means more laissez fair, more
going around the procedures. Right, I’m starting today”, he said with a smile, while
ordering a few glasses of wine (Fieldnotes, April 2010).

What is striking in the data presented here is that the Panamanian participants
were often left aside; they were labeled as a separate group. Most often, the labeling
of cultures in the project organization evolved around the Spanish and Italian
participants (‘the southerners’) versus those participants affiliated with the Belgian
company (‘the northerners’). Even though the Panamanians defined themselves as
‘Latin’ and others subscribed them similar images as used for describing Spanish
and Italian employees, they were perceived as a different category. When I asked
why Panamanians were not included in the constructed groups, the Atlantic Design
Manager stressed that Panamanians do not belong to any of these groups because
“they are from the wrong side of the pond” (Interview, June 2010). Even though
Panamanians might feel being part of ‘the Latins’, for other participants this was
not the case. They perceived the Panamanians as local employees, and therefore
as a different group. Besides the location of their country, I sensed that there was
a more political reason for excluding the Panamanians from ‘the Latins’ and ‘the
southerners’. These groups were comprised of Spanish and Italian participants, the
biggest parties within GUPC. If the Panamanians were included in these constructed
labels than they could be viewed as equal, while, when remaining a separate, small
group, their status stayed limited. Hence, the use of labels reflects and affects power
relations within the project organization.

We have seen that, while project participants try to make sense of the new
project organization, they feel comfortable in making references to nationalities
and national culture stereotypes. The project participants constructed meanings and
practices related to the characteristics they could connect to the national culture label.
I found that the national culture label was firmly embedded in the daily conversations
and practices in the project organization. Often, the actual discussions appeared to
be about creating distance between the project participants rather than being an enhancement of the collaborative relationship. Actors applied widely known images to each other, and based on certain characteristics (e.g. communication style, work attitude and hierarchy), created boundaries between them. The interpretations of the cultural differences dominated attention for collaboration among the project participants, resulting various group deviations. The following section, in which I discuss the organization culture label, further explicates the labeling of cultures and gives more insight into the political arena of GUPC’s project organization.

**Organization Culture Label**

The previous section has shown that when constructing and creating categories within the project organization, the national culture label is embedded in the actors’ daily language and practices. Another strategy for GUPC employees to make sense of the cultural complexity in the project organization was by referring to the home organization. Images about the company, its cultural values and work practices supported the subjective interpretation of participants about the groups existing in the project organization. With illustration of the organization culture label, this section shows how project participants identified groups in the process of collaboration. Annabelle, who described Jan de Nul and Impregilo during and after the tender process, gave a case in point:

Impregilo is a big company that is used to work only in foreign and international projects outside from Italy. So they have a core in Milan and people abroad and it seems that they were not taking too much steps in doing the tender, you know. It seems that they were doing nothing. And then when they started, [all of a sudden] it was like a big machine in the field. Jan de Nul did it step by step. So this was creating some difficulties, you know, because each had a different way to work. (Interview, April 2010)

Annabelle saw how the partners’ work practices differed from each other and created difficulties in the daily collaboration: while Impregilo took a silent role in the tender phase, they dominated in the execution phase. Jan de Nul, according to Annabelle, presented itself deliberate by taking more cautious steps in the process.
Remarkable to note is that Jan de Nul employees perceived their company differently. In the following interview excerpt we see how Bart gave me his opinion about each partner, and how he pictured his own company:

When you analyze these four, you see this: Sacyr is simply weak and I think they have very little international experience. Okay, they have done some projects in Latin America, but outside of that, nothing I think. Impregilo is a firm with extensive international experience and they are relatively well organized. Of course, they are a bunch of mafiosos… Jan de Nul, well, here you immediately see the difference between ‘the northerners’ and ‘the southerners’: we go straight to our goal; we don’t walk around the bush. (Interview, June 2010)

Bart strongly framed the partners in a destructive manner whereas he extolled his own company. While Annabelle experienced Jan de Nul as being restrained, Bart depicted his company as being straightforward and direct. His colleague Ruben, an Atlantic Engineer Jan de Nul, also praised his home organization to the skies:

We are a small partner in the consortium and therefore less accepted. Our head quarters had to work really hard to get us involved in GUPC. But if you look outside now, we are present at every level of the organization. I think others have realized that we are needed, because we speak very well English and we work a lot more efficient than they do. (Interview May 2010)

Extremely positive about his home organization, Ruben stated that GUPC would not be able to operate without the presence of Jan de Nul. Bart verified:

Jan de Nul is the most reliable [company] and gives the quickest replies when it comes to a reaction from the home organization in Europe. Also, we have a financially strong company. (Interview, June 2010)

What is interesting about Bart and Ruben’s statements is that they pictured their home organization as superior to the other participating companies in the project.
Practices within the GUPC project organization: Diminishing Collaboration

organization. This, however, seemed to be a strategy to counter the inferior position Jan de Nul had in the project organization. As explained in the context chapter, Jan de Nul was a smaller company within GUPC; it held a three per cent share. GUPC partners agreed that each company could bring in a certain amount of employees related to the company's share in the project organization. As the amount of Jan de Nul employees in the overall project organization was fairly small, their formal influence was limited. The company worked hard to conquer a position in the Works Management Team (WMT) of the project organization. However, a year after the commencement date, a job description for this position was still in the making because partners continued discussing the content and length of authority for the Jan de Nul representative in the project organization (Fieldnotes, June 2010). For the person in question, this created confusion, frustration and conflicts, because the framework of his role remained unclear. As such, he remained dependent on the decision of the WMT and was left behind with inferiority emotions. These feelings were also sensed among other Jan de Nul employees in the project organization, of which Jaap reminded me:

Their [Impregilo] procurement process is super slow! Everything needs to go via their home organization; it takes ages! And their payment procedure… Really, they make things much more difficult than needed. However, I have to be careful to make a remark about it. They are the bigger partner in GUPC, so we just have to follow their rules… (Informal conversation, April 2010)

Referencing to Impregilo's dominance in the daily practices, Jaap expressed how he felt obliged to follow the bigger, and more powerful, partners in the project organization. Furthermore, Jan de Nul employees experienced difficulties in their daily work regarding acceptance, and felt harassed by participants from other GUPC partners. Ruben expressed: “sometimes it feels like they think we come from a different planet” (Interview, May 2010).

Feelings of frustration and alienation had a tremendous effect on the collaborative relationship among the project partners. I observed one occasion in which a Jan de Nul employee had to leave the project, because collaboration had become impossible.
was said that his communication style and work practices were not in line with those of his co-workers, while the particular individual said that he was bullied until he left the job (Fieldnotes, June 2010). For this employee, who had arrived in Panama only a few months before, this implied that he and his family had to leave the country. For Jan de Nul, this meant that the company lost a position to fill. And, by means of a quick replacement, an employee from one of the superior partners took the position. Both politically as well as emotionally, this situation had a great impact on the Jan de Nul employees: the company lost a position, one that came with supervision and authority, and the employees missed a comrade, a friend.

These incidents represent many other events in which Jan de Nul employees felt overpowered by Sacyr and Impregilo. Statements like those of Bart and Ruben illustrate how actors attempted to push their home organization to the fore. They emphasized their home organization’s skills and importance to establish their position within the project organization. This attitude did not remain unnoticed; in many conversations within the project organization, the organization culture label for Jan de Nul came to the fore. Jerry, for example claimed:

Jan de Nul’s people are - they’re very different from the Sacyr or Impregilo or the CUSA’s people. They’re very different in their approach to the work and their demeanor is just much different that of the others. (Interview, June 2010)

Although Jan de Nul’s employees felt inferior in the project organization, and were seen as ‘different’ in their work attitude compared to other participants, their presence did not remain unnoticed. They were seen as ‘the northerners’ and often pictured as the other cultural group. Yet, CUSA was barely mentioned in distinctions between cultural groups. Within the project organization, CUSA had the smallest share, one per cent, and the company was often overlooked. In the statement above, in which Bart described the four partners, he failed to mention CUSA. In a similar vein, I noticed comparable attitudes in other conversations. Jaap recognized that “CUSA’s influence is rather small” (Interview, April 2010). And CUSA’s deputy acknowledged his position in the WMT:
We are left out on many decision-makings. I mean, if there is a vote, I will give
my opinion, but I am not pushing any issues anymore. Recently there was a
discussion about buying some special equipment. I saw the prices, everybody
except me agreed on buying the cheapest one. I said: ‘Well, I don’t know that
brand, they don’t have a local representative, I’ve never heard about it. So I
don’t agree on buying that. I would propose to buy something a little bit more
expensive, that I know they’ve got a representative, they’ve got spare parts, etc.’
And everybody said that I was crazy… They did not even listen to my comments!
(Interview, March 2010)

The interviewee felt ignored, and even though CUSA is a full partner in the project
organization, they did not feel treated as such. In this specific statement CUSA’s
deputy suffered for not being heard, but in other situations I have seen him agree
with decisions for the sake of the project. Decision-making within GUPC is organized
in a way that when there is no unanimity between the Works Management Team,
the matters are taken to a higher level, to the Executive Committee. However, this
institute needs to investigate the matter, which means that it would take longer
before a final decision could be made. Under pressure of both time and budget,
GUPC profited from quick decisions, and for that reason CUSA often followed suit.

As GUPC is working under high pressure emanating from the low price proposal
and the internal conflicts the company started with, topics as decision-making and
procedures were highly debated in the everyday practices. Participants felt the burden
and stress needed for efficient work processes. By means of the organization culture
label, they found explanations for the complex situations encountered. Applying this
label helped project participants to make sense of the struggles and conflicts they
faced in the project organization. Common images and well-known practices about
each company were brought to the surface to distinguish groups among the project
participants. This may be illustrated by expressions as ‘those guys from Sacyr’ or ‘it is
Sacyr…’ followed by a sigh, implying general understanding.

To give meaning to GUPC’s complex project organization, the national culture
label and the organization culture label were used intertwined in the daily practices of
project participants. Labeling project participants regarding their home organizations’
nationality or characteristics supported actors to distinguish identities in the process of collaboration. Frequently, these labels were brought into action to illustrate, defend and negotiate the political area within GUPC. Both the emotional connection that actors experienced amongst each other as well as the political strategies they were confronted with, fed the use of cultural labels. Additionally, the various contracts on which employees were hired enforced the use of labels. Sergio expressed a commonly used distinction between project participants:

> The organization is split up in five groups: Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul, CUSA and the Market People, which is the rest. This last group consists of people that were hired by Grupo29, so they are not related to any of the four partners. (Interview, March 2010)

Building upon the different contracts, this distinction was widely used within GUPC’s project environment. All employees who were affiliated with one of the four partners had a contract with their home organization and received a salary and benefits from that specific company. The ‘market people’ were employees hired by GUPC; they had a contract according to the local Panamanian labor law, or, that of an external consultant. One can imagine this caused confusion and frustration in the daily collaboration of project participants: one employee earned more than a colleague working in the same position or one team member had less holidays than other team members. Sacyr employees, for example, were not used to work on Saturdays, but since this is common practice for the other partners, they were obliged to come to work on Saturdays in this project. Thus, influenced by a wide variety of salaries and benefits, actors applied national culture and organizational culture labels to translate, distinct and explain cultural groups within the project organization.

In this paragraph I have illustrated that labeling cultures is an act of cultural sense making. While project participants search for a logic understanding of the complex situation encountered, they bring their emotional affiliations to the fore and take common images, well-known practices and organizational political manifestations into account. The laborious collaboration among GUPC partners inclined actors to

29 Project participants often abbreviated Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC) as ‘GUP’ or ‘Grupo’.
relate to cultural differences in order to position themselves and to safeguard their interests, values and cultural practices. Competition among the project partners encouraged the use of certain discursive strategies, such as constructing the image of superior and inferior groups. During this process of sense making, actors labeled the characteristics they encountered with the culture they could relate with. Consequently, the translation and negotiation of practices resulted in the distinction between the national culture label and the organization culture discourse. As such, the labeling of cultures hampered collaboration in GUPC’s project organization. Actors focused on cultural differences, differentiated and identified categories and applied these to distance themselves from each other. Accordingly, the use of cultural labels diminished collaboration between the project partners.

Apart from the labels connected to the national culture and organization culture, a professional culture label is often found in organizations. Based on a shared knowledge base, common codes for constructing interpretations and a collective understanding of objects and events, professionals can form a subculture co-existing in the culture of an organization (e.g. Bloor & Dawson, 1994; Mahadevan, 2012). Within GUPC, however, this label did not receive much attention. Naturally, the project organization accommodated various professions and members of the same profession might have felt a mutual understanding, but this was not operationalized into the everyday practices of project participants.

The practice of using metaphors and labeling cultures show how project participants made sense of the complexity they encountered in their everyday work environment. It illustrates that actors seek for common understanding and rely on shared knowledge; they aim to find common ground. However, the practices resulted in hindrances for the process of collaboration. Project participants held on to categories, used metaphors with negative connotations and, as such, created greater distance between them. In the following paragraph I will portray how the material spatial settings affected collaboration among the GUPC project partners.
Marking Boundaries

GUPC worked on one program, project participants divided it into two separate projects and executed it from three different locations. In this paragraph I will portray how these spatial settings played a part in the collaboration between project participants. It will illustrate how actors marked boundaries and applied these in their everyday practices. As such, it demonstrates that spatial setting play an essential role in organizations (Van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010). First, I will portray the distinction that project participants made between the Atlantic project and the Pacific project. Subsequently, I will elaborate on the three locations from where GUPC executed the Third Set of Locks project: Gatún, Cocolí and Corozal Oeste, and describe how these influenced the collaborative relationship among the project participants.

One Expansion Program, two projects: Atlantic versus Pacific

As described in chapter four, the Panama Canal Expansion Program runs from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean through Panama. Project offices were located on both sides of the 80-kilometer waterway. At each side of the canal, GUPC rented office buildings from the ACP. At the time of this study, GUPC’s headquarters were located among ACP buildings in the Corozal Oeste compound, close to Panama City. By means of equal control in the project, according to its share in the consortium, it was agreed that Sacyr and Impregilo each received authority for one project site. Shortly after the tender phase it was decided that Sacyr would manage the project at the Atlantic site and Impregilo took control of the project at the Pacific site.

These project sites heavily distinguished from each other. In the day-to-day operations the Sacyr – Impregilo divide meant that the Project Manager for the Atlantic site originated from Sacyr and the Project Manager for the Pacific site was associated with Impregilo. Both Project Managers were entitled to choose personnel for their own projects. This resulted in a staff that was based on the home organization: most employees at the Atlantic project site were affiliated with Sacyr and most employees at the Pacific project site were related with Impregilo. Additionally, the societal perception of local employees in the area created a difference between the project sides. In the Panamanian society it was said that local employees residing from the
Atlantic area had a ‘Caribbean’ work mentality. This was reflected in a more relaxed work attitude, a less strict perception of time and failing to go to work after salary payment. In contrary, employees at the Pacific side of the country were perceived as being more business-oriented, more formal and more professional than people from the Atlantic side of the country. Furthermore, from a technical perspective the project sites were very different from one another. The soil in the Atlantic project site, called Gatun-rock, is a soft, siltstone-type of material that was easy to excavate. At the Pacific project site, the soil consisted of robust basalt rocks caused difficulties in excavation. After heavy rainfall, the soil at the Pacific project site was advantageous because it remained solid under the pressure of heavy-duty trucks and excavators, while the Gatun-rock at the Atlantic side changed into mud, blocked machinery and congested the work process. Accordingly, both on a personnel level and a technical level, the project sites heavily differed from each other.

The distinctions between the project sites were strongly enacted in the everyday practices. Numerous respondents acknowledged there was very little connection between the project sites. The Atlantic project site was perceived as Sacyr terrain, where mainly Sacyr employees were hired and Spanish became the leading language. Sacyr employees became known for their lack of English, which created problem in the daily operations. The Expansion Program was executed in English and staff was obliged to master this language. Other GUPC partners followed this requirement, but Sacyr was short on English-speaking staff and this created friction among the project participants. At the Pacific site, where Impregilo took control, English remained the everyday language because the work force consisted of a mix of Impregilo and Jan de Nul employees. Project participants did not feel like they were part of the same organization, as Sergio lucidly illustrated:

The Atlantic site is like an island, created by Sacyr. And they think they are the supreme human beings, like they are the big bosses and the rest is shit. […] When you walk to the canteen in the Atlantic you feel that people are watching you like ‘Who is this Martian?’ (Interview, March 2010)
Sergio expressed antagonism towards the Atlantic site of the project. He was looked upon as a stranger and felt deviated from his colleagues. Often, project participants did not seem to know who their colleagues were or what was going on at the opposite side of the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Moreover, project participants spoke in terms of ‘competition’ and ‘conflicts’ when talking about a relationship between the Atlantic and the Pacific project. Oscar, a Planner from Impregilo, revealed:

These two [the Atlantic and Pacific Project Managers] don’t work together; they are in competition. Our companies are competitors in the market, and in this project we feel that too. (Informal conversation, May 2010)

Although the companies act as partners in GUPC, in previous projects they were competitors, sometimes even competing for the same projects. This historical context affected the current relationship between the partners and that was, as Oscar portrayed, felt on the work floor.

The physical distance between the projects underlined the boundaries between the Atlantic project and the Pacific project. In most conversations project participants showed curiosity about the other project site. Chris, who worked at the Atlantic site, illustrated:

We have very little contact with the Pacific. I would like to go and see what they do there, but there is simply no time. (Informal conversation, May 2010)

Actors admitted not knowing who was involved or what was going on at the other project site, but stressed there was no time to gather such knowledge. When I suggested that an exchange event could be organized in which Atlantic project participants go out to the Pacific site and the other way around, Chris replied enthusiastically, but remarkable enough: he was confident that the WMT should initiate such an event (Fieldnotes, May 2010). He emphasized that it is the responsibility of the top-management to initiate and create activities that help project participants bridging the gap between them. Oscar too, underscored:
The upper management should integrate more, but the Program Leader does not do that. What do you think, he worked 20 years for Impregilo and has one year with Sacyr, he still is an Impregilo guy! (Informal conversation, May 2010)

Besides stressing that the initiative of an exchange-event should be at the top of the project organization, Oscar revealed that GUPC’s Program Leader, a Sacyr representative, was affiliated with Impregilo for many years, and he assumed that the ‘Impregilo-blood still runs through his veins’ (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Impregilo employees felt betrayed for the fact that their colleague moved to Sacyr, while Sacyr employees did not trust the Program Leader as a representative of their home organization. The complexity of these backgrounds affected the collaborative relationship among the project partners. Actors marked the boundaries between them and emphasized these in their everyday work. Enforced by these boundaries, subcultures evolved within the project organization and collaboration between the two projects was hardly noticeable.

In addition to the subcultural divide between the Atlantic and Pacific project sites, boundaries were also drawn based on the location of the offices, which is next to discuss.

**Two projects, three locations: Gatún, Cocolí, Corozal Oeste**

The office for the Atlantic project site was located in Gatún and the commute had an enormous impact on the project participants’ everyday life. From Panama City, where most project participants would travel from, a drive to this office would take about one hour. That is, when there was no traffic. However, in the mornings there were heavy traffic congestions on the route to the office, which troubled the project participants. Oscar, for example, expressed that he did not have time to build a social life. He claimed:

I don’t have a life: I rush to work in the morning, work my ass off, and then arrive home late. Eat, sleep, and wake up at 5am again. That’s not a life! (Fieldnotes, May 2010)
It was mostly the travel distance that exhausted Oscar, who, for that reason, hoped to be moved to the Pacific office soon. Every morning he had to leave his house before 6 a.m., so that he would arrive in time on the highway towards the Atlantic Ocean and could avoid the daily traffic jams. His workday started at 7 a.m., and he worked until 6 p.m. or later, again, to avoid the traffic in the afternoon (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Furthermore, Oscar and his colleagues were disturbed by the discussion about who should pay the toll required to access the fast road: GUPC, the home organization, or the employee himself. Additionally, project participants at the Atlantic project site pointed out that the location of their office in Gatun felt secluded from the rest of the project and its participants.

Besides the drawbacks of the office in Gatún, project participants recognized its benefits. For one thing, employees experienced the large distance with the headquarters as an advantage because, from their perspective, involvement from the management team was much smaller when being remote. Besides, the project participants very much enjoyed the office buildings and its surroundings. Former houses from the Canal Zone were remodeled into office buildings, which gave a warm and cozy feeling to the workplace. Almost every office had a kitchenette where employees had access to a coffee machine, a wide variety of tea flavors, a cold-water tap and a fridge to store their snacks and sodas. Outside the office, a green jungle gave a scenic atmosphere to the work environment. Within a five-minute drive and after passing a security fence, one could enter the project execution site.

For lunch, project participants walked to a house that is located on the hill and redesigned as a restaurant. Project participants had to sign their name on a paper sheet to announce their presence before enjoying a catered lunch buffet. It struck me that, at lunchtime, project participants did not stay with their departmental colleagues, but they preferred to join a table with employees from their home organization (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Gustavo, an Atlantic Engineer Sacyr, clarified:

The companies are still very present in the daily work. At lunch for example, we share a table with people from our own organization, we want to speak our own language. You will find Spanish, Italian, Dutch and Panamanian tables. (Informal conversation, May 2010)
This practice shows that participants were not merged into one group, but rather remained separated in various groups, based on their home organization and native language. The way project participants made use of spatial settings reflects their organizational behavior and preferences; although allocated at various departments, at lunchtime employees from the same home organization gathered together. From my observations, this was different at the Pacific project site.

GUPC’s offices in Cocolí, where the Pacific project site was based, were located in two old ACP buildings with the look and feel of being in a container: walls were thin and windows very small. The project site was only footsteps away and the sound of trucks and trailers was clearly heard in the offices. The atmosphere inside the office mostly depended on the weather conditions: rainy days brought a muddy environment and sometimes even floods, while at warm, dry days the offices were dusty. Air conditioners were placed to keep the area cool, but their noise was very loud and the air often too cool. The canteen in the Pacific office housed in a container that was connected to one of the office buildings. A pile of empty water cans and a stack of paper were placed in the corner of the container: the eating area was also used as a storage room, and no daylight could enter. Before enjoying the buffet, one had to sign a paper sheet. Different than in the canteen at the Atlantic project site, only plastic tableware was used. There had been no efforts to create a nice environment is this area; it merely served its purpose. This is exactly what project participants said about the food: “It serves it purpose, it keeps us alive, but it is certainly not tasteful!” (Fieldnotes, April 2010). In contrast to lunch-practices in the Gatún office, I observed here that project participants shared lunch with their departmental colleagues. Often, actors made remarks about lunch at other project locations. Daniela explained:

Lunch is much better in Gatún and even in Corozal it’s okay. I don’t know why.

Karen: Maybe they have a better caterer?

But they don’t. It’s all prepared by Niko’s Café. They should deliver the same quality everywhere... Maybe it’s the way we get it served here. Look [she breaks
a plastic fork]. This place is horrible. Gatún is far away, but at least their lunch meals are delicious! (Informal conversation, April 2010)

Daniela’s frustration was shared among many other project participants and, if work allowed them, they would drive to a neighboring town (Arraijan) to buy lunch. Some actors admitted staying longer in the Corozal office after a meeting to be able to enjoy lunch at this location. Besides the food quality, project participants felt uncomfortable in Cocolí’s office: the absence of decoration, the lack of daylight and the use of plastic tableware reflected the project’s temporality. None of these features of temporality were seen at the headquarters, while this office in fact was planned for temporal use.

At a ten-minute drive away from Panama City, along the Panama Canal, lays the area Corozal Oeste. This area was previously part of the Canal Zone and houses many ACP buildings, all numbered. Directly after the tender phase the building with number 732 was assigned to GUPC. Earlier in the year the ACP had declined the building as ‘sick’ because it was in such a bad shape that they did not want to use it. GUPC was given the building, but needed to refurbish it extensively before moving in. The roof needed to be fixed, walls were painted and air conditionings were installed (Fieldnotes, October 2009). One needed an ACP identity card to enter GUPC’s headquarters, which all GUPC employees received after the company took office in building 732. While GUPC used the back section, the ACP occupied the first half of the building; a wall and different entrances separated the companies from each other. Various (staff) departments and the WMT were based at GUPC’s headquarters. Due to many movements, either in or out the office building, many people did not know each other and the high work pressure did not allow for time to connect. Hence, I found the atmosphere in the building somewhat distant (Fieldnotes, January 2010). A spacious restaurant was located in the center of the building. With regard to the set-up and procedures, it showed similarities with other GUPC restaurants: one needed to sign before enjoying the catered buffet. Yet, the look and feel of this restaurant was different. The wooden chairs, the silverware and decoration (posters and a bulletin board) gave the restaurant a warm ambiance.

30 A few months after the fieldwork period, by late 2010, GUPC moved its headquarters to a newly build office in Cocolí.
Project participants in Corozal Oeste shared lunch with their co-workers, and met in the canteen for (coffee) breaks.

From GUPC’s headquarters, the Pacific project site was located about a twenty-minute drive away and it took about an hour drive to the Atlantic project site, resulting in fewer visits to the latter. Hence, the relationship between the main office and the project offices was heavily debated.

Project participants experienced a distance in the relationship with its headquarters. In Gatún, employees felt excluded and they often indicated sensing ignorance from the headquarters in Corozal Oeste. With certain anger in his voice, Tom, an Atlantic Engineer, explained:

People in Corozal are supposed to support the site offices, but instead they try to impose their way of doing things, their opinions and their procedures on us. They don’t come here and we sure feel that we are satellite. I miss all cooperation with them. But we are the ones that make the money in the end! (Interview, May 2010)

Tom did not feel part of the overall organization and was upset about the low level of independency for the project site office. He felt subordinated and claimed more respect from the main office. Tom’s colleague Ruben underscored the connection with GUPC’s headquarters:

The relationship with Corozal is awkward and stiff. Personally, I think that Corozal is an unwieldy structure that ‘no matter what’ needs to be, and mostly, wants to be, involved. Yes, we are treated childish sometimes; matters that we should decide upon independently always need to go via them. (Interview, May 2010)

Ruben and Tom felt treated pedantically, stuck in rules and regulations by higher management and they sensed a resilient power difference between Gatún and Corozal Oeste. Juxtaposing, later in our conversation Tom admitted enjoying the distance between the headquarters and the project site office. “As soon as I’m back
here, they don’t feel the urgency anymore”, he revealed to explain that when he is not around the WMT or staff departments, they do not question him as much (Interview, May 2010).

Correspondingly, project participants from the office in Cocolí experienced a distance with GUPC’s headquarters. Simon, a Pacific Engineer Jan de Nul, portrayed:

We don’t get involved. We don’t have a clue about what’s going on in Corozal. And they barely know what’s happening here. In fact, I don’t even know what they are doing in the office next door! (Interview, April 2010)

Simon illustrated a deficiency in communication with the headquarters in Corozal Oeste, but at the same time highlighted that this is also the matter within his own office. He pointed out that project participants in Cocolí, even though close by Corozal Oeste, suffered from a lack of interest in the project, the person and the work. Actors were mainly focused on their own task instead of paying attention to what happened around them. Another example portraying exclusion was seen around meetings. Almost all meetings took place in the main office, which meant that project participants from Gatún and Cocolí were obliged to travel. Only occasionally, employees from the headquarters visited the project site offices. As such, imposed by the spatial settings, power differences were felt between the project participants.

This paragraph illustrated how spatial settings influenced the collaborative relationship among project participants. It showed that project participants identified themselves (and each other) with the project site or office one was based in. They marked these places as boundaries, and, at the same time, applied these as borders between them. They felt distanced from the headquarters, but also separated themselves from another project site, location, or as portrayed in Simon’s quote above, from the departments in the same office. By marking boundaries, project participants tried to simplify the complexity within the project organization. In doing so, however, they created segregation and fragmentation in the relationship between them. The ambiguous link between the project spaces did not improve collaboration but rather created a greater distance between the project participants. Table 5.1 summarizes the spatial settings of GUPC’s project offices.
While trying to create clarity by marking boundaries, project participants searched for an organizational structure offering them a framework of the project organization. In the following paragraph I will elaborate on this practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.1 Spatial setting of GUPC project offices</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atlantic site</td>
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<tr>
<td>Driving time to Panama City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office atmosphere</td>
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<td>Communal area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canteen locations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surroundings</td>
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<td>Distance to the field</td>
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**Searching for structure**

Observations in the project organization showed that project participants missed having a structured overview of GUPC. Such a drawing or document does not only explain where employees are situated, it also shows how the organization and its formal (power) relations are arranged. Earlier in the fieldwork study, in December 2009, a project participant called me on my cellular phone:
Karen, there is now total chaos in GUPC! It appears that the Ministry of Labor has announced to visit GUPC tomorrow, to check upon valid work permits. [Laughs] We don’t even have a work permit! So, this afternoon every foreigner in the company was informed; tomorrow morning we all have to call our manager before entering the office area, and we should be prepared to leave any minute. Seriously, can it be any more amateurish? What a joke! (Fieldnotes, December 2009)

The respondent laughed about the unorganized situation for expat employees in the project organization, but he was far from being happy. He had been in Panama since October 2009, but still worked without a valid visa, and the fact that the government announced an inspection, worried him. However, he humorously finished the conversation saying that this event might be a solution to discover GUPC’s organizational structure:

Maybe this is a good practice to create an organizational structure: who-calls-who will show hierarchy. We just have to call with Movistar[31] afterwards and we can draw an org. chart! (Fieldnotes, December 2009)

Clearly, project participants’ searched for the confirmation of a certain structure. By the same token, in October 2009, presuming it would help me to understand how GUPC was structured, I asked whether an organization chart was available. During my fieldwork period I continued asking for it, but I never received a confirming answer. It appeared that GUPC partners could not come to an agreement about the structure of their organization and the position of certain people in their organization. Yet, the ACP received a chart and had put it up their office walls for clarification, but when I asked GUPC employees about the chart, the answer always rejected the existence of a confirmed organizational structure. Almost a year later, in June 2010, I received a document containing an organization chart that was marked as ‘not approved’. Thus, there was still no consensus about GUPC’s organization structure (Fieldnotes, June 2010).

[31] A Spanish telephone operator offering its services in Spain and many Latin American countries, such as Panama.
The absence of a certain organizational structure portrayed disarray at the higher management level, which was reflected on the work floor. Project participants frequently illustrated that any form of trust within the project organization was out of the question. The motivation to work together was low and project participants felt that a collaborative relationship was missing. Consequently, numerous employees stated that GUPC’s project organization affected their emotional well-being. Jaap, a Pacific Engineer Jan de Nul, for example, had a worried expression on his face when I encountered him in the corridor of GUPC’s headquarters. I asked him what is going on and, with a deep sigh, he replied:

It's a continuous headache, this project is the most difficult one I've ever worked on. It's not just one thing that's going wrong, it's everything! (Fieldnotes, March 2010)

While we spoke, an employee came storming into the hallway, screaming: “If this does not change before the end of the month, I’m out!” (Fieldnotes, March 2010). Jaap sighed and continued his route. Later that week, Sergio too, admitted:

Last week was an emotional drain. Going to bed at 2am every night, getting up early, coming home late and usually not in a good mood, that is not what I want. I have a wife and two children that I want to take care of. (Informal conversation, March 2010)

Employees who arrived in Panama at the start of the execution phase expressed feelings of discomfort when I spoke to them in December 2009. At the time, they predicted this was part of the beginning of the execution phase and expected better structures to be implemented soon. However, when I spoke with them again in June 2010, the employees had sensed no development with regard to the collaborative relationship. Simon confirmed:

I sleep bad, I worry all the time. At first I thought it would be over soon, and I had hopes that issues would stay on the management level, but they don’t. We need
over a year to find our way of working together, and that is far too long for this project. (Informal conversation, June 2010)

The tense atmosphere within the project organization, as portrayed above, was fed by activities, such as, for example, an installation of Adobe Professional on all computers. This program supports employees to convert their documents in .pdf files. In the laborious collaboration among project participants, this action was understood as a display of distrust, as Simon verified:

That’s when you know things are going in the wrong direction, when your colleagues send information in pdf. Because with that they show there is more info, but you cannot access that. Why would we hide information from each other? We should operate as a team. Well, we don’t! Instead, we give everyone a license to make pdf-files so that information can be kept secret to others. It’s crazy!! (Informal conversation, June 2010)

In a different work environment, one in which collaboration is perceived positively, project participants might view the installation of such a program as a handy tool to send documents to the client as it prevents drawings from being changed in the process of sending. However, with regard GUPC, this comment underscored a practice that hampered collaboration.

The continuous conflicts at the higher management level and the fact that no consensus could be reached on the organization chart, among other issues, portrayed an unstructured project organization. It may be obvious that the emotional distress for the project participants’ daily life did not benefit to a satisfactory collaborative relationship. As an answer to spatial divides and the absence of a clear organizational framework, project participants held on to common behavior and traditional practices, illustrated by marking boundaries and searching for structure. The marked boundaries were enacted and created a greater distance between the project participants, and the lack of an organization structure amplified the complexity and uncertainty of the project organization.
Discussion: Diminishers of Collaboration

In this first empirical chapter I focused on collaboration within the project organization Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC). By means of describing practices of collaboration I explained how project participants made sense of and dealt with the cultural complexity they encountered in their everyday work life. Although an abundance of practices was observed in the project organization, the ones presented in this chapter demonstrate how project participants searched for something to hold on to and what they did to find comfort in their daily work environment.

Due to an unstable start, the collaboration between Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA was colored by high pressure and simmering tensions. Through the use of metaphors and labeling cultures project participants translated their thoughts and experiences into more amendable forms of understanding. Marking the spatial boundaries and searching for structure supported them to give meaning to the project environment. At first sight, these practices might seem to have supported the project participants in unraveling the dense nature of their organization and its context, but when taking a closer look, it turned out that these practices reflected how a collaborative relationship was hindered. The outcomes of the practices led to differentiation, segregation and fragmentation among the project participants and created a ‘canal’ between them. That is to say, the actors’ strong focus on differences and boundaries magnified the emotional distance between them. Hence, these practices enacted as diminishers of collaboration.

The diminishers of collaboration reflect the project participants’ search for security and confidence in their ambiguous and uncertain work environment. By nature, collaborations are rarely static structures and often, due to the difficulty of understanding and negotiating around the different, conflicting, overt and hidden agendas, clarity is not achieved (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). As a result, actors hold on to deeply embedded practices, and actively deploy and construct cultural differences to defend and oppose established practices and power relations (Ybema & Byun, 2009). Offering useful means of interpretation and sense making, these established project management practices have an important bearing on the shaping and development of collaboration (Bresnen, Goussevskaia, & Swan, 2005b), because
such traditions guide and constrain the potential for change (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010). The term collaborative inertia, put forward by Huxham and Vangen (e.g. Huxham, 1996; Huxham & Vangen, 2004), describes the pitfalls of collaboration. The authors emphasize that, amongst others, difficulties in negotiating a joint purpose, difficulties in communicating across (national, cultural, professional and organizational) languages and difficulties in developing joint modes of operating, as we have seen in the GUPC project organization, result in static behavior and fixed practices. In the following chapter, however, I will portray that project participants were motivated for creating a collaborative relationship amongst them and illustrate how they shaped and initiated practices of collaboration.
Chapter 6

Collaboration within GUPC:
Amplifying Practices
Introduction

Following the previous chapter, in which I portrayed how the GUPC project participants made sense of the cultural complexity in their everyday work environment, I will demonstrate in this chapter the practices that project participants enacted, shaped or initiated when creating a collaborative relationship amongst them. More explicitly, in this chapter I will elaborate on the practices that manifested collaboration among the GUPC project participants. Affected by a high work pressure related to the price proposal and the social-cultural difficulties, as explained earlier, project participants recognized that combining their knowledge, shaping their practices and adjusting to the other parties generated the progress in the Third Set of Locks Project. This reflective process induced project participants to alter their everyday work practices and behavior. Illustrating these evolving practices of collaboration allows me to discover oblivious perceptions of the organization and provides us with insight into the internal dynamics within GUPC.

The chapter unfolds as follows. In the first paragraph I will elaborate on the shared interests supporting the project participants in finding common ground. In the second paragraph I will discuss bridging actors who acted as intermediaries and brought the project participants closer together. As the project took shape, I observed cross-cultural code-switching on the work floor. Focusing on the adaptation of language, shaping work practices and initiating new practices, in the third paragraph, I will describe how project participants make sense of the collaborative relationship amongst them. As part of this sense making process, project participants initiated social activities, of which I will illustrate several examples in the forth paragraph. The last paragraph captures these practices into amplifiers of collaboration.

Sharing interests

In the rapidly moving project organization of GUPC, actors built on prior, mutual and collective knowledge to make sense of their work environment. Idiosyncratic to the level of the collaborative undertaking, both congruence and diversity in interests

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32 I have presented parts of this chapter at the 6th Making Projects Critical Workshop, 16-17 April 2012 in Manchester and at the 28th EGOS Colloquium, 5-7 July 2012 in Helsinki.
and goals influence the collaborative relationship (Vangen & Huxam, 2011). When seeking for common ground, project participants rely, amongst other aspects, on their shared interests. At the principal level, project partners share an interest about what they aspire to achieve together, such as the completion of the Third Set of Locks project. At the organizational level, however, interest for collaboration often reflects existing agendas that need to be addressed, while individuals are likely to be assigned to a role in the project for the need of their organization (Vangen & Huxam, 2011). At this level, the GUPC partners dealt with resource constraints, viewed policy implementations differently and had differing interests for the collaboration (see Interlude). Furthermore, at the micro level, the GUPC members explored mutual experiences and collective knowledge supporting them in the sense making process. Correspondingly, sharing interests and following a mantra were the bases for generating a more collaborative relationship in the execution of the Third Set of Locks project.

**Passion for profession**

A mutual passion for their profession was found in the project participants’ backgrounds. Some respondents had a degree in technical engineering and others had studied electrical or industrial engineering, but they were all educated for and had experience in the construction sector. This shared field of interest came directly to the fore when actors discussed their previous work experiences with each other. Project participants showed pride in the projects they had completed: several employees worked on the Palm Islands in Dubai, other participants were involved in the construction of hydroelectric plants in Brazil, and some were employed for the construction of the national railway network in Venezuela. Actors enjoyed speaking about the preceding undertakings in their career. One respondent, for example, pointed out his personal website where he keeps track of the previous projects he worked on, and informs readers about the backgrounds of these engineering works. On the website he published that his “passion in life is visiting the world of construction sites, as there is so much to learn from new technologies” (May 2010). Another case in point is Luis, a Pacific Manager Sacyr, who proudly showed me a picture book of a project he worked for in Spain, and presented me a magazine...
that published an article he wrote about social responsibility in engineering projects (Interview, May 2010). These examples demonstrate that, besides being passionate about their job internally, project participants also publically portrayed their passion for the profession of engineers. According to Humberto, an Environmental Specialist for GUPC, this passion is universal. He depicted:

> We have a lot of problems here and sit down as a team, because they are environmentalists, we are environmentalists; let’s fix it. […] People who are working in the environmental area are some sort of environmental warriors. (Interview, May 2010)

In addition to a shared educational background, Humberto felt emotionally connected to other environmental engineers as similar objectives to fight for the environment were shared.

In the everyday work place, the shared professional interest emerged in a mutual language among project participants: an engineering language. In many meetings I observed project participants understanding each other better when drawings were made. Also in interviews, numerous participants asked for a piece of paper for answering my question and explaining themselves better with an illustration. By means of clarification, actors frequently felt the urge to illustrate their story with a drawing. The sketches could be as simple as a pyramid or as complicated as a design structure; they supported project participants in making themselves clear. As such, the use of drawings to express and understand each other was a manner of speech shared by project participants.

Another aspect of the passion for profession is the expatriate life. On a yearly basis, only few, large engineering projects commence, and they are often located in remote areas in the world. As a result for their passion for working in engineering mega projects, and simply because this is their job, most project participants know the expatriate life. They move from project to project, which usually entails moving from country to country, depending on where their home organization acquired a new project. The shared knowledge of the expatriate life proved to be a connecting factor for employees in GUPC’s project organization; they invited each other for dinner parties and together they explored their new base, the country of Panama. Also, the
partners and families of project participants frequently exchanged experiences and built friendships. The expat community was small: people often knew each other from previous projects and understood what it was like to leave their roots, family and friends behind. As such, they were building a new social life with each other. Hence, the shared passion for profession reached further than the common educational background or mutual language, it was also related to the project participants’ life styles.

**Following the Mantra ‘the work needs to be done’**

Originating from Hinduism and Buddhism, a mantra expresses an invocation or mystical formula, but a mantra also signifies a repeated word or phrase, such as a motto or a slogan (Merriam Webster Dictionary). The mantra ‘the work needs to be done’ was often heard within GUPC. Representing their work attitude and mindset, this mantra expressed a basic drive to finalize the project. It indicated the actors’ pragmatic approach and displayed an attitude of putting one’s shoulders to the wheel. In some occasions, the mantra was applied to cover up the cultural differences in the project organization. Celso, a Technical Engineer Impregilo, for example, believed:

> Of course the Spanish are different from the Italians and the Belgians, but what I think makes everything come together is the, what we do, is a common goal. We are really concentrated on this; we have to finalize this project. (Interview, May 2010)

In contrary to defining or enlarging the cultural differences, as described in the preceding chapter, Celso preferred a focus on the shared interest between project participants. In the execution of the project, this mantra was echoed in numerous interviews and strongly enacted in the work attitude of project participants. Pablo, the Pacific Engineer Impregilo, declared:

> I speak very clear with all my guys and just say we are here to work together. We are trying to work in the same direction because the work needs to be done. (Interview, March 2010)
In his role as a manager of the Technical Department, Pablo articulated that collaboration is important in the execution of the project. Moreover, he applied the mantra to clarify the common goal among the project participants and pleaded to seize the work with both hands. The mantra was central to the project participants’ work routine and reflected in their everyday practices; GUPC employees had a six-day workweek and worked ten hours a day. Many respondents emphasized that their work also was their hobby, and it had to be, as not much leisure time was left for other activities (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Consequently, an emotional connection to the idea that ‘the work needs to be done’ evolved, resulting in tense discussions, powerful debates and, in some instances, even a rough scuffle between project participants broke out. The Pacific Project Manager saw benefits in conflicts at the work floor. He stated:

I like it when people are fighting. That means things are happening, that they feel attached to the project, and that is very important. If they put their pen on the table at six o’clock everyday than this is not going to work. They have to be in it 24/7. (Interview, February 2010)

Relating conflicts at the work floor to the emotional involvement of project participants, the Pacific Project Manager suggested that a struggle amongst project participants signified their connection to the project. He furthermore explained that this dedication is needed for collaborating and finalizing the project.

Completing this paragraph on shared interests, it is interesting to note that the mantra is a reflection of the overall aspirations for the project organization. As was contractually agreed for the collaborative effort of GUPC, the project partners desired constructing the Third Set of Locks project together. Although less visible at the organizational level of the project organization, where project partners found themselves in continuous conflicts, the mantra reoccurred at the micro level of the organization. A critical note here is needed, since the meaning behind the mantra as it was envisioned at the principle level, might differ from how project participants at the lower level gave meaning to the notion. With regard to the acrimonious situation within the GUPC project organization, the motivation for ‘the work needs to be done’-
mantra might signify ‘let’s get it over with’, symbolizing the completion of something unpleasant or difficult. Following this line of thought, the GUPC employees often embraced a rationale of the project as ‘merely’ a temporary engagement. Time and again, in a variety of wordings, they reiterated that the project was “just another project”, not any different from any other projects they previously participated in. Consequently, they needed to approach the project as any other project in their careers; that is, by rolling up their sleeves and finalizing the project together, so they could move to the next one.

**Bridging Actors**

Several months into the execution of the project, bridging actors emerged in the process of collaboration. These actors, who were not related to any of the partnering organizations and had no preceding connection to the organizations, evolved as middlemen. Hired for their skills and experiences in, particularly American mega projects, these employees appeared to be a viable source for bridging the gap between project participants. The word ‘middleman’ is first used in 1677 and refers to ‘an intermediary or agent between two parties’ (Merriam Webster Dictionary). This is not a term used in the organization, but one that I connected to the role these persons had in the collaborative process among GUPC project participants.

Although mostly used in economic studies, the concept of middleman is also translated to several organization studies. Van Marrewijk (2001), for example, illustrates that middlemen are deployed to overcome cross-cultural differences between Dutch and Indonesian employees in the telecom sector. Middlemen in Van Marrewijk’s work, however, are explicitly hired for their role as an intermediary or for their network in the country that was new for expatriates, while middlemen within GUPC were not intentionally hired for such a position; they were hired for their knowledge and experience and, in the process of collaboration, developed the middleman-role.

Middlemen played a vital role in GUPC’s project organization. In a number of ways, middlemen were advantageous for the collaborative process in the project organization. First, the middlemen acted as translators of language and interpreters...
of the contract. Second, the middlemen transferred their knowledge and experience to employees in the project organization. Third, due to their impartial position, middlemen were not easily distracted by organizational politics. Hence, middlemen focused on reaching the project’s targets, were capable of acting in both directions, and provided unbiased information and advice for the execution of the project. Within GUPC, I detected three middlemen. Their roles are established in the (self-) appointed characters of a saint, a fire fighter and a mediator. These characters embody the roles of bridging actors, which are discussed in this paragraph.

**Saint Judas Thaddeus**

The first middleman to discuss is Lee. Lee was born in the United States and, before moving to Panama several years ago he worked for over twenty years in numerous construction projects. In February 2010 he joined GUPC to support the organization with the submittal process. This is an administrative process, providing a critical check-and-balance during the execution phase. Data, drawings and project documents about the quantity and quality of materials and products needed for the construction process were gathered so that the ACP could review its details. This quality control mechanism is used to ensure that the project outcome conforms to the initial design and construction plans, and meets ACP’s expectations. Difficulties in this process are found in the level of detail and completeness of the information, which makes it a daunting and time consuming task. Lee was hired because he had experience with the American project management standards that ACP applied in the contract for the Third Set of Locks project. He explained:

> Having worked with the U.S. government for 25 years, I know what these guys [ACP] are looking for. I know what their hot buttons are and what their frustrations are. […] I know them better than they know themselves. And so a lot of the times I have to say [to GUPC], “Pull back of out it. Don’t do what you are planning on doing” and other times I say, “Yeah, go, go, go”. (Interview, April 2010)
Lee confidently described that he supported GUPC with his knowledge and experiences with the submittal process. However, his role in the project organization became much broader. Besides guiding GUPC through the administrative process, he became occupied with a wide variety of other tasks resulting in the lack of a job-title. Lee revealed:

> Sometimes they call me the change manager, but it’s funny because they’ve tried to give me titles and none of it sticks because I do everything. I mean... every path in this company crosses my desk, both vertically and horizontally. Do you know who Saint Jude Thaddeus is?

Karen: No.

> He is the saint of the last resort and they call him San Judas Tadeo in Panama... I’m here to help them. (Interview, April 2010)

Lee used the character of Saint Jude Thaddeus to make sense of his role in the project organization. Often referred to as Saint Jude, this saint was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. In the Roman Catholic Church, Saint Jude Thaddeus is known as the patron saint to petition for hopeless causes\(^3\). Catholics seek for the saint’s powerful intercession and call upon him for hope and confidence. Desperate situations such as family affairs, business failures and personal difficulties are stories to share with Saint Jude. Thaddeus, or Tadeo in Spanish, signifies to a generous and fearless man; in ancient times the name corresponded to the way of being a person\(^4\). The saint is a popular image in Panama; in the capital city of this Roman Catholic country a hospital is named San Jude Tadeo.

Due to his presence, stated Lee, processes ran smoother and collaboration between the project participants strengthened (Interview, April 2010). In this vein, Lee organized workshops about the submittal process for the GUPC employees. He verified:

\(^3\) See: http://www.judes.org/pages/history.html
\(^4\) See: http://parroquiasanjudastadeo.com/quiensanju.html
Our submittal program has gone from what was just an absolute disaster to something that is pretty good now, and it's getting better every week, every month. I've held some workshops internally. We got all department heads and said: “Here's the problems we're having. We need to take a look at this because this is what is creating problems in each of our submittals.” And then further down the organization, with the submittal writers, which basically are the technical guys out in the field: “Okay, here is what you need to work on.” (Interview, April 2010)

Lee demonstrated that the workshop, held at various organizational levels, enhanced the work practices within GUPC. Furthermore, the workshops bridged the gap between project participants allowing them to discuss their struggles and feelings towards the tedious administrative process, and working towards a solution together. Improving the daily work practices, as such, Lee showed that he is a ‘helper’ in the organization. Another character for the role of middleman is that of a fire fighter, the next one to discuss.

**Fire Fighter**

Similar to Lee, Robin had many years of experience in the American principles for project management before he started working in Panamanian construction projects. And, he had no affiliation with any of the partners in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. Both Robin and Lee were hired for their knowledge and experience with the common practices of project management in the United States (Fieldnotes, March 2010). Robin noted:

In the States everybody is quite used to these requirements, and here [in Panama] the contract is geared towards the American system. So that has caused struggles and that is one reason why I was asked to come in. (Interview, June 2010)

Robin justified his presence in the project organization with his expertise on American project management, standards that the GUPC employees did not master. His initial task was to produce a formal document displaying the major milestones, activities...
and resources required for the project. Such a plan is used to guide the execution and control of the project as it portrays the planning assumptions, it facilitates communication among stakeholders and it states baselines for the scope, costs and schedule of the project. Furthermore, Robin was employed because he is a native English speaker, which is the project’s official language (Interview Sergio, March 2010). However, apart from the specific task he was hired for, Robin was deployed to bring structure to the project organization’s work processes (Fieldnotes, June 2010). He underscored his role within GUPC:

It’s claims or writing letters, or solving problems. So that is my role. I guess in brackets you could put bombero (fire fighter) because I tend to have other responsibilities, other than what I’m hired for. […] Besides that, I solve any other problems that the Program Leader asks me to solve. I chair the weekly staff meeting and when I have the opportunity I attend the weekly site meetings at the Atlantic and Pacific. […] I use my skills and knowledge to better the processes. (Interview, June 2010)

Emphasizing his role within the project organization, Robin referred to a fire fighter and illustrated problems as fires needing to be extinguished. In weekly staff meetings at the headquarters, for example, Robin took over lead from the Program Leader. Many project participants, both from the ACP and GUPC, experienced the Program Leader’s role as a chairman for meetings as problematic: a fire that Robin fought by taking over this role. In many other occasions, Lee did the same for the Project Manager at the Pacific project site (Fieldnotes, June 2010). Their problem solving-role was highly appreciated in the project organization. Ben, an Impregilo engineer, emphasized the need for middlemen within GUPC. He suggested that:

We have too many different mindsets inside the project organization. Now, with Robin and his experience, he will put it together. (Interview, June 2010)

Ben highlighted that Robin’s assistance consolidated the differing cultural profiles and interests that project partners have brought to the organization. Accordingly, the
presence of middlemen is of vital importance in the process of collaboration between project partners. Particularly after the complicated start-up that GUPC partners experienced in the transition from tender phase to execution phase, middlemen positively contributed to the project organization by bridging knowledge, experience and cultural gaps. In other situations, a middleman acted in a more negotiator role, illustrated in the character of mediator.

**Mediator**

Bart, affiliated with Jan de Nul, often fulfilled the role of a middleman in the GUPC project organization. Although, for his affiliation with one of the project partners, he was not an impartial actor, he was perceived, and presented himself, as a negotiator, an arbitrator sometimes, but mostly, as a mediator. In many occasions Bart intervened conciliatorily between project participants. He aptly exemplified:

> This morning after a meeting in which two people clearly had issues with each other, I asked one of them to come and see me. I said: “Please act wise, you have much more experience, and you’re knowledgeable. He (the other person) has good sides. Try to act normal: give and take”. So, my goal is to enhance the internal relations. (Interview, June 2010)

Later that day, in an attempt to settle the issue, Bart organized a meeting with the two persons. He clarified:

> These two just can’t stand each other. But to avoid further divide and rule I had to talk into them. Afterwards, I gave Celso advice on how he can bring his girlfriend to Panama. It’s a strategy, you know, I’m like the ‘masseur’ in this organization. (Interview, June 2010).

In this example Bart required Celso to adapt and, motivating him to do so, he strategically gave Celso advice on another topic. Presenting himself as a middleman, characterized in the role of a masseur, Bart molded relationships between his colleagues. He was dedicated to negotiate towards agreements or compelled to
make a decision, because he was aware that conflicts cost time and hinder the collaboration (Informal conversation, June 2010). As such, for many actors, Bart bridged the gap between them.

At the Pacific project site, the Foreman also developed into a bridging actor. For the past ten years, Santos had worked in many local construction projects as a Lead Foreman. He is a Panamanian employee who, without connections to any of the project partners, was hired as a foreman for the Pacific project site. Mainly operators at this site recognized Santos as the person to go to when problems occurred (Fieldnotes, May 2010). According to Santos, the job site needs to be a peaceful place so that everyone can collaborate (Interview Santos, May 2010). He underscored the importance of a middleman and described how he enacted this role in the field:

The guys were used to working with a Belgian superintendent, but his Spanish is not very good. He spoke English and Rodolfo translated, but sometimes he did not use the same words as the Belgian did, so that became a problem. When I came here, Rodolfo complemented me, because he saw that I have better communication skills.

Karen: Many of the problems and trouble dissolved when you came on board?

Yes, I have been a good solution for the company. And also for the guys, because right [now] things are running, not as smooth as they should be, but it is running better than before. So I think I have been a good solution for them. (Interview, May 2010)

Equally to Bart, Santos shaped the relationship between the project participants. Supporting others to settle conflicts and ensuring that the interaction among operators remained comprehensible, he contributed to a collaborative work environment.

Following three characters from the field, these paragraphs have shown the various roles that the bridging actors enacted in the daily project setting. A helper, a teacher and a leader were embodied in the character of Saint Judas Thaddeus, while the firefighter represented a problem solver, consolidator and someone who
structured work processes. Moreover, the character of a mediator symbolized the roles of a negotiator, a translator and a connector of organizational members. Altogether, these roles informally emerged in the project organization. They were not formally assigned to the actors, but rather evolved in the process of collaboration among project participants.

What is more, as they possess a certain set of traits, these roles appealed to the middlemen. An outspoken personality, experience in (American) project management, convincing and emphatic capacities and the goodwill to collaborate were valued qualities of the middlemen. Mainly because these bridging actors were less embedded in the project organization, they were able to act more freely and more flexibly. Furthermore, it often takes a fresh pair of eyes to put things into proper perspective. By means of transferring knowledge and experiences and by molding internal relationships, middlemen supported project participants in their everyday practices. Trying to enhance and share practices, and resolving issues among project participants, the bridging actors were manifestations of collaboration in the GUPC project organization. Table 6.1 gives an overview of the characters, their roles and goal in the project organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Goal</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saint Judas Thaddeus</td>
<td>Helper, Teacher, Leader</td>
<td>Transferring knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire fighter</td>
<td>Problem solver, Consolidator, Structure work process</td>
<td>Sharing experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Negotiator, Translator, Connecting project members</td>
<td>Enhancing relationships</td>
</tr>
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**Table 6.1 Bridging actors**

Cross-cultural code-switching

The previous paragraph highlighted the role and importance of middlemen in a project organization. Bridging actors played a vital role within GUPC, even when these roles where not previously or intentionally appointed. In this paragraph I will
focus on adaptation occurring in the single interactions between actors. Adaptation entails the practice of shaping or adjusting behavior and routines to the new work conditions. This is what Molinsky introduced as ‘cross-cultural code-switching’, which he defined as: “the act of purposefully modifying one’s behavior and interaction in a foreign setting in order to accommodate different cultural norms for appropriate behavior” (Molinsky, 2007:624). Intentionally, actors adapt their behavior with the purpose of gaining a better social impression. Cross-cultural code-switching supports actors avoiding the negative consequences of norm violations and generating positive outcomes such as fitting in, being well-liked, and winning respect, trust, and friendships from colleagues, clients, and subordinates (Molinsky, 2007). While making sense of their work environment, actors learn the rules for appropriate behavior in their new setting. Shaping their behavior and adjusting their routine practices stimulates a positive spiral within the process of collaboration among project participants. In GUPC’s project organization, I detected linguistic and behavioral code-switching.

**Linguistic code-switching**

Linguistic code-switching, according to Molinsky (2007), entails bilingual speakers altering between languages when interacting with other bilinguals. In this study, however, I interpret linguistic code-switching as the adaptation to language among all actors. That is to say, I do not focus on the interaction between bilinguals; I focus on the interactions between individuals who are, not necessarily, or, in fact, most likely, not bilingual. Hence, in this study, linguistic code-switching entails the practice of, intentionally, adjusting language skills.

Within the GUPC project organization, a wide variety of languages came together. Among other languages, native speakers in Spanish, English and Italian prevailed. Yet, as the contract for the Third Set of Locks project was written in English, the ACP had decided that this was the official project language. At the beginning of the execution phase, when project participants arrived to Panama, the language differences caused enormous difficulties in the process of collaboration (Fieldnotes, November 2009). Overall, Impregilo employees have sufficient knowledge of English and they understand Spanish, and most CUSA employees comprehend English,
while their native language is Spanish. However, as it appeared that Sacyr project
participants barely spoke English, and Jan de Nul employees were not familiar with
the Spanish language, daily struggles were related to language issues. At the start
of the execution phase the project partners had decided that Sacyr would control
the Atlantic project site. As a result, the project site was mostly occupied with Sacyr
employees, who often were not skilled in English. One can imagine this caused
conflict in the everyday collaboration with other project participants. Over time,
however, project participants adapted words and phrases from the foreign language
and adjusted to each other. Ruben, a native Dutch speaker, explained:

> Back then I did not speak Spanish, and I still don’t, but I understand much more.
> His (points at a Sacyr employee) English was of such a low level that we could
> hardly communicate, and this was very difficult in the first two months. Now, his
> English has improved, so he can express himself a little better. When he cannot
> say it in English, he can say it in Spanish and generally I understand that. So we
> have no language issue anymore, but it was there in the beginning. (Interview,
> May 2010)

Ruben verified that at the start of the execution phase language differences created
complications in the collaboration between him and his native Spanish-speaking
supervisor. Yet, he highlighted that they adjusted to each other’s language, and the
communication between the project participants advanced.

Ruben’s colleague Chris confirmed that language differences created
complications, but he emphasized that serious attempts to enhance the language
skills proved to be fruitful. He underscored:

> In the beginning Gustavo did not speak any English, and my Spanish sucks, but
> we both try and have built a good relationship. I like him; he’s an easygoing guy.
> (Informal conversation, May 2010)

In the daily practices, both Chris and Gustavo adapted their languages skills by
putting energy into learning a new language: Gustavo improved his English and Chris
slowly understood more of the Spanish. Subsequently, Gustavo affirmed: “knowing that both try to understand each other helped in the relationship” (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Furthermore, some Spanish-speaking project participants started to take English lessons and GUPC offered a Spanish language course. Listening to a tape in their car, while driving to work, various employees acquired new Spanish words and phrases (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Hence, project participants made an effort adapting to the foreign language and appreciated it when the other party equally tried to adapt. Over time, language became less of an issue in the process of collaboration.

When project participants did not sufficiently speak the required language, English, a translator was hired. Mostly occupied at the Atlantic project site, the translator supported native-Spanish speakers understanding the project documents and communicating in meetings. Ruben clarified:

Language really is a problem for some Sacyr employees because every document they see needs to be translated. One person, hired by Grupo, only fulfills tasks for those few that do not speak English. He translates in both directions. So when something from the client arrives it needs to be translated to Spanish and when they have to send a reply that needs to be translated to English. (Interview, May 2010)

The interpreter worked side-by-side with some Sacyr employees, supporting them with the use of English in their daily work. In meetings with ACP, I observed that a translator was seated next to a Sacyr employee, translating what was being said in the project meeting (Fieldnotes, May 2010). In addition, project participants requested language support from their colleagues. Ensuring they fully understood a document, or could communicate in jargon with their co-workers, a colleague was often asked for help. Tom, an Atlantic Engineer, described:

At our department we are doing pretty well. The only issue that I have with language is with the draughts men. I have to ask my colleague to help me explaining to them what I need. The technical draughts men speak very little English and I cannot explain what I need in Spanish, so with sign language, and with the help of my colleague, we manage. (Interview, May 2010)
Tom pointed out that he had approached a colleague for the communication with the Spanish-speaking draughts men, because the technical terminology in Spanish was beyond his language level. Thus, besides learning the new language or hiring a translator, also by means of finding support from other colleagues the GUPC project participants succeeded in bridging the language gap in their everyday work environment. Enacting linguistic code-switching, actors aimed at enhancing interaction and collaboration with their colleagues, superiors or subordinates. Consequently, the language barrier on the work floor dissolved and language differences became less of an obstacle in the collaborative relationship among project participants.

**Behavioral code-switching**

In line with linguistic code-switching, behavioral code-switching entails the actors’ behavioral adaptation, which includes shaping the work attitude and modifying or initiating work practices. Within GUPC, actors each brought their idiosyncratic ways of operation to the project organization that, as a result of their distinguished natures, could hinder the process of collaboration. Reflecting-in-action (see Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009), project participants became aware of their culturally ingrained behavior and were guided to adapt their behavior to the current project setting.

The Atlantic Field Manager Jan de Nul, for example, experienced that his work attitude was uncommon for the local employees he supervised. His home organization expected employees to fill in a database with detailed information on how the work was executed, but his subordinates were deterred; they had never analyzed their work in such a precise manner (Interview, May 2010). Frank, the Atlantic Field Manager, reflected:

> When we realized they did not want to change, we said: ‘okay’. Then we took a step back. (Interview, May 2010)

Experiencing that his way of working clashed with the common practices of local employees about how to provide data, made Frank realize the necessity of adapting his work attitude. “I deliberately place myself at the background,” admitted Frank (Interview, May 2010). This way, Frank tried to give space to others and avoided being
the ruling person in the group. When I asked him whether he had to restrain himself, Frank confirmed and added: “But I am a guest in their country.” (Interview, May 2010). By reflecting on the situation, becoming aware of his position and concluding that taking a step aside supported the daily practices, Frank switched from his embedded work attitude to an attitude more suitable for the new circumstances. Doing so, he adapted to his subordinates and aimed at stimulating the process of collaboration.

Along with the prolongation of the execution phase, project participants adapted to the complexity of the everyday situation. They recognized that adverse attitudes towards each other were not furthering collaboration and, as a result, had a negative outcome on the work processes. Humberto, an Environmental Engineer, illustrated such a case in point:

When we asked him [Arturo] to do something, he said: “No, I don’t have time for that” With an attitude of ‘I am too important, my work is important and you are not important enough!’ Nowadays if you ask Arturo for help he says: “Okay, I need a couple of that and you do this.” He has changed his attitude. […] That makes things a lot easier... (Interview, May 2010)

Humberto explained that his supervisor, who first portrayed a non-collaborative attitude, changed in a positive sense, enhancing the collaboration between them.

Frank and Arthur’s stories are examples of the many other situations in which project participants deviated their accustomed attitude to engage with the new work environment and its newly required attitude. Especially after experiencing several conflict situations, as mentioned in earlier chapters, project participants echoed that collaboration within GUPC is a manner of ‘give and take’ (Fieldnotes, June 2010). This practice of compromise involved shaping the work attitude, and, additionally, required the acceptance of the other parties’ embedded behavior. Hence, project participants adapted their work attitude with the purpose of improving the collaborative relationship among them.

Besides altering their work attitude to the contemporary project organization, actors modified and initiated work practices. A prime example of this behavioral
code-switching was seen at the Atlantic Project site, where it appeared that a work practice very important to Jan de Nul received much less attention within CUSA's daily operations: operators' efficiency. Monitoring the machine operators' results was common practice for Jan de Nul employees, while measuring the efficiency was not a prior concern for employees from CUSA. According to Jan de Nul's supervisor, the outcome and value of a machine can improve when the operator is aware of 'winning seconds', a proficient operation of the machine (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Frank explained:

A little more like this, twist and turn a little less: we always keep harping on it (Interview, May 2010).

Aiming at an increase of the operators’ efficiency, and thus, at altering their work practice, the dredging company from Belgium organized an event for all operators in the project field. Frank illustrated:

At one morning, we invited the operators to come to the office of the project, and we explained how they could adjust their operations. These men were super impressed that they could come to the boss's office and that we explained them how things can improve. This was a big change for them. And what’s most important, they themselves experienced how they could improve. They are not waiting anymore for someone to say: “Hey, you need to change this.” No, now they see it for themselves! (Interview, May 2010)

Frank described that Jan de Nul employees taught the machine operators how their work practices could be done more efficiently. However, the effect of the organized event was larger than expected. Complementary to the modified work practices, the operators developed a more pro-active work attitude and a hands-on mentality in the field. In many other occasions I observed that, by learning from each other, work practices were modified. CUSA's field managers, for example, were accustomed to managing the work in the field from the office, from behind their desks. In collaboration with field managers from other project partners, such as Impregilo,
they saw the value of managing the operations by being present in the field. Led by the example, CUSA’s field managers altered their work practices and started to spend more time among their employees in the field (Fieldnotes, May 2010).

About 80 kilometers away, in the GUPC head quarters in Corozal Oeste, project participants were also modifying their daily work practices. For instance, Bart’s aim of intensifying the collaborative relationship resulted in a need for more structure at the managerial level of the project organization. This organizational level contained the managers of each department within GUPC, such as the Environmental Department, the Health & Safety Department and the Contracts Department. He illustrated:

Today, -even without the Program Leader’s presence- I managed to get approval for a weekly staff meeting: every Tuesday at 7am. And every month we’ll have an Executive meeting. Otherwise you can’t work! Our last meeting was on November 30th: we need more structure! (Fieldnotes, January 2010)

Bart, a middleman, proudly explained how he succeeded in creating structure among the middle managers by defining a fixed moment in time for their meetings. Emphasizing the Program Leader’s absence signaled, according to Bart, that an official authority was not required to establish a meeting structure. In the following months a staff meeting was held every week, but it rarely took place on the planned Tuesday morning (Fieldnotes, June 2010). Yet, the meeting itself is an example of behavioral code-switching. It required actors, residing from different project partners, sharing a room together, sitting around the conference table and discussing their work together, with the purpose of enhancing interaction and collaboration amongst them, and, the progress of the Third Set of Locks project.

By the same token, work practices were modified at the Pacific project site. Aimed at improving collaboration, and making the work more efficient, the practice of emailing was scrutinized. Lee, who is earlier in this chapter introduced as a middleman, supported the Pacific Project Manager when he found out the person started his workdays at 4 a.m. in the morning to go through all two hundred emails he daily received. Lee clarified:
I had to go into it and say, “Look, here’s how you do an email. Here’s where you put the ‘who to’, here’s where you put the ‘cc to’, here’s who you don’t include on the list because they don’t need to know, and if you reply you do not cc everybody.” Just the basic things, because email traffic got out of hand and everybody was trying to justify their existence internally with email, resulting in that the Pacific Project Manager is reading emails that he should not be receiving. (Interview, April 2010)

Lee protected the Pacific Project Manager from receiving too many emails and interfered in the practice of emailing. Aiming at improving the collaboration at the project site, he requested project participants to modify their email habits to a more workable practice for the organization.

Over the course of the collaborative process, project participants developed an understanding of each other and of the project organization, resulting in new ways of working. Aspiring a collaborative work environment, and striving for project progress, project participant initiated new work practices at various level of the GUPC project organization. The introduction of meeting minutes is a case in point.

When Lee and Bart discovered that most meetings were held without noting what was being said or decided, they learned that project participants had set aside this practice. Based on their previous experiences, the middlemen recognized the need for such documentation and started logging the project meetings. Lee revealed:

There’s just nobody in the organization that has the wherewithal or skills or the language to do a proper set of minutes. […] So I took it on and basically grabbed it and said, “No, you stay out, you stay out, and so here’s what it’s going to be”. (Interview, March 2009)

Lee noticed that project participants had no experience with making meeting minutes and decided, recognizing the need, to conduct the task himself. Similarly, Bart implemented the practice of making meeting minutes on a higher level in the organization. Nourished by the power struggles and conflicts of interest between the GUPC project partners, Bart felt the urge to document what was discussed and
decided in their meetings, so that, in the future, one can refer to the agreements or debates that were held. He highlighted:

I started to make minutes. Other companies are not used to having those, but we sometimes leave meetings here without knowing what has been decided. I want to prevent that. (Interview, June 2010)

Bart aimed at using the minutes as a conformation of the meeting and perceived them as a clarifying tool in future debates. Initiating this work practice, Lee and Bart intended to create transparency and precision, which could add value to the process of collaboration.

The implementation of an information-sharing tool was another initiated work practice in the project organization. Pablo, a Pacific Engineer Impregilo, invented a technical library. He explained:

I think we have GUPC practices now. For example, I am creating a library with all the technical text and software that we have available. I prepare the library and we can all use it together. I’m creating something that is not mine and is not from Impregilo. It is something that is developed for everyone on our site. (Interview, March 2010)

Pablo developed and introduced the technical library with the intention of sharing technical information and software among project participants. He stated this tool is a ‘GUPC practice’ as he specifically designed it for the project organization. Later in the interview, Pablo regretted that the tool could not be made available for employees at the Atlantic project site, because a digital connection between the projects sites was missing (Interview, March 2009). The lack of such a connection hindered collaboration between the project sites, while the information-sharing tool attempted to bring project participants, and their knowledge, closer together.

In this section I have illustrated how project participants purposefully adapted to the language and behavior of their colleagues to accommodate the variety of cultural norms and practices amongst them. Reflected in the adaptation to Spanish
Chapter 6

or English, and the modification and introduction of work practices, cross-cultural code-switching portrayed how project participants mastered the project rules and became able of using them. As such, they learned from the idiosyncratic common practices and contributed to the process of collaboration. In the following paragraph I will illustrate several social activities that project participants organized with the purpose of advancing their collaborative relationship.

Organizing Social Activities

The practices described in the preceding paragraphs mainly take place on a professional and formal level, while also on a more informal level project participants enacted, shaped or initiated practices manifesting collaboration. GUPC’s Works Management Team had not initiated practices supporting collaboration on the work floor. Consequently, to fulfill the need to get to know each other, to assimilate to the various cultural backgrounds in the project, and to share leisure time together, actors organized a variety of social activities. Luis, a Pacific Manager Sacyr, verified:

Well, for sure no intentional event, like a team-building thing, has been planned. I miss that a lot. For instance in September, when ten of us began on site, nothing was there. But we met twice for ten minutes. It was short, but very important. [...] We put the tables together and did an introduction round: “who are you, where are from, what have you done before?” that sort of questions. [...] The thing is that we are all here to build this project, so we have to work as a team. (Interview, May 2010)

Luis underlined that project participants initiated an introduction meeting to get acquainted with each other and he emphasized the need for social activities: to create a team.

Later in the year, when more project participants had moved to Panama, and the project organization became divided in departments, the employees of the Engineering Department organized an event called Secret Santa. Similar to other departments, the Engineering Department consisted of a mix of both local employees
Collaboration within GUPC: Amplifying Practices

and employees that were directly related to one of the four GUPC partners. Secret Santa was a well-known event for some, while others were introduced to the game for the first time (Fieldnotes, December 2009). In this event, as Christmas approached, names of the department's employees were placed in a hat and each participant drew the name of a person for whom to buy a gift. In the weeks before the final gift exchange event, participants, in the role of Secret Santa, left hints, in cards or little gifts, on the desk of their colleague to raise curiosity. At the end of the game, in a social gathering with drinks and snacks, presents were exchanged and Secret Santa's mystery was revealed. This event created an informal atmosphere in the Engineering Department; employees got to know each other better, felt comfortable sharing jokes and some found a trustworthy person helping them cover up their Santa role (Fieldnotes, December 2009). After this event, project participants initiated other social activities for the department, such as a dinner and drinks, and, every month, birthdays were celebrated. Common practice in Panamanian office is putting up a calendar on a wall displaying the project participants’ birthday, and per month an event is organized celebrating the birthdays of that month. Events like Secret Santa and the birthday celebrations intentionally stimulated actors sharing an informal occasion together.

Likewise, aspiring a collaborative relationship, social activities emerged in the project organization. One afternoon, when I had scheduled a meeting with Yazmin, the Atlantic Document Control specialist, I could not find her at the project site so left a note on her desk. Two hours later she called me to apologize and we agreed on a location for the interview. She told me she went out for pizza with her colleagues. Emphasizing the need for such informal initiatives, she stated that lunch breaks were a valuable way for learning more about her colleagues (Informal conversation, May 2010). Her coworker Juan, an Atlantic engineer for Sacyr, told me about another informally initiated social activity: football night. Every week, a group of project participants gathered to play football. He clarified:

Normally it’s Panama versus el resto del mundo (the rest of the world), but today we play Atlantic versus Pacific. (Informal conversation, May 2010)
Juan explained that, generally, the football teams were formed based on the national culture label, but for this game, teams were shuffled and based on the project site. Juan was overly excited for this particular event because the Atlantic Project Manager had agreed to participate (Fieldnotes, May 2010). The relationship between Juan and the Atlantic Project Manager is strictly hierarchical. Consequently, besides getting to know each other in a different context and sharing leisure time together, organizational roles might dissolve in such social activity.

A frequently seen activity aimed at strengthening social interaction and improving the collaborative relationship, is going for a drink together. Frank aptly touched upon this:

I ask questions like ‘why is it this way?’ and ‘we need to do this and that?’ They perceive that as an attack, while I just think that these are just things that come to mind that we still need to do. They feel it as an attack though. And when you do that too often, they completely block. Then you need to start over again: let’s go for a beer! (Interview, May 2010)

Frank revealed that, when he realized that the collaboration became tense, he invited his colleague for a drink. He believed that sharing a drink together and spending time outside the work environment stimulated the collaborative relationship. Being in a more informal environment can support actors to feel more comfortable and to feel more open to put their feelings or ideas on the table. Equally important as celebrating Christmas, going out for pizza and playing football, is going out for a drink expected to loosen work pressure, disperse work-related tensions and improve collegiality. Furthermore, such social activities give project participants topics to talk about during a workday as well.

All social activities illustrated in these paragraphs share the characteristic of being initiated from the micro level of the organization. Project participants felt a shortage of social interaction and wanted to become more acquainted with each other. There seemed to be a natural drive to collaborate and a genuine goodwill to create a collaborative relationship amongst them. Organizing the social activities stimulated actors to share more than work together, to find friendships and to give
attention to each other. Although social activities might blur the boundary between the project participants’ work and private lives, the examples portrayed that this did no disturb them. During the social activities, actors searched for a stronger bond, for comradeship, and, complementary, they invested in social relationships for strategic purposes, as to enhance the process of collaboration on the work floor.

Discussion: Amplifiers of Collaboration

In this chapter I highlighted how the GUPC project participants tried to create a collaborative relationship amongst them. I portrayed how actors searched for common ground, bridged the gap between them and adapted to cultural values and practices. Aiming at the progress of the Third Set of Locks project, and understanding the need to combine knowledge, to interact about ideas and to share skills, project participants developed practices that generated collaboration. Their mutual passion and shared goal supported them in this journey. Along the process of collaboration, bridging actors emerged to better the work processes and molded relationship in the project organization. Moreover, aspiring improvement in the collaborative process, project participants enacted cross-cultural code-switching. Over time, language barriers were reduced, established work attitudes and routine practices improved and, in the flow of learning, new practices evolved. Finally, I gave various examples of social activities that were organized with the purpose of expanding collaboration between project participants. Connected by their aim to enhance collaboration within the GUPC project organization, these practices guided project participants to integrate, intermingle and involve with each other in their everyday work environment. Therefore, I termed these practices as amplifiers of collaboration.

The practices highlight that, although the situation in the project might be tense and acrimonious, an underlying need to collaborate connected the project participants. Besides a strategic need to collaborate, mostly influenced by the construction sector's conditions requiring inter-organizational collaboration, actors were generally willing to work together. Moreover, a feeling of togetherness strengthened the nature of a collaborative relationship amongst them. Their shared contexts and common representations supported project participants in facilitating
the solutions for problems and share knowledge (Dietrich et al., 2010). In the same way, grounded by traditions and interpretations from the past, project participants constructed contemporary practices of collaboration (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010). Furthermore, a great deal of effort had to be invested into understanding the world as seen by the other participants (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Informed by their adaptability and ability to compromise, project participants were encouraged to interact and collaborate, and, consequently, a collaborative spirit evolved in the project organization. Project participants aimed for collaborative advantage; that is, to achieve outcomes that could not be reached by any of the organizations acting alone (Huxham, 1996).
Chapter 7

Chaperoning: collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill
Introduction

The two preceding empirical chapters described how collaboration was manifested in the GUPC project organization. Elaborating on how project participants made sense of the cultural complexity in their everyday work life and illustrating the practices of collaboration manifested within their collaborative relationship, I detected diminishers and amplifiers of collaboration. In this chapter, I will focus on the internal dynamics between the ACP and CH2M Hill and how these affected collaboration between the project participants. Particularly, I will describe chaperoning, a practice focused on guiding, teaching, and supervising novices in the world of project management. Illustrating how project participants dealt with the contractually agreed relationship between them, I focus on how chaperoning came about in the project participants’ everyday work life. This unique practice in project management indicates that innovation in the contract for program management services requires an innovative relationship between project partners.

The chapter is organized as follows. After introducing how ACP and CH2M Hill came together, I will, in the second paragraph, introduce chaperoning practices. In the third paragraph, I will describe how actors experienced chaperoning in their everyday organizational life. Two personal stories of project participants and an ethnographic account of a meeting between the project partners will illustrate how this project management practice was present in the project organization. The final paragraph highlights that, when joining a project organization, the participants’ differing expectations and practices come to the fore at conflict situations. As such, I will display benefits and drawback of chaperoning. Overall, this chapter portrays that, while chaperoning was described in the contract, the practices related to such notion were unknown and new to project participants. A great part of this chapter has been published as an academic journal article (see Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012).

How they met...

Although small projects around the Panama Canal have been developed over the course of the past ten years, a project in the size and scope of the Expansion Program...
has never before been conducted in Panama. In chapter four, I portrayed that the Expansion Program had an estimated cost of USD$ 5.25 billion and was expected to generate approximately 40,000 new jobs during the construction of the third set of locks (ACP, 2006b). Within the ACP, both the size and the complexity of this mega project brought discussions on how to conduct the program to the table.

Fed by expert support from around the world, ACP’s Board of Directors studies three manners of executing this mega project. Their first option was a form of project management in which the owner of the project hires a program manager to deliver the project. This is a common practice in the construction sector: the project owner appoints a specialized company to fulfill the assignment. In this scenario, the program manager receives accountability and responsibility for the project and the final results of the assignment. As part of this common practice the program manager obtains a budget to work with, which can be used to hire specialized professionals to design, plan and construct parts of the work. A general characteristic of this form of project management is that the program manager carries a great amount of risk, but is rewarded for the end results.

Opposite to the first option, the Board of Directors discussed the idea of the ACP executing the complete program on its own. Several members in the Board of Directors pictured the company well experienced in designing projects and dealing with contractors, and a conviction grew that no external support was needed in the execution of the Expansion Program (ACP Program Director, Interview November 2010). A great sense of pride played part in this opinion as, after one hundred years of American governance, the ACP aspired to show its own capability for such an undertaking. The ACP had managed various projects with contractors according to the commonly known practice in project management. For those projects, the ACP described the assignments in detail and hired contractors to execute the tasks. The company had achieved changing the canal into a profitable business and the Board of Directors was proud of this success. As such, the realization of the Expansion Program was perceived as merely a greater version of the projects conducted before. Consequently, several board members believed that the ACP needed experts to execute this mega project for them, while others fought for ACP’s autonomy.
Finally, a combination between the two opinions satisfied all members of the Board of the Directors. A program manager would be hired, but only for the parts in the program where the ACP felt that support was needed. Different from the common practice in project management, the external party would not be allowed to run the project autonomously. Instead, the ACP envisioned that its employees would execute the project while learning from experts on their side. Key positions in the project organization, where advice and teaching from a consultant was required, were identified. The ACP described in detail what skills and knowledge they needed the program manager to convey. In this unique practice of project management, both the initiator of the project and its contractor would conduct the project. This is unique, according to respondents, as never before a program manager was asked to work in such close collaboration with the owner of the project. In order to select its program manager, the ACP initiated a tender process for the program management services required in the Panama Canal Expansion Program.

**The tender**

In 2007, the ACP published a 220-page document (including appendices) expressing their needs, expectations and tasks in the assignment for the program manager. The document, named ‘The Invitation to Bid for the Program Management Services’ (further abbreviated as Invitation to Bid), described the scope of the program management services, the requirements for the program manager and the terms and conditions under which both parties should operate. In four separate sections the ACP defined its plans, rules and goals for the program management services.

The first part of the document portrayed the price list and clarified the notes applying to the document. Part two explained the specifications, terms and conditions for the program management services. Its first clause stated the general conditions, such as number 1.3:

> In performing the Program Management Services, the PM[^36] will work in close coordination with the ACP’s existing personnel to form a unified team capable of delivering the Program in accordance with ACP’s requirements. (ACP, 2007)

[^36]: The abbreviation PM refers to program manager. In this chapter, I will not use the abbreviation, except when I directly quote authors or respondents who use the abbreviation.
Contradictory to a more common practice of project management, this clause highlighted that the program manager was expected to profoundly collaborate with the ACP members. Typically, the project owner transfers authority and accountability over the project execution to the program manager (CH2M Hill Program Manager, Interview September 2009). Yet, the ACP took an exceptional approach to the client-contractor relationship and underlined their role deviation in further clauses. Various sections in the tender document stated that the program manager “shall assist the ACP in […]” (ACP, 2007), indicating ACP's need for support and guidance rather than the intention to transfer control and responsibility of the project. Indeed, the ACP admitted not possessing the skills that meet the Expansion Program’s requirements and therefore demanded a program manager to provide its services and advice. In the tender document, the ACP noted the following objective for the program manager:

Training both by working with the ACP personnel in performing Program Management Services and also by means of seminars, handbooks and any other material which would provide the ACP’s personnel with the best training possible to acquire the skills necessary for assuming more responsibilities in the supervision of the Works. (ACP, 2007)

This objective highlights ACP's expectation of the program manager to educate and instruct the ACP employees. With regard to topics as confidentiality obligations and insurance requirements, Part three of the document defined the contract clauses. This section stated that English would be the ruling language in all documentation and communication of the Expansion Program. Accordingly, to attract worldwide companies, the Invitation to Bid itself was published in English. In the fourth and last section of the document, the ACP described the instructions to bid, the selection procedure and evaluation criteria for the tender process. Ten appendices supplement the tender document with additional information. Here, information like a chart of the ACP project organization, the Expansion Program’s schedule and a map of the existing canal are enclosed. Overall, the full document served as the assignment for a program manager supporting the ACP with the execution of the Panama Canal Expansion Program.
The ACP received three bid submissions, all from American consultancy firms. As the Invitation to Bid was published in English and program management services are mostly developed in the United States, it was not a surprise that American consultancy firms responded to the bid. Furthermore, the historical context of American involvement in the construction of the Panama Canal might have created extra attention for this mega project in the United States. To receive detailed information of the submissions, the ACP invited each company to give a presentation and elaborate on its price and plan for its program management services. After one month of evaluation and review confirming that the chosen firm would meet the project needs, CH2M Hill was awarded as the program manager. In the international construction sector, this firm is a well-known enterprise with a global presence of over 23,000 employees holding expertise in consulting, design, design-build, operations and program management (CH2M Hill 2011). In August 2007, a group of CH2M Hill employees enthusiastically came on board of the project. “We committed to deploy our core team together in three days,” remembered CH2M Hill’s Program Director indicating the urgency of their presence in the project (Interview May, 2010).

Shaping their relationship
The Invitation to Bid confirmed how collaboration between the ACP and the program manager should come about: the program manager was hired to act in an advisory capacity for the Expansion Program and expected to integrate its program management services with those of ACP’s personnel, forming one functioning team (ACP, 2007). Correspondingly, CH2M Hill was requested to share its knowledge and expertise and, instead of working independently, the program manager was bounded by various clauses. Clause 32 in Part three, for example, portrayed its authority in the project:

The PM shall have limited agency authority to act as ACP’s agent to direct, manage and coordinate the activities of the Construction Contractors, provided that the PM shall not be authorized to take any action or omit to take action to lessen the rights of the ACP under the Construction Contracts. The procedure for the due and proper exercise by the PM of its rights and obligations in such
capacity shall be mutually agreed and set out in the Interface Protocol and the PM shall adhere strictly to such procedure. (ACP, 2007)

Emphasizing the little amount of authority that the ACP had in mind for the program manager, this passage underscores that the program manager was not expected to execute the project but rather needed approval of the ACP before taking action. Specifically, the program manager was allotted the task to educate, advise and guide the ACP employees in the execution of the project. In fact, the ACP had planned an intense collaborative relationship between its own personnel and that of the program manager, as the Invitation to Bid stated:

All the functions [...] will be performed by the ACP and the Program Manager hired under this contract. The duties will be performed by either ACP personnel or the Program Manager staff as assigned or by a joint effort between both parties, working as an integrated team. (ACP, 2007)

This excerpt expresses ACP's intention of having a program manager next to them, literally, teaching the ACP employees what they needed to learn about the managing of a mega project. For the execution of this new form of program management, the ACP provided extended details of the program manager's tasks and responsibilities, as example of the engineer position illustrates (see Figure 7.1). Figure 7.1 portrays that the task descriptions contain terms as ‘coordinating’, ‘applying knowledge’ and ‘providing training’, all referring to a mentor role for the program manager. Therefore, the Invitation to Bid prescribed an innovative form of program management: instead of executing the project on their own, the program manager was required to be on the sidelines and appointed for advice and guidance in the management of the Panama Canal Expansion Program.
3.7.6 Engineers, Atlantic and Pacific Locks, Gates, Valves and Locks Controls Systems

Shall assist the ACP in all engineering issues related to the Locks Contract. Activities will include:

- overall managing of the PM engineering and other assigned staff required for successful delivery of the Locks Contract;
- coordinating the preparation and review of performance specifications, reference plans and drawings for the Locks Contract;
- applying diversified knowledge of engineering principles and practices;
- analyzing design problems that may be identified during over-the-shoulder review of the Locks Contractor’s design, and developing new or improved techniques or procedures for their resolution;
- developing a strong working relationship with the ACP and Locks Contractor;
- establishing communication procedures to ensure other pre-construction activities are coordinated in the design process;
- working with the Program controls group with the objective of Program delivery remaining within the Project Schedule and Project Budget;
- implementing strategies and processes to mitigate any schedule or budget issues;
- providing training to the team of Engineers, Atlantic and Pacific Locks, Gates, Valves and Locks Controls Systems;

Figure 7.1 Description of tasks in program management services for Engineer (ACP, 2007: II-11)

Turning to CH2M Hill, it appeared that its employees came to Panama expecting to work in a standard project management operation. Having the common practices of project management in mind, the consultants expected taking over the leadership and responsibility of this undertaking. In the mindset of CH2M Hill employees, they were going to lead the project, manage the contracts and handle the daily procedures and processes needed to execute the Expansion Program. Kristin, a CH2M Hill Engineer, expressed how she generally perceived a program management assignment:

Most of the time I get on a project and I have a client that knows what they want but has no idea how to get there and doesn’t want to mess with it. They're just kind-of (pause) lean back, and we do it. (Interview, March 2010)
Chaperoning: collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill

This quote portrays CH2M Hill's expected role in the Expansion Program: the company assumed that the ACP hired the consultants to perform the program management tasks in the project. However, after the first meetings with the ACP it became clear to CH2M Hill that ACP's expectations for the program management services were different than the common practices in this field. The ACP had assigned the program manager a different role; the project owner expected CH2M Hill to provide training, to monitor the progress and to supervise the general work on site. Then, the consultants realized:

There were no intentions to give leadership out of hands and we were treated as though we were staff (CH2M Hill Program Director, Interview May 2010).

Remarkably, after reading the bid and signing the contract, the CH2M Hill consultants found out that their role was different than what they had expected. Respondents acknowledged that, based on their long and broad experience in program management services, CH2M Hill had assumed that program management in the Expansion Program would not be different than any of their previously conducted projects. Their interpretation of program management services was based on former assignments in which they received a leadership role in the projects. Martin, CH2M Hill's Senior Manager, recognized:

Having the contract for the Expansion Program was much more important than its content. Our company needed it... (Informal conversation, June 2010)

Martin revealed that obtaining the contract for the program management services in this mega project was of high importance for CH2M Hill. This might have been the case for financial reasons, but it could also have been for reasons of status as, for many people, this mega project was an undertaking they wanted to take part in for future reference. As such, it is most likely that CH2M Hill's management had not paid close attention to the details of the Invitation for Bid. While this contract defined a close collaboration between the ACP and the program manager, CH2M Hill had overlooked this new practice of project management. For CH2M Hill, being part of
the Expansion Program, and winning the tender process for this mega project, played a bigger role than how this task would come about in the daily work practices. Requiring an innovative form of collaboration, the contract between the ACP and CH2M Hill demanded a different kind of behavior from the program manager, different than CH2M Hill consultants were familiar with from previous conducted projects. They were accustomed to taking over the lead and executing a project, but for the Panama Canal Expansion Program the CH2M Hill Engineers were required to merely assist and advise the ACP in the project execution. In the following paragraph I will introduce the chaperoning practices and illustrate how project participants experienced this new type of contract for program management services.

Chaperoning

For collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program, the ACP created a unique practice in project management. Where in traditional project management a program manager is hired to accomplish a project, the ACP invented a manner of collaboration in which its employees were closely involved in the daily practices of the project execution. This intense collaboration between the program manager and its client, which is the foundation for execution of this mega project, is what I call chaperoning. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, a chaperone is a person (as a matron) who for propriety accompanies one or more young unmarried women in public or in mixed company. The word chaperone originates from the Latin word *cappa* (‘cape’) that referred to a hood used to protectively cover a person’s head (Oxford English Dictionary). In the 16th century the meaning of the word transferred to a protective person, or a person that supervises a younger one. In America it signifies an older person who is present at a social event for young people to encourage correct behavior (Cambridge Dictionary). As an older, more knowledgeable entity, the chaperone guides a younger person in an unknown world. The chaperone explains the novice on what practices are expected from him or her, it shares its embodied experiences and teaches how to operate in the new environment. It is the chaperone controlling the novice’s behavior, but power can be in the hands of the novice. In this project, CH2M Hill was hired to chaperone the ACP, to guide the company in managing the Expansion Program of the Panama Canal.
Chaperoning: collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill

On an everyday basis, chaperoning entails a form of collaboration in which two employees are hired for one key position: an ACP employee and a consultant from CH2M Hill worked in a ‘one-on-one’ structure. The consultant acted as the chaperone and the ACP employee was expected to learn practices of managing complex projects and to gain knowledge and skills while conducting the tasks. The ACP employee was perceived as the assistant (or the novice) of his chaperone. In this role s/he dedicated her/himself to the administrative tasks, including personnel and internal political issues, while the CH2M Hill consultant was focused on the technical aspects of project management. At the same time, the ACP employee could see and learn how the chaperone performed the tasks. The goal of this unique practice of program management was to give ‘training on the job’ to the ACP employees, so that they, in a later phase, could perform the tasks on their own. The contract therefore stated the intention to have a large participation of the program manager in the beginning, and, as the ACP employees acquired the expertise, gradually reducing its presence (ACP, 2007).

Chaperoning was new for the CH2M Hill respondents. The consultants were accustomed to come to a project, to take the lead and execute a program. They were used to having the freedom to direct, to decide, and to be held accountable for the outcome of a project. In the consultants’ previous experiences, a moderate collaboration with the owner of a project was sufficient to succeed. This appeared to be different in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. In this mega project, the ACP kept the authority for decision-making, while CH2M Hill, as a chaperone, supervised the work of the ACP employees, showed the practices of managing complex projects, gave them training where needed and guarded the budget and time schedule of the Expansion Program.

For the ACP employees, chaperoning was not a completely new practice. First and foremost, with the Invitation to Bid the ACP proved its intention for chaperoning, aiming at building an integrated team with experts on their side. Second, this form of collaboration originates from the time when the American Government transferred the canal to Panama. From the moment that the Torrijos-Carter Treaties were signed, in September 1979, the Panamanians gradually played a greater role in the control over the waterway (Greene, 2009). As the final transfer has been just over ten
years ago, many ACP employees remember these days. Back then, the American and Panamanian employees also worked side-by-side, transferring knowledge and experience. Hence, based on their previous experiences, the ACP employees knew the chaperoning practices. In the following paragraph I will picture how the CH2M Hill consultants and the ACP employees experienced chaperoning in their everyday work practices.

**Experiences with chaperoning**

Nourished by a different point of departure, the CH2M Hill consultants and the ACP employees started working with an adverse attitude towards each other. The consultants were surprised by their position and role in the project and questioned their presence in the endeavor. When describing his company’s role and how consultants experienced chaperoning, CH2M Hill's Program Director stated:

> Contract oversight, contract administration, consultation, advice, but we are not responsible for directing or deciding, we are not, and that is very hard for our people. Most of our people here are very senior people, they have been around for twenty, thirty or some even forty years and they are like; “Well, then why are we here?” “Well, because they want us here”. (Interview, May 2010)

CH2M Hill employees felt uncomfortable in the chaperoning role. Even though their names appeared above the ACP employee's name in the organization chart, indicating superiority, the consultants did not have the right to control or power to determine the project's development. They felt frustration when their advice was not followed and experienced a lack of support on how to conduct the teaching aspect of their job; the role of a ‘trainer on the job’ was new to most CH2M Hill consultants.

The ACP employees, on the other hand, had mixed feelings about the collaboration with the CH2M Hill consultants. Several ACP employees did not recognize the value of an advisory capacity or were afraid that ‘the Americans’ would soon take over leadership of the project. Conversely, there was a group of ACP employees in favor of assistance in the management of this mega project. These ACP employees found CH2M Hill's presence beneficial, mostly because a majority of the regulations, processes and values within the ACP originate from the American era, and thus, were
well known among the CH2M Hill consultants. Steve, an ACP Team Leader Assistant, emphasized that he was positive about CH2M Hill's role in the project:

ACP is, as I told you, we have a lot of ego persons here. So it's better to have an outsider to manage this complicated project. A design/build contract is something new for ACP. We need to recognize that we don't have the know-how on how to deal with it. We have been doing excavation works, but this is the first locks project that we are going to face in this generation. I mean, yes, we have experience in drilling and blasting and excavation, and some of the drainage work. And the project content is not difficult; it's the magnitude, the size of the project that overcomes us. We regret that we don't have that experience, we don't have that now and therefore we need somebody to guide us. They need to be here with us for at least the first couple of years, as planned. But let me tell you; seeing how the contractor's [GUPC] behavior is such a surprise to us, I believe that we will require their support a little longer. (Interview, March 2010)

Steve underscored that the ACP employees lacked sufficient knowledge and experience in the management of mega projects. Taking it a step further, some respondents stressed that completing the project without assistance of CH2M Hill would be impossible for the ACP (Fieldnotes, April 2010).

As for the guiding and teaching aspect of the consultants’ role, however, several ACP employees expressed no interest in learning from the consultants. These members felt rather comfortable having “the Americans” run the program and found it “refreshing to have them back” (Amanda, Interview April 2010). With regard to CH2M Hill, the consultants often complained about their role in the project and the attitude of the ACP employees. William, for example, shared his experience with chaperoning. He told me:

If you have a mentor-protégé relationship, it's important that the protégé wants to be mentored by the mentor. And that goes beyond respect. I might respect you for who you are, but that does not mean that I will take in what you say. I may not absorb your advice. Or adjust my own practices. So, that being said, we have not the easiest relationship to work with. [It is] a very hard relationship to work with (Interview, September 2009).
Chapter 7

William, a CH2M Hill Project Site Manager, pointed out that, although there was a contractually agreed mentor role for the consultants, he felt that the ACP employees were not motivated to learn from the CH2M Hill consultants. Sensing an adverse attitude towards the consultants, William emphasized that the collaborative relationship between the ACP employees and CH2M Hill consultants was complicated.

At various levels and aspects, chaperoning appeared to be a complicated endeavor. One such case in point was related to the nature of the two organizations: the ACP is a public organization and CH2M Hill is a private company. Dwelling from differing work environments and practices, project participants often subscribed conflicts amongst them to the differing root characteristics of their organizations. CH2M Hill's Kristin demonstrated:

ACP is very - what's the word I'm looking for? - very regimented. Their procedures are very detailed and very strict, something that I'm not used to. [...] Here it is all very slow. So that is like a big change for me (sighs). I try to be patient; I'm not a patient person by nature. I just keep reminding myself that this is a different company. It's a different culture. Everything is different in ACP and they are a governmental agency so I have to keep reminding myself that there are regulations in place that I may not be aware of. (Interview, March 2010)

Kristin explained that collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill was problematic due to the differing work environments of the organization. She professed bureaucracy as a root characteristic of the ACP and felt this was a burden in her everyday work. The ACP employees acknowledged their organization had many lengthy procedures, however, they did not recognize those as a threshold in their daily operations. More so, the ACP employees emphasized the term ‘CYA’ when the aspect of bureaucracy was discussed (Fieldnotes, September 2009). ‘CYA’ abbreviates ‘cover your ass’, a term also known in the banking sector, which referred to the act of protecting oneself from criticism or legal and administrative penalties. Instead of making a decision, the ACP employees were rather stimulated to find backup with their superiors. Based on stories from the past, illustrating dismissal for making the wrong decision, the ACP employees were afraid to be held liable for any mistake. As a consequence, changes,
requests or new ideas were taken far up on the organizational ladder before a reply was issued. With regard to chaperoning, this notion created an obstacle for quick actions and progress in the field. CH2M Hill consultants interpreted the ACP work attitude as ‘low accountability’, resulting in that it was difficult to “actually figure out who you can pin down to get something done” (CH2M Hill Team Leader, Informal conversation April 2010). The hierarchical focus, that is also a known trait in the Latin American context, played an important role in the chaperoning practices.

Pointing at their root characteristics, the organizational values of the ACP and CH2M Hill contrasted. The CH2M Hill Program Director revealed:

> When you work for a private corporation the bottom line is money. In our line of work you have to be billable, you can’t be non-chargeable. This just comes with the type of work that we do. A company, obviously, cannot afford to pay salaries to people that are not billed to a client. So that is very different from any public organization. (Interview, May 2010)

The billability from CH2M Hill and the public values carried out by the ACP were set square. For CH2M Hill values as time and money were important. Moneymaking was the organizations profound motive. On the other hand, the ACP was focused on its services to the local community and the public at large; the public good was its driving factor. ‘For the people of Panama’ was an often-heard reasoning for working at the Panama Canal. Serving the public good, transparency was one of the main organizational values for the ACP, resulting in open, but lengthy procedures.

Regardless the initial differing interpretations of collaboration, work practices and organizational characteristics between the two parties, both the ACP and CH2M Hill decided to stay with the contract and work towards an integrated team as defined in the Invitation to Bid. The ACP Managing Director verified:

> We have chosen the hardest way to execute a project. It would have been a lot easier when it would have only been ACP, or only CH\(^7\), that would be a lot easier. But, one of our goals was that the ACP people get experience from somebody that has done this before. There would be no added value to have

\(^{7}\) Project participants often abbreviated CH2M Hill with ‘CH’.
hired them to do 100 percent of the work. And it was too high of a risk to do it only with ACP people who have never done something like this. So, [pause] oh well, we’re working it out. We’ll make it work […]. (Interview, June 2010)

CH2M Hill’s project site manager and the ACP Managing Director shared the same opinion: collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill was challenging, but they both expressed the spirit to do anything in their power to succeed. As a solution to the conflicting collaborative relationship between the project participants, ACP’s top management aimed at bringing them closer together and introduced the slogan ‘One Team, One Mission’.

‘One Team, One Mission’

“If it worked then, it could work now,” motivated the ACP Administrator (Interview, May 2010). With the use of the word ‘then’ the Administrator referred to historical events around the operation and control of the Panama Canal. In the transition phase, from 1979 to 2000, when the control of the canal was transferred from the American Panama Canal Commission (PCC) to the ACP, this concept was used to set the stage for a smooth transfer of control and a seamless transition for Canal costumers. In corporate communication at the time\(^\text{38}\) the slogan ‘One Team, One Mission’ referred to the coordinated and harmonious work accomplished. Expressing the meaning of the slogan, a PCC employee was quoted:

> We all attended the work meetings with the same spirit of cooperation, without egoism or arrogance. […]

We are all aware that we are part of the same objective and that the goal is not to reach December 31, 1999, but to proceed without showing that there has been a transfer.

The aim of reintroducing ‘One Team One Mission’ is bringing back the spirit of those days. The Administrator was in strong favor of working as an integrated team and

\(^{38}\) Various stories on the transition period are depicted in The Panama Canal Spillway, the canal newspaper. This newspaper was first published in 1962 and its last edition was distributed on December 30, 1999, when the Panama Canal was transferred from the United States to Panama. Digital copies of The Panama Canal Spillway can be found at the George A. Smathers Libraries of the University of Florida, online available at: http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00094771/01191/allvolumes2 (last visited, September 2012)
had noticed the difficulties in the collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill. He proposed re-using the slogan as an attempt to overcome the struggles within the collaborative relationship. Both program directors agreed, and from that moment onwards the slogan continuously filled discussions on the meaning of a cohesive team.

In the everyday work environment, various expressions of the slogan came to the fore. Under the flag of the ‘One Team, One Mission’ slogan, a management workshop had been organized, t-shirts with a logo of the slogan were printed, access to the ACP facilities (such as the gym and swimming pool) was granted to CH2M Hill employees and both parties were using similar business cards, portraying a shared logo as well. A budget became available for the organization of integration activities, such as a dinner at Miraflores Locks and the sponsorship of the softball team. In the Expansion Program, there was not a kick-off meeting or an explicit moment organized to enlighten all project participants on the meaning behind the slogan. While revitalizing the concept, it was been taken for granted that its connotation was tacit knowledge. Most likely, this was the case for those ACP employees who had worked for the PCC, but for fresher ACP employees and for CH2M Hill employees, the slogan was new and related practices were unknown.

Although the slogan created awareness of the need to form an integrated team, doubt remained among the project participants on whether ‘One Team, One Mission’ reached its desired effect. Henry, CH2M Hill’s Program Manager, portrayed:

> It’s an attempt to put us all on the same page and I have learned that when you keep saying it long enough, eventually it may happen. […] I don’t think we will ever be a real team, but we are more accepted now. (Informal conversation, June 2010)

Ensuing the slogan, Henry felt a slight change in the collaborative relationship with the ACP employees. His ACP counterpart, Andreas, however, expressed his disbelief in any attempt of integrating the two parties into one team. He aired:

> I think it’s a waste of time. People are the way they are. I accommodate to them and they have to accommodate to you, that’s how you have to live. When you get
married you have to accommodate to your partner and the other way around. You don’t go to a marriage counselor before you start! (Informal conversation, May 2010)

Indicating the relationship between the ACP and CH2M Hill, Andreas used the marriage metaphor (see chapter five) and illustrated his lack of confidence in the slogan. Both Henry and Andreas showed minor interest in the slogan as a solution to the struggles amongst their organizations and were reserved about its expected outcomes.

Revitalizing the slogan was a plea to denote the transition period in which employees were taught that the success of the Panama Canal organization relied on teamwork. Bringing back the slogan emphasized the relationship between the Americans and the Panamanians. In the transition period, role segmentation existed between the American government as a mentor and the Panamanian protégé. Back then, the local employees were subordinate to the foreign leaders and, by means of chaperoning, a similar relationship was created. By introducing this unique practice of program management, the ACP gave a new meaning to the ‘One Team, One Mission’ slogan. Just like in the transition period, the slogan signified teamwork. In the Expansion Program, however, the collaboration was intensified with a prescribed one-on-one structure. The ACP aimed at an equal relationship between the Americans and the Panamanians, corresponding to how the transition phase was remembered.

Collaboration in Practice

Let us have a closer look inside the project organization. Illustrating the project participants’ experiences of chaperoning, I will describe two personal stories. These stories, based on my observations, were not the only stories that I encountered in the project organization, but serve as a detailed illustration of how chaperoning came about in the everyday work environment. First, we meet the 53-year old Paola, who is employed with the ACP in the role of an Assistant Team Leader in the Expansion Program.
'It just does not work that way in the ACP'

The security guard at ACP's entrance gate had put a smile on her face when he complimented her for today's hairstyle. He granted her access as she showed her ACP ID card. Quickly she drives to the parking area close to her office, building number 732. Although it feels early, many colleagues have arrived already. A parking spot is not difficult to find in this parking lot, the trick is to find one close to the office. While she turns the key to switch off the car she notices that the car radio says it is 7.17am. She's late! She takes her bags from the car and locks its doors. No matter where you park, the five-minute walk to the building is still a long one in the warm morning sun. Carrying her lunch bag in one hand and her purse in the other she has no trouble walking in her high heels. While walking up the five steps towards the side entrance of the building she searches for her ID card to swipe against the magnet. A loud ‘beep’ shows acceptance of her card and the lock of the door is released. The metal door feels heavy, but the breeze of cold air that welcomes her in calms her down. She sighs and greets the colleagues that are already at their desks with a friendly buenos días (good morning). Like any other morning, she first visits the ladies room. As her house has no air-conditioning to cool off and the hour drive makes her feel sticky anyway, she does her make up in the office. Here, she wipes off the sweat from her face and refreshes to start the day.

The bright red lipstick expresses that Paola is ready for another day of work. Twenty-five years ago she started at the Panama Canal as a student-assistant. When the canal was transferred to Panama she moved up to the Human Resource department. She married a colleague from the Environmental Office and gave birth to three children. Her oldest son is now studying in Madrid, while the other two are still in high school. Two years ago she accepted a team leader position in the Expansion Program, after the company's Vice President personally asked her to join the project. It was an offer she could not refuse, and she has not felt any regrets so far, although it is certainly not an easy task.

The relationship with her CH2M Hill counterpart is complicated. Every day again she wonders why she and Edward have to work in the same position and whoever had thought that this would be a good match. Clearly, they are
Paola finds him impatient, dominant and certainly not sensitive to the local culture. He just comes in, expects her to do what he says and he does not understand a word of Spanish. And he has never tried either. Whenever the ACP organizes something, Edward seems to find it more of a burden than a possibility to get to know each other better, whereas she whishes to build a better relationship with him. Once, they went out for drinks after work, and their conversation then smoothed some of the frustrations. Nevertheless, he still tries to push her to the limit. Paola has worked long enough in the ACP to know that it's not necessary to do so, but Edward does not accept that. He has been here for a year now, but he still wants to push, push, push. It just does not work that way at the ACP…

While Paola comes up the stairs to the first floor she hears laughter in the kitchen; some colleagues are having breakfast together. She drops her bags in the chair besides her desk, switches on her computer and walks to the kitchen for a coffee. A colleague has brought candies from the town he visited over the weekend. Several colleagues gathered in the kitchen to talk about the weekend and to discuss the latest news. Paola has always enjoyed these moments in the office, it has created a connection with her co-workers and it gives a warm feeling of friendship. Some consultants walked in to grab a candy, but most of them don’t stay for a talk. Paola catches up with a few of her friends and agrees to join them for lunch later. Back at her desk she goes over the last emails, checks the companies website and reads the daily message of the Administrator. Edward walks in. He seems to forget to ask about the weekend, or to say ‘good morning’, but she is used to this by now. “Any news on the cell phones?” he asks agitated. Paola closes her eyes for a second and sighs; “Not yet.” She knows he needs more clarification: “I have filled in form 1792 on which I indicated the features of the phones we need, the service it requires and I submitted the form to our manager. He signed.” The frown on Edward’s face explains he does not know what the next step is going to be, so Paola continues: “Now the form needs to go to the Budget Officer, who determines to which department our request needs to be charged to. Then, she sends the form to a purchase agent. That person needs to develop the specifications and publish a tender. After she
has received proposals we get to evaluate them. Then, our manager needs to approve so that the purchase agent can send the order details to the supplier. When the phones arrive we get to check whether they are the correct ones. If so, we have our phones… That’s the procedure we need to follow.” Paola looks over.

Edward cannot believe what he just heard: “The purchasing process here is absurd! It’s all based on stopping the rare chance that something is bought for a few pennies more than the lowest price out there,” he says agitated while walking away. Paola gives a shrug and continues reading the web page. “This is the way it goes here,” she reflects. It takes time, talks, forms and signatures before you get something done. One cannot just go to a store, buy what is needed and expect the company to reimburse the purchase. From the start, she has told Edward that it would take a few weeks to have the cell phones available, but he did not seem to be listening. “How rude,” Paola thinks. “He does not respect the way things are done here!”

Paola’s story portrays an adversarial relationship between the ACP employee and the CH2M Hill consultant. The consultant was frustrated about ACP’s purchasing system, while his ACP colleague felt that he did not show respect for the way things were done in the ACP. Executing their tasks, the project participants relied on each other; the CH2M Hill consultant brought technical knowledge to the project organization and the ACP employee obtained insight on the internal organization. Complementing each other, the counterparts were expected to collaborate. The second case also illustrates a dependence of the consultant on his ACP colleague. In contrary to the previous story, the two project participants in this story perceived chaperoning more positively. Let us meet Tim, who is employed with CH2M Hill and a Senior Manager in the Third Set of Locks project.

‘Where would I be without you?’

It does not surprise him anymore, that after he greets the guard with a buenos días (good morning), the guard replies in English. He feels guilty for his limited knowledge of the Spanish language, but nods and continues his drive to the
office. When he locks his grey Honda CR-V he feels the sun burning in his face. However, the heat does not slow down his pace to walk to building 740. He still feels the stress from Panama's traffic. The aggressive drivers annoy him; just this morning, he could have been in three accidents. When he opens the office door he senses the quietness belonging to the time of the day. It's just after 6.30 in the morning. He connects his laptop and goes through his email, a task that he prefers doing before colleagues arrive. The family picture on his desk reminds him of his daughter's exams today. He misses them both, his son and daughter, and promises himself to call them later today. Among the many emails an email from a friend in the Middle East attracts his attention. They worked together for CH2M Hill on a construction project in Dubai. His friend is now back in the US and curious to hear about the Expansion Program.

Although Tim has been working for CH2M Hill for over 15 years, the Expansion Program is only his second project abroad. After his divorce, the project in the Middle East seemed to be a welcome change. Unfortunately, due to the crisis he could not stay that long and soon he was transferred to Panama. He has been in Panama for about nine months now, but it wears him down. The climate here is exhausting and the traffic tiresome. Working for the ACP has been a challenge, as the bureaucracy goes further into detail than he has ever seen before. And he despises the political agendas behind it. Tim finds the Panamanian people really friendly and he has actually made some friends here. He is taking Spanish lessons and tries to practice over lunchtime with his ACP co-workers. Despite the good things about being away from the United States and the nice things about being in Panama, he keeps in mind that he might not stay until the end of the program. As much as he wishes to be standing in the crowd and watch the ribbon cutting to open the new set of locks, it's part of being a consultant: when you have achieved what you were hired for, you pack up and move to another project. And it has been like this throughout Tim's career and it will not be different in this project.

In contrast to some of his CH2M Hill colleagues, the relationship with his counterpart has worked out very well. From the first time they met in the office they have gotten along. Carmen is very open to his suggestions and eager to
learn from him. Although he finds the teaching-part of this job stressful at times, her enthusiasm feels rewarding. He wishes he could teach her to be more outspoken, and to criticize him when needed, but she just does not. Carmen is calm and she always has a smile on her face. She received her masters' degree in the United States and is almost fluent in English. This had made collaboration between them easier, because she is familiar with the English jargon.

While Tim reads further through his emails he notices that the office is becoming livelier. People are starting the day and the smell of coffee fills the corridors. A message from higher management pops up his computer screen. A few weeks ago he had proposed to implement some changes in the team. Tim believes that if his team were to physically be working on the project sites, they would be more connected to the people they work with on a daily basis. Carmen was quickly convinced, as she saw the benefits from having their team divided over the project offices. However, she immediately saw some issues this would create. Team members would not want to move, as they are attached to their co-workers in this office and prefer to work close to the city. Furthermore, she expected higher management not to agree with it, as for them it would mean fewer people who work in this office. And less employees under your wings means less status. Above all, she indicated that the project manager on site would suspect the new employees to be the head office's spies. Tim expected some resistance to the change, but as he could strongly justify the need for it, he had hoped it would be implemented quickly. In contrary, it made the organization shake more than he could have ever imagined. Discussions were taken to the top of the organization and rumors at the lower levels hit him personally. Last week it went so far that Tim seriously considered resigning. Carmen supported him all along. And today's email again shows that he could not be running this department without her. She knows her way around the ACP. She knows who to go to and presses the right buttons to get the answers needed. The message on his screen indicates agreement to Tim's plan. Clearly, Carmen has been behind this. With a grin from ear to ear he walks into Carmen's office. She is pleased to see him. “What can I do for you, Señor Tim?” she smiles. “Where would I be without you?” he says thankfully. They have a short conversation about
Carmen’s actions, but Tim understands that he should not ask too much. This is her part of the position. They then quickly move on to the next step in this change process.

“She is just super, super good” Tim says to himself when walking back to his desk. “Carmen is the key to this success!” he thinks, but he has not told her in so many words yet. From behind his computer he writes an animated reply to his friend from the Middle East.

These two stories illustrate two different ways of how project participants perceived chaperoning. Paola’s story depicted friction between the ACP and CH2M Hill counterparts, while Tim indicated a positive outcome of chaperoning. In the everyday practice of chaperoning, the ACP counted on the technical expertise of the consultants, while CH2M Hill depended on its client’s organizational, political and historical knowledge. As such, both parties possessed a token of control. The ACP employee was expert in the contextual knowledge of the project, and s/he could exert power with that knowledge, while CH2M Hill consultants called forth all skills preventing being overruled by their client. Consequently, chaperoning created a relationship of interdependence.

In addition to the two personal stories, an ethnographic account of a meeting illustrates how chaperoning was manifested after the slogan ‘One Team, One Mission’ was introduced. This observation gives insight into how chaperoning was translated into the daily collaborative relationship and how practices of collaboration were developed between the ACP employees and CH2M Hill consultants.

‘We are the Shadow of CH2M Hill’

Every Tuesday at 10am this meeting was held in a conference room in building 740. For the amount of people attending the meeting, the space was small, not bigger then 12m2. A rectangle shaped conference table with chairs around it took up most of the space. A screen was set up on the left short wall, while the short end opposite of it held a white board. The room had only one window facing the inside of the office building, but a net curtain ensured that colleagues passing by could not distract the meeting attendees. Most people were already seated
when I arrived, but as it appeared that not enough chairs were available, more chairs were taken from a nearby office. When I found a place to sit, I noticed that the consultants were seated at the table, while their ACP counterparts formed a second ring around the table. “It looks like a theatre setting,” I said to myself. Attendees formed a U-shape facing to the left end of the table, where ‘the stage’ is. From here, the CH2M Hill Program Manager started the meeting. (Fieldnotes, 2009)

Remarkable about the set up of this meeting is that the CH2M Hill employees had occupied the seats directly at the table, while the ACP attendees positioned themselves as apprentices by taking a seat on the second row, behind their chaperons.

The setting emphasized the hierarchy in the relationship between the CH2M Hill consultants and the ACP employees; the ACP employee acted as an assistant. Hierarchy was also portrayed in who had leadership over the meeting. As a matter of fact, in this meeting a specific space at the table was reserved for the CH2M Hill Project Manager. By taking place on ‘the stage’ he received the status of the leader, and he enacted this role.

As usual, an agenda was handed out and an attendance list went around the room while the meeting started. Henry started the meeting by emphasizing that cell phones should be shut off; “There is a cup on the table. Whoever’s cell phone goes off, pays a dollar.” Immediately, the person next to me searched in his pocket to shut off his phone: “I paid last week,” he whispered with a smile. Every meeting touched upon similar topics: the safety issues were reviewed first, followed by more in-depth topics like the Three Week Look Ahead Schedule, an Excel sheet that is discussed regularly. While each agenda point was being discussed, I took notes and tried to understand what the project participants talked about. Today, the Baseline Plan was heavily debated. In this plan the contractor of the Third Set of Locks project [GUPC] defined how they expect the project to develop: their milestones, their expected costs, time and goal factors are described in detail. “A roadmap for the project,” revealed Josh. “The question is whether we reject it or ask them to revise and resubmit.” Henry stated that he
Chapter 7

is leaning towards rejecting the document; “This might get us somewhere,” he underscored. But Josh did not agree, he felt that a flexible attitude towards the contractor could be beneficial in the future. From the corner, Mark remarked: “yes we should be flexible, but on the other hand, we do make a very clear statement when we reject now.” (Fieldnotes, September 2009)

It should be noted that the meeting was held in the English language. As the contract was written in English, and because most CH2M Hill employees did not speak Spanish, English was the main language in their meetings. For the ACP employees, English was not their mother tongue. They felt hesitation for speaking and, therefore, they were comfortable with a seat in the second circle of the meeting. Furthermore, worth mentioning is the comment that was made about the use of cell phones in the meeting. For the CH2M Hill consultants, switching off their cell phone when entering a meeting room was common practice, while this was not the norm within the ACP. I have observed numerous meetings in which the ACP employees answered their phone in a meeting, or, when the phone rang they left the room to have the conversation on the phone. By placing this comment in the meeting the CH2M Hill project manager made perfectly clear that he did not accept the local habit, and he created an incentive to prevent attendees from answering their phone. The meeting continued:

Henry felt supported and emphasized his opinion: “I’m being honest with you. We want the contractor to give us the document that we want, because if we stay flexible this process is going to be confused and critical for us.” ACP employee Rene asked what the difference between rejecting a document or returning it as revise and resubmit would be, and Henry explained: “Rejecting the Baseline Plan would send a stronger message. When we label it as revise and resubmit that means that ACP gives comments for changes, but that we are leaning towards acceptance. We would use it as a foundation for our payments, but we cannot pay them unless they hand in a new and better one. Thus, reject this one.” Rene nodded and Henry continued the meeting with the next topic to discuss. Even though time pressure was on, the atmosphere maintained to be relaxed;
laughter filled the room frequently. After a round for further issues, Henry closed the meeting with: “That’s it, bye.” He immediately stood up and left the room. (Fieldnotes, September 2009)

It may be clear that the discussion shown in the description of this meeting was held among CH2M Hill consultants. The ACP employees were seated further away from the table, listening to what was said and taking notes. Reluctantly, an ACP employee asked for clarification. Often, participation from ACP’s side only came to the fore when their opinion was asked directly or when questions related to the ACP organization were raised. Especially because they were seated in the second row it looked like the ACP attendees were hiding behind the consultant. In the apprentice-role they showed a hesitant attitude in the meeting, whereas the consultant had no trouble speaking up. Therefore, CH2M Hill portrayed a more dominant attitude, as expected from a master teaching his trade.

Similar stories were heard from the field office, as an ACP Engineer explained:

CH2M Hill is supposed to be advising us, but all I see in Cocolí is that they are very much in control. They rule the office. And when I have a question, I’d rather go to a CH person, because at least he knows the answer. ACP managers in the same position always need to verify with their counterpart! […] On paper [the ACP manager] is the boss, and yes he signs, but in reality it’s his CH2M Hill counterpart who is making the decisions. […] We need a different approach: CH should be in the second row in meetings. They are advising. In the current situation we feel low, and we take a step backwards. Somos la sombra de CH! (We are the shadow of CH2M Hill!). (Informal conversation, October 2009)

This statement emphasized that the ACP employees felt subordinate to the consultants. Although CH2M Hill employees formally had no decisive power, it is illustrated that in practice they did control decisions. Dominant in their behavior, CH2M Hill consultants played a leading part in the meeting. Formally they had little authority, but in more informal settings CH2M Hill portrayed strategies to acquire power. In project site offices, like Cocolí, I observed that CH2M Hill was pulling the
ropes. Hence, the meeting described above was not just one event; it serves as a symbol to the collaborative relationship in the project organization. It demonstrates that the relationship between the ACP and CH2M Hill was more complex than what the slogan ‘One Team, One Mission’ suggested. In fact, chaperoning and the slogan contradicted each other: the slogan aimed at an equal relationship while the Invitation to Bid prescribed that the ACP was superior to CH2M Hill. Given the ambiguity of these formal relations, it is not surprising that project participants struggled finding satisfactory conditions for collaboration.

**Discussion**

In the role of the program manager in the Panama Canal Expansion Program CH2M Hill was hired to assist the ACP in this mega project, to guard budget- and time schedules and to supervise the ACP employees in their daily operations. However, the findings of my research portray different expectations of how collaboration should come about. At the start of the project CH2M Hill expected to carry responsibility, to be held accountable and to carry risks in the execution of their work. To them, these were among the common practices in managing mega projects. In contrary, the ACP prescribed chaperoning practices in the Invitation to Bid. Table 7.1 provides an overview of the common practices and the chaperoning practices in project management. The table portrays that the ACP merely assigned supervising and training tasks to the program manager and kept all authority and liability to itself. In the daily practices, however, I observed that CH2M Hill employees felt uncomfortable in the role they were expected to carry out, as chaperoning practices were new to them.

These differing expectations of how collaboration between the program manager and client should come about resulted in power struggles and conflicts among the project participants. The slogan ‘One Team, One Mission’ was reintroduced as an attempt to smoothen the relationship among the project participants. This slogan created awareness for the need to build an integrated team among the actors, but this was not translated to the micro level of the project organization. Furthermore, the collaborative relationship between the ACP and CH2M Hill as specified in the
Invitation to Bid conflicted with the objective of the ‘One Team, One Mission’ slogan. As a result, the enacted relationship contained contrasting practices of collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill employees.

### Table 7.1 Common versus chaperoning practices in program management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Practices</th>
<th>Chaperoning practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contract</strong></td>
<td>Client hires Program Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Program Manager is responsible for project outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Program Manager is accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Risk is divided between client and Program Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Program Manager leads the execution of the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>No training aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>The client supervises the Program Manager’s results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Moderate collaboration between Client and Program Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given this lack of reflection, practices of collaboration remained largely unconscious, tacit and embodied (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). The ACP and CH2M Hill revitalized the embodied practices of the former American – Panamanian collaboration in the Panama Canal. We have seen that cultural conflicts *in situ* were needed for employees to become aware of the taken for granted practices. In these conflicts, as Geiger (2009) shows, reflection takes place over practices of collaboration. At these moments actors become aware of their routine practices and change towards a discursive mode to negotiate practices that suite the project and its participants. In these conflicts the ACP and CH2M Hill slowly negotiated a way to enhance their collaborative relationship in, what Nicolini et al. (2003b) called a *bricolage* of material, mental, social and cultural resources. This is exemplified in the separation of authority between the ACP and CH2M Hill: the ACP employees took care of the internal politics within the internal arena, while the CH2M Hill consultants took the lead at project offices.
In this specific case, chaperoning practices have shown both benefits and drawbacks for the project. Benefits are the transfer of knowledge to the local situation of the client, as well as the high level of trust that is built in such a close relationship between client and program manager. Another benefit is the increase of understanding for ‘the other’ in the collaborative relationship. Drawbacks of chaperoning are found in personal mismatch and conflict. Another drawback is the questionable durability of the transferred knowledge and the translations of new expertise to future practices.

In this chapter I have portrayed that even though the contract states how collaboration should come about, common practices are embedded in the everyday organizational life of project participants (Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). However, I believe that chaperoning practices can serve other projects if daily work practices receive more attention. Since practices of collaboration are not fixed at the start of a project, the discussion about how collaboration should come about in the project organization needs to be stirred up.

Now that we have become acquainted with the field and the empirical data of this study it is time to move to the last part of this book. In part III I answer the research questions and draw conclusions. Furthermore, I elaborate on how this study contributes to the academic debates and pose my ideas for future research endeavors. This book ends with my recommendations for practitioners.
Part III
Learning from the Field
Chapter 8

Cross-Cultural Work in the Panama Canal Expansion Program: A Collabyrinth
Chapter 8

Introduction

In this concluding chapter it is time to look back at what has been learned and extract contributions for further research and practice. In retrospect, in chapter one I portrayed the aim of the research and outlined the research question for this study. A quest began to find out how actors deal with cross-cultural collaboration in a mega project, and the Panama Canal Expansion Program was introduced as the case for this study. In chapter two I presented the academic framework for this research. Building on current theoretical debates on project management and cross-cultural management, the practice-based approach was explained. This approach, which I followed throughout this study, is focused on what actors do and say and helps to explain complex organizational phenomena. As such, it supported me in understanding what is actually going on when values, beliefs, experiences and expectations of project actors come together in the project organization. In chapter three I provided a methodological account on how this research was conducted and I elaborated on my role as a researcher in the field. In chapter four we familiarized ourselves with the context of this research; the Panama Canal, the Expansion Program and its project organization were described and, by means of an interlude, I gave insight into how collaboration between the project partners began. In chapters five, six and seven I illustrated the practices of collaboration that project participants enacted in their everyday work life.

This chapter will proceed from where the analysis portrayed in the previous chapters has left us. In this final chapter I will further analyze the findings and answer the research question. The departure point of this study has been the question:

How does collaboration manifest itself in the daily practices of project participants in the Panama Canal Expansion Program?
This research question was divided into a number of sub questions: a theoretical question, two empirical questions and a more explorative sub question. These are:

1. How are project management, cross-cultural collaboration and practices debated in the current academic literature?
2. How do actors make sense of the cultural complexity in their everyday practices?
3. What kind of practices of collaboration can be identified in the Panama Canal Expansion Program?
4. How can we explain the cultural dynamics that appear in the project organization?

In the next paragraphs I shall answer these questions. This entails both theoretical and empirical notions that are elaborated in the preceding chapters. Based on the analysis I present the conclusions of this academic study and its contribution to the contemporary academic debates. Finally, I portray five recommendations for practitioners.

### Project Actuality

 Following the theoretical question set out to guide this research, I delved into academic literature on project management, cross-cultural collaboration and practices. Bringing the academic debates on these main topics together, as portrayed in chapter two, supported me in developing an interpretative framework for this study.

Termed as the ‘projectification of society’, in which project-related features become the dominant organizing principle in modern life, the need (or obligation) for collaboration between various partners to execute large undertakings increased (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Maylor, Brady, Cooke-Davies, & Hodgson, 2006; Midler, 1995). In the construction sector, conditions such as the long-term demand for multiple, integrated services often require an extensive form of collaboration (Dietrich et al., 2010). Governmental agencies, construction companies, consultancy firms and other specialized organizations therefore join forces to combine their knowledge,
skills and assets needed to complete the endeavor. This brings together project participants residing from different societies, affiliated with various organizations and possessing a multiplicity of interests. It creates a cultural complex work environment. Being the strongest liaison between organizations, collaboration is thus coined as a highly significant theme in managing projects (Bresnen & Marshall, 2011; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk, 2009).

In recent years, various researchers have acknowledged the need to study the ‘inside’ of projects so that what is actually going on in these organizations can be further unraveled (e.g. Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Engwall, 2003; Söderlund, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). With a focus on understanding social phenomena, the ‘practice turn’ emerged as a new perspective on projects and the management of projects. Research in this realm aims to explain complex organizational practices as they occur, and thus aspires to understand what people do, how they do it and in what context practices are carried out (Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003a; Orlikowski, 2010). Here, practices are understood as a *bricolage* of material, mental, social and cultural resources and perceived as ways of actions that are relational, mediated by artifacts and always embedded in a context of interaction (Nicolini et al., 2003a). In the ongoing flow of activities and the process of sense making, actors take a moment to review the situation, which Weick et al. (2005) call ‘bracketing’. In this brief stability actors reflect on their behavior, and that of others, to draw new distinctions, imagine new things and create new understandings (Tsoukas & Chia, 2010). Actors are reflexive about their practices and, in the midst of action, modify their routine practices into new practices. The practices become temporarily fixed and are put into use until new processes of sense making occur.

Consequently, a more fine-grained analysis of the micro activities of project participants, as proposed in the projects-as-practice framework, will make a significant contribution to the understanding of the internal dynamics in project organizations (Blomquist et al., 2010). This framework allows for a deeper insight into how project participants make sense of, and respond to, the complex, culturally diverse and ambiguous project setting in which cross-cultural collaboration is required. Hence, unraveling practices of collaboration enhances our knowledge on these collaborative situations and clarifies what is actually going on within the project organization.
In order to further understand the project actuality, the Panama Canal Expansion Program offered a particular interesting vantage point for several reasons. In the first place, its location outside the Anglo-Saxon economies and openness towards a detailed examination of its participants and their practices, values and expectations could further develop the field of project management research (Hodgson & Muzio, 2011). In the second place, its timing was parallel to this study, which gave me the opportunity to be present from the moment that the tender was awarded for their main project, the Third Set of Locks Project. Thus, I could study the start-up phase and parts of the execution phase of the project. In the third place, this project matched the principles that were set out for this study: location, language and access. Furthermore, the cultural complexity that is central to this project offered great opportunities for better understanding cross-cultural collaboration in infrastructural mega projects.

A Collaboration Labyrinth

It has become clear throughout this research that the topic of collaboration is a salient theme when it comes to the execution of a mega project. The arena of a project organization contains a maze of different (national, organizational, and professional) cultures, identities and work practices combined with the project participants’ distinctive interests and perspectives on the undertaking. In this complex network of interactions, working together requires project participants to combine their (cultural) practices, and to let go of some of their traditional values and methods. Each guided by their own established ideas and distinct practices, actors need to translate and negotiate their differences into more amenable forms of deployment. However, finding ways to capture all the actors’ desires for the collaboration into a satisfying manner is often not an easy task.

While many scholars underscore that collaboration is a key element in the management of projects (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Vaaland, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006), there is a lot of evidence suggesting failures for collaboration. Cicmil and Marshall (2005) illustrate relational and performance failings of a ‘two-stage tendering’ procedure and conclude that a stronger facilitation is needed to sustain long term benefits of collaborative work. Partnering, a development that emerged
as such a facilitation, appears to be rather an elusive concept than a model leading to the establishment of collaboration amongst organizations (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011). Furthermore, Van Marrewijk et al. (2008) prove that collaboration in mega projects often fails due to differing project designs, project cultures and management approaches. Moreover, the construction sector in general has been heavily criticized for its insufficient project performances, lack of integration, confrontational attitudes and pronounced blame culture (Dietrich et al., 2010; Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011; Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008). Taking these results into account, we can question why there is still an aim for collaboration.

Based on longstanding action research on collaboration, Huxham and Vangen (2004) suggest that working together is often so difficult that avoidance might be the best strategy for task execution. Following this spirit, I agree that, if there is a choice, collaboration with other organizations should be evaded. However, there are numerous situations conceivable in which working alone is not sufficient to achieve desired ends. For the execution of a mega project, as portrayed earlier, collaboration -not coordination or cooperation- is inevitable. This intensive, stable and long-term arrangement entails sharing resources, aligning activities and establishing a high degree of trust among its members (Keast et al., 2007). Owing to their scope, cost and duration, the construction of mega projects demands collaborative arrangements between organizations to overcome a lack of competencies and resource scarcity, and to create value together (Dietrich et al., 2010). In these situations, collaboration needs to be placed high on the agenda and receive most attention. Alternatively, in some occasions the mega project can be cut into smaller, separate projects. If a part of the project can be executed by one single organization, collaboration within this distinct project might be avoidable. Yet, collaboration between the separate projects remains highly important. Ensuring that the distinct projects are correctly geared to one another, collaboration is essential in the final configuration of the mega project. As an illustration, when building a railroad going through a tunnel, this mega project can be divided into smaller projects; the building of the tunnel can be described as a separate project from the construction of the railroad. At the interface of these independent tasks, where the projects meet, collaboration is crucially important to make sure that the tunnel and the railroad are well connected. One can understand
the disaster and disgrace if the railroad could not be linked with the tunnel. Thus, answering the question addressed above, collaboration is aimed for when working together is the only way to accomplish complex tasks.

In light of the Panama Canal Expansion Program, project execution would be impossible without the collaborative efforts of various organizations. In this complex work environment project participants need to reflect upon and modify their practices while finding their route in the project organization. Similar to other mega projects, collaboration in this large undertaking began when the home organizations explored and decided to form a bond. The GUPC partners worked together to develop the tender document for the execution of the Third Set of Locks project, and, in a similar manner, CH2M Hill had signed its contract for collaboration with the ACP. Delighted to start this journey, the project partners had gained confidence in each other and looked forward to a collaborative relationship for the coming years. During the development of their bond, they were a homogeneous group sharing ideologies about project values and principles. A ‘hyper culture’ (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007) evolved among the project participants, reflecting an ideal type of clear, uniform and convincing beliefs for the development of the project. Among other values, transparency, efficiency, and accountability were considered of paramount importance for the project partners in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. However, applying these values to the everyday practices failed to occur. We have seen in the GUPC organization, and in the collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill, that, when the project partners actually commenced their works, they collided. Their level of authority, their position, identity and performance in the project were under dispute and clashing cultural values, differing organizational interests and opposing ideas nourished conflicts among the project participants. At these moments, actors searched for something to hold on to and for support in unraveling the complexity of the organization and its context. Based on their idiosyncratic frameworks, project participants enacted the ongoing stream of events and created their own (socially constructed) realities (Duijnhoven, 2010). While making sense of the GUPC organization, project participants translated the complexity of their everyday work environment into more amendable forms of understanding. Yet, the emerging diminishers of collaboration further divided the project participants and
created a ‘canal’ amongst them. Regardless of the institutional differences between the organizations or the embedded cultural values and practices, project participants felt a need to attain a collaborative relationship within the project. A feeling of togetherness and personal commitment with colleagues and the project encouraged actors to regenerate collaboration. Searching for the way to go, they changed from a mode of un-reflexive practicing to a reflexive mode of communication (Geiger, 2009) and, reflecting-in-action, they shaped their routinized practices and initiated new practices (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). Amplifiers of collaboration emerged and stimulated integration among the project participants. Pervaded with a collaborative spirit, the project participants’ belief in the project and their identification with the engineering work advanced the relationship in the GUPC project organization. Likewise, in the collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill, in which both parties understood that chaperoning practices created conflicts amongst them, their attitude and commitment towards the project inspired a collaborative relationship. Mapping the work environment, actors made sense of the cultural complexity in the project organization. Their willingness to collaborate and their concern for the project strengthened its development. Consequently, the social relations between project participants and their shared drive to work together created practices bringing actors together and building a collaborative work environment in the project organization. Along this challenge, we have seen that practices of collaboration emerged to support project participants to find their way around in the everyday work setting.

Against this backdrop, the journey towards developing a collaborative relationship could be seen as exploring a collabyrinth. This neology of ‘collaboration’ and ‘labyrinth’ reflects the complicatedness of collaboration. Organizational actors are obliged to find their way in the complex situation and collaboration is essential for understanding the terrain. As portrayed in the empirical chapters, actors first disagreed on the route, and might have felt disoriented, but they soon came to understand that working together is the way to deal with obstacles encountered along their route. As such, practices of collaboration emerged.
Practices of Collaboration

In the Panama Canal Expansion Program we have seen that cross-cultural collaboration entails a wide variety of practices. These practices of collaboration contain actions and activities that project participants enacted while exploring the collabyrinth and making sense of collaboration in their daily work life. Studying this life through ethnographic research methods gave me the opportunity to grasp how actors deal with the cultural complexity in their work environment. I came to understand how project participants translate, negotiate and generate practices of collaboration. As such, the practices of collaboration that I identified in this mega project provide an answer to the empirical questions of this research.

Leading from the data presented in this study, diminishers of collaboration, amplifiers of collaboration and chaperoning practices are recognized. Extensively described in the empirical chapters of this book, these practices portray a picture of cross-cultural collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. As project participants travel through the collabyrinth, these practices of collaboration emerged in their everyday work life. Yet, some practices appeared to be obvious, while other practices were hidden beneath the surface. As such, the practices of collaboration that I identified in this mega project can be distinguished between manifest practices and concealed practices.

Resulting from the longitudinal, interpretative ethnographic fieldwork period, I gained an understanding of how project participants made sense of social reality. Being there, in the organization of the Third Set of Locks project, allowed me to participate in the life worlds of its participants, to built a relationship with them and to grasp their common sense, everyday, spoken and unspoken, tacitly known ‘rules’ within their work environment (Ybema et al., 2009). Attending the everyday aspects of collaboration and engaging with what the project participants do and how they talk about what they do has led me to a practice-based understanding of the organizational life (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003b). Furthermore, an iterative alternation between being close to the actors and their practices and distancing to recognize how these practices are immersed in a thick texture of connections steered me to see both manifest and concealed
practices. Manifest practices are those actions and activities that are directly visible and became apparent in the everyday encounters between project participants. Concealed practices refer to practices that are covert and therefore not directly accessible; these are often implicit and covert in the everyday organizational life. The manifest and concealed practices both consist of different interrelated actions and activities abstracted from specific circumstances and comprising parts of social reality for the actors involved.

Based on my analysis of the data, I was able to classify key practices of collaboration in the everyday organizational life of project participants. These practices highlight the ways in which actors deal with cultural complexity in the workplace and capture the doings and sayings that adverse collaboration as well as that build and connect towards a collaborative relationship. In the collabyrinth, three manifest practices can be distinguished: (1) conflicting conditions, (2) seeking consent and (3) crafting reciprocal relations. Besides, three concealed practices were prominent: (1) submarining, (2) storytelling and (3) synergizing. These dominant practices are dynamic and evolving. That is, as actors continuously translate and negotiate their practices to make sense of the current situation, these practices are not merely static and vast, but rather flexible and moving. What is more, these practices are not a fixed outline for all actions and activities represented in the process of collaboration. Nevertheless, the process of bracketing (Weick et al., 2005) is essential here. Actors take a moment in time to reflect on their practice and, if needed, to modify the practice. On a daily basis, processes of translation, negotiation and power struggles are continuously present in the project participants’ actions and activities, and these are reflected in the practices of collaboration. For illustration purposes, Figure 8.1 gives insight into the collabyrinth and the dominant practices.
Figure 8.1 The Collabyrinth

Manifest practices
The first manifest practice is found around the conflicts that obstructed collaborative relations in the projects. Cross-cultural collaboration in the project organization was colored by the various struggles among its project participants that hindered their collaborative relationship, but simultaneously, conflicts were needed to bring about differing perspectives, interpretations and meanings. Among the GUPC partners, for example, the conflicts that emerged after winning the tender for the Third Set of Locks Project influenced the collaboration amongst them. These conflicts arose out of the differing perceptions about how GUPC’s project organization should be set up, how profits and costs should be divided and, in addition, the knowledge that their bid was lower than ACP’s allocated funds for this project created tension among Sacyr, Impregilo, Jan de Nul and CUSA. Likewise, conflicts between the ACP and CH2M Hill...
affected collaboration between them. These partners struggled over the different interpretations about the role that CH2M Hill consultants would play in delivering program management services to the Expansion Program. CH2M Hill expected to independently perform program management tasks in the project, while the ACP hired the consultants to provide training, monitor progress and supervise the general work on site. Instead of being executors, CH2M Hill employees were contracted for a pure advisory role. These examples underscore the work of various scholars (e.g. Bresnen & Marshall, 2011; Engwall, 2003; Van Marrewijk et al., 2008) stating that project organizations consist of complex interactions between its partners, because each party is guided by its own established ideas and distinct practices. The data has illustrated that differing ideas, perceptions and expectations of how collaboration between project partners should come about resulted in conflicts amongst them.

In fact, project participants seem to need conflicts to be able to make sense of their relationship and to attune how this relationship can be shaped. Scholars recognize that, among other organizational activities, conflicts over goals, their interpretation and history are co-present in everyday organization practice (e.g. Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini et al., 2003a). Essentially, conflicts are an evident part of collaborative projects (Vaaland, 2004). As we have seen, when joining a project organization, the participants’ differing expectations and practices come to the fore at conflict situations. During these periods of conflict actors become aware of the taken for granted practices and are forced to reflect upon their practices. As Geiger (2009) shows, problems with current practices of collaboration triggered for the emergence of new practices. In the Panama Canal Expansion Program, actors became aware of their routine practices and changed towards a discursive mode to negotiate practices suitable for the project and its participants (Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012).

The second manifest practice that was evidently present in the everyday organizational life of project participants is ‘seeking consent’. This refers to the notion that actors explored for shared understandings, mutual interests and common features between the different groups. Project participants used metaphors supporting them in making sense of their daily work environment. Metaphors are applied to express feelings and experiences, to capture emotions and to make the complex situation understandable. They are interpretations of a situation and express feelings about
the circumstances. In the emotional process of trying to grasp the complexity of the situation, to justify practices or to understand activities, metaphors were used as abstract constructions enacting the development of thoughts and interpretations about the situation. Furthermore, the metaphors used in the project organization provided information about the collaboration between project partners and how its actors experienced this. For example, portraying the GUPC project organization as a ‘war zone’ comes with negative connotations relevant to understanding the collaborative relationships and dynamics within the project organization. Describing the organizational atmosphere as a battlefield gives insight as how to actors constructing the embodied metaphor perceive the situation. Making the actors’ intangible thoughts tangible, metaphors changed abstract understandings into concrete and generally understandable explanations.

Furthermore, project participants found common ground by means of applying labels to the various groups in the project organization. Commonly known features for a group were captured in a label, which created a shared understanding among the project participants. We have seen them distinguishing the cultural differences and similarities encountered in the project organization and connecting these to national, organizational or professional identities. Within the GUPC organization, for example, four national culture labels were detected: ‘Spanish’, ‘Italian’, ‘Belgian’ and ‘Panamanian’. In some occasions, project participants generalized these labels to ‘northerners’, who were perceived as ‘straightforward’, ‘cold’ and ‘closed’, and ‘southerners’ that were seen as ‘inefficient’ and ‘expressive’. The project participants used the labels strategically; when it suited them to capture all Italians and Spanish together, the label ‘southerners’ was used, but when a distinction between the two was the intention, the national culture label was coined.

What is more, in their search for consent project participants found several commonalities connecting them to each other. Supporting the process of sense making, they explore mutual experiences and collective knowledge. A shared interest for engineering works, their professions and language appeared to be such commonalities. Furthermore, for particular actors, the experiences of the expat life transpired into cohesion. Building a collaborative relationship, project participants applied their interpretations of the past to understand the current conditions and
related to traditions, habits and rituals from previous contexts (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010; Philips et al., 2000). In line with Boyacigiller et al. (2004), these practices illustrate that actors in a project organization tend to draw on previous experiences in order to create new cultural understandings and practices allowing them to make sense of their everyday work environment. Participants relate to situations they have endured earlier to find explanations for the complexity encountered in the collabyrinth. Illustrated by the use of labels, metaphors and the shared passion for their profession, project participants tried to foster collaboration. As such, the manifest practice ‘seeking consent’ entails the actors’ search for parallels and similarities so that a relationship amongst them can be developed.

The third manifest practice, ‘crafting reciprocal relations’, is displayed in the participants’ motivation and drive for building a relationship amongst them. Corresponding to the professional need to collaborate, members of the project organization exposed an emotional necessity to develop a good understanding with their co-workers. Their drive to work together set them in motion engaging with one another. To create such connection actors organized various activities through which they could get to know each other better, learn from the other and develop inside experiences. The creation of a feeling of togetherness strengthens the nature of collaboration and encourages open sharing of information and knowledge (Dietrich et al., 2010). This may be illustrated by the introduction of ‘Secret Santa’ in GUPC’s Engineering Department. The event, organized around Christmas 2009, created an informal atmosphere in the department and employees became more familiar with one another. Also the weekly football nights are an example of the activities that improved the relationship among colleagues. Moreover, the ambition to create a collaborative work environment was supported by various bridging actors; project participants who fulfilled the role of middlemen. Besides helping project participants with everyday work practices, middlemen assisted in conflicts that occurred and they were focused on improving collaboration. Illustrated by the character of a mediator, for example, roles of a negotiator and a translator were fulfilled to connect project members and to build relationships on the work floor. Apparently, these roles were needed in the project organization as these informally emerged and were enacted by middlemen. Stimulating a collaborative work environment middlemen bridge
the cultural gap between members of the project organizations and, therefore, are crucial in the process of collaboration. Crafting reciprocal relations is recognized in several studies. Dietrich et al. (2010) highlight that, in projects, partners mutually rely on each other. Both the individuals and the organizations they represent must be willing and able to combine their expertise so that, while benefiting from the pooled knowledge, risk and uncertainty can be reduced (Dietrich et al., 2010; Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Although the construction sector is not unique in this, the key driver for collaboration in mega projects is the need to surmount the lack of competencies and scarce resources and thus, to create value together. Since collaboration tends to pull together actors from various organizations with a wide range of different skills, backgrounds and experiences (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007; Vangen & Huxham, 2003), project participants seek to create a comfortable environment within the project organization. Central in this is their willingness to collaborate, which is fundamental in building mutual trust and respect, and supports the effort from all players to accept cultural differences and similarities encountered in their workplace.

Table 8.1 summarizes the manifest practices that came to the fore in this research. Illustrated with examples from the research field, it shows that practices of collaboration emerged in both conflict situations as well as in more harmonious circumstances. Manifest practices are those practices that evidently come to the fore when applying a ‘practice lens’ for studying organizational phenomena (Gherardi, 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003b; Orlikowski, 2010). While studying practices in action, by taking a deeper look into the everyday life of project participants, I found that besides the manifest practices several concealed practices exist. These are described in the following paragraph.
Table 8.1 Manifest practices in the Panama Canal Expansion Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice of Collaboration</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Illustrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting conditions</td>
<td>Actors become aware of taken for granted practices and reflect upon these practices.</td>
<td>Fighting about low bid proposal and profit/cost deviation Struggling about roles and authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking consent</td>
<td>Actors search for something that is shared by different groups</td>
<td>Using metaphors Labeling cultures Sharing a passion for profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafting reciprocal relations</td>
<td>Actors have a drive to collaborate and use their willingness for collaboration to build a relationship.</td>
<td>Organizing activities Bridging Actors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concealed Practices

Complementary to the manifest practices, this study unravels a series of concealed practices. Following the ethnographic research methods I was able to study practices of collaboration ‘up close and in person’ for the period of one year. When applying such a close look at what project participants actually do with regard to collaboration, several covert practices in the collabyrinth ascended. These practices occur at the micro level of the project organization and are not particular obvious to its members. Being concealed, these practices are not directly accessible, observable, or definable. In fact, they are rather hidden, tacit and often linguistically inexpressible in a propositional sense (Corradi et al., 2010; Gherardi, 2009). However, through lengthy observations, engaging with the project participants’ everyday collaboration and how they talk about their collaborative relationship, while being sensitive to how they make sense of and give sense to the organizational context (Ybema et al., 2009), I also came to understand the concealed practices that sustain in cross-cultural collaboration.

The first concealed practice is called ‘submarining’. Used figuratively, this term refers to the act to descend underwater and, like in a submarine, operate autonomously. In the Panama Canal Expansion Program, submarining was seen after a period of conflicts. Project participants distanced themselves from their partners, focused on their own portion of the contract, on their idiosyncratic knowledge and skills and, consequently, they remained separated from other partners in the project.
We have seen that project participants within GUPC searched for structure as they missed an overview of how their project organization was organized. They expressed the need for insight into the deviation of roles and responsibilities and sought for an organizational format. Project members remained focused on their own expertise and the interest of their home organization prevailed because a shared commitment for the GUPC organization was deficient. As a result, the collaborative relationship among the project partners was adversely affected and tensions increased. Furthermore, the recurrence of behavior from previous experiences and enactment of traditional practices is captured in the submarining practice. Connected to the earlier mentioned struggles between the ACP and CH2M Hill, it appeared that CH2M Hill consultants enacted traditional habits rather than incorporated new behavior and practices suitable for their advisory role. The CH2M Hill employees experienced difficulties letting go established practices and felt uncomfortable in the chaperoning position. It troubled them that they could not execute their familiar management tasks, but were asked to stay at a certain distance. Moreover, submarining was seen when project participants emphasized boundaries to distance themselves from each other. One such example is found in the spatial settings within the project. The distance between the project sites, which is roughly 80 kilometers, diminished a collaborative relationship between project participants working in these offices. Project participants developed a strong distinction between the project sites and subcultures emerged, the sites were seen as separate projects. In fact, competition between the Atlantic and the Pacific project site offices was stronger than collaboration. As a consequence, project participants enacted these boundaries in their everyday practices and did not share the knowledge generated at the project site offices. The same holds for the relationship between the project site offices and headquarters. Project participants working on the Atlantic site of the Panama Canal felt remote from the headquarters. The travel distance in time, approximately one hour, was often brought up as a reason to postpone a visit to the Atlantic project site, while the Pacific project site was visited frequently. Submarining, discussed as a concealed practice, takes place in complex situations characterized by uncertainty and conflicting environments. In the collabyrinth, partners choose their idiosyncratic route, focus on their own specialty and disregard interfaces with other partners. Following the paradoxes, influences and ambiguities surrounding...
the project organization, cross-cultural collaboration is shaped by practices that are embedded in the actors’ life world. Swidler (2001) remarks that practices are the infrastructure of repeated interactional patterns. Fundamentally, it is the repetition of the practice that informs contemporary action in the everyday work life. Project participants searched for structures that created boundaries and, based on previous experiences, boundaries were created. As Swidler (2001) aptly portrays, people are forced to return to common structures as the need to engage one another prevails. Indeed, antagonistic interchanges steer project participants to ancient practices and imply a particular challenge for the development of new practices (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010). In this connection it should be noted that when actors join a project organization, their individual, organizational and professional identities as well as other cultural aspects and work practices adapted elsewhere are embedded in their thoughts and actions (Boyacigiller et al., 2004; Jacob, 2005; Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). Hence, a collaborative relationship between project partners does not automatically arise at the beginning of a contract (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011). Consequently, the distinction ‘we’ often appeared as a significant marker of identity for a certain group. Project participants constructed formal and informal boundaries maintaining common practices and rules for collaborations (Bjørkeng et al., 2009), and therefore, fragmentation waited in ambush.

The second concealed practice that I unraveled in this study is called ‘storytelling’. Various stories were brought into the project or evolved in the collaboration between project partners to build on and further develop a collaborative relationship. The revitalization of the ‘One Team, One Mission’ slogan is a case in point here. This slogan originated from the time that control over the Panama Canal was transferred from the American Panama Canal Commission (PCC) to the Panamanian owned Autoridad del Canal de Panamá (ACP) and was introduced to plea for a smooth and seamless transition period. Almost ten years later, ACP’s higher management brought the slogan back to the workplace. This time to enhance collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill aiming at an equal relationship between the Panamanians and the Americans and similar to how the transition phase was remembered (Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012). Under the banner of the slogan, various activities have brought the ACP and CH2M Hill employees somewhat closer together. However,
the revitalization was not marked as such and many project participants never knew the deeper connotation behind it. In addition, the Expansion Program was narrated to the inhabitants of Panama, and beyond, as highly important for the future of Panamanians, the development of the country and the canal’s competitive position in the maritime world (ACP, 2006b). As such, a great sense of pride dominated the project narratives that were told by the ACP and CH2M Hill employees. They were proud to be affiliated with the project and saw it as a privilege to work on the “registered trade mark for Panama” (Jaén Suárez, 2011: 299). A different project narrative prevailed within the GUPC organization. Among its partners, the project was seen as ‘just another project’. Hence, they perceived the project equal to other projects in their careers, decided to roll up the sleeves and finalize the project so that they could move on to the next one. Many times, the members of GUPC uttered the mantra ‘the work needs to be done’. This repeated phrase expressed their basic drive to finalize the project. It illustrates that, even though the circumstances were not ideal, project participants were prepared to put their shoulders to the wheel for the execution of the project. This pragmatic, shared spirit characterizes a down-to-earth attitude; it is in the project participants’ nature to seek for (technical) solutions.

Accordingly, the differing narratives about the project shaped how participants committed to the project and put effort in building a collaborative relationship. The shared stories had an enormous impact on how this relationship is developed: collaboration within the GUPC was rather loose, as project participants saw this project as a temporary state of working together, while the ACP and CH2M Hill developed a more profound relationship with the project. This is in line with Veenswijk and Berendse (2008), who found that organizations may use narratives as a means to engage individual actors in a collaborative process. Their findings suggest that this engagement creates a dialogue recognizing the different experiences and can enhance future work practices. Attempts to bring about collaboration, through repeated interaction and storytelling, therefore supported project participants to reshape and refine their collaborative relationship (Philips et al., 2000). Nevertheless, because different narratives were told in the project organizations of the ACP/CH2M Hill and the GUPC, occasionally the parties clashed and a more non-collaborative situation occurred.
The third concealed practice in this study is ‘synergizing’. This practice was covert in the daily practices and only became visible over time. As project participants spend more time together and recognized that only through collaboration the project could be realized, they opened up to each other’s ideas, expectations and practices. Cross-cultural code-switching, a term coined by Molinsky (2007), refers to intentionally shaping or adjusting one’s behavior and routines to the new circumstances. Aiming at a positive spiral within the process of collaboration, project participants enacted linguistic code-switching and behavioral code-switching. Attempts to overcome the language barrier, like learning Spanish or translating for colleagues, were highly appreciated among the GUPC project participants and resulted in language being less of a hurdle in the daily work environment. Behavioral code-switching entails altering the work attitude and modifying or initiating work practices. When Jan de Nul experienced that their way of working distinguished from the CUSA operators’ work practices, for example, they adjusted their embedded work attitude to a more appropriate one. Aspiring a collaborative work environment, Jan de Nul initiated an event to explain how the work could be done more efficiently, resulting in a more proactive work attitude and a hands-on mentality among the operators. Furthermore, striving for project progress in the GUPC organization, a variety of new practices, such as the technical library, were initiated.

Along the project’s prolongation, participants adapted to the complexity of the everyday situation. They negotiated for mutual concession and shaped practices to improve work processes. Besides improving existing practices, they discussed different work practices and gradually new practices emerged. Moreover, synergizing is portrayed in chaperoning practices. CH2M Hill was hired to chaperone the ACP employees: to guide the company in managing the Panama Canal Expansion Program. In this chaperoning role, the consultants were expected to teach the ACP employees (best) practices of project management, to give them training where needed and to guard the budget and time schedule of the project (Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012). However, chaperoning practices were new to the CH2M Hill consultants, who had expected conducting the project according to their common practices of managing a project. When the work commenced, CH2M Hill employees understood that they had a mentor-role in the project execution. Yet, informally, they soon claimed
authority in the project site offices. Hence, synergy was created as both parties found means to collaborate so that together they achieved results they would not be able to achieve alone.

Developing over time, synergizing is a practice of collaboration involving the translation, negotiation and evolution of practices. This continuous process takes place among project participants who adjust existing work practices and develop new practices that are useful and valid in their collaborative relationship (Bjørkeng et al., 2009; Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011). Actors shape and reshape their idiosyncratic practices, and, in this cycle of mutual interaction, create new practices as well as new ways to address them (Geiger, 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003a; Shimoni & Bergmann, 2006). As such, collaboration in projects involves discarding old practices and overcoming vicious circles of reinforcing perceptions (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011) so that new knowledge, that is not likely concordant with established traditions, can be produced (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010). Keast et al. (2007) emphasize that collaboration entails an interdependent relationship between partners synergizing to create something and maintain a holistic perspective to the desired outcome. This is in line with this study’s findings illustrating that project participants seek to build a collaborative relationship. To make sense of their cultural complex work environment, practitioners redesign practices and develop new ones together. Hence, over time, a ‘negotiate culture’ might arise; a culture containing practices of each incorporated culture as well as some elements of its own making (Brannen & Salk, 2000). An example of an emergent practice is the technical library that was created within GUPC, so that technical information and text could be shared between the Atlantic and Pacific project office.

Table 8.2 provides an overview of the concealed practices found in this study. It shows the practices of collaboration that were rather hidden and not directly accessible, with their illustrations from the field. These practices, some diminishing, others improving collaboration, occurred tacitly and concealed at the micro level of the project organization. Both manifest and concealed practices consist of interconnected actions and activities that illustrate how project participants make sense of the cultural complexity in their everyday work environment.
Chapter 8

Table 8.2 Concealed practices in the Panama Canal Expansion Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice of Collaboration</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Illustrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submarining</td>
<td>Actors recur to previous behavior and enact traditional habits rather than incorporate new roles and practices</td>
<td>Searching for structure Marking boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>Actors are guided by project stories</td>
<td>Project pride One Team, One Mission Following the mantra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergizing</td>
<td>Actors learn from each other and acceptance among them grows</td>
<td>Cross-cultural code-switching Chaperoning</td>
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</table>

Explaining the cultural dynamics in the project organization, the collabyrinth answers the explorative question that was set out for this study. It is the complexity of working together across cultures and practices that transpire these dynamics in the everyday project setting. Exploring the collabyrinth, actors enacted, developed and initiated practices to support them in their journey towards a collaborative relationship. Although some practices rather hindered collaboration, the diminishers of collaboration, these were part of the project participants’ exploration of the cultural dynamics in their daily work life. Amplifiers of collaboration, on the other hand, were practices that encouraged the development of a collaborative relationship between the project partners. Hence, actors came into motion and found their ways, they reflected upon and modified their practices to enhance a collaborative relationship. Furthermore, we can conclude that the actors’ journey to collaboration, as described above, is a routine practice in itself portraying an expedition leading to the necessity of highly developed social relations amongst them. This entails that collaboration advanced due to a strong personal drive to finalize the project successfully, rather than because the project organization stimulated such a work environment.

After answering the sub questions for this study, it is now time to reflect upon the impact of this research for both theory and practice. First, I will take the practices of collaboration to another level of abstraction and connect them to the collaboration continuum. This exercise illustrates this study’s contribution to the academic debates on project management and cross-cultural collaboration. Second, I will discuss my ideas for a follow-up on this research and, third, I will address my recommendations to practitioners in the field of project management.
The Collaboration Continuum

The practices of collaboration convey insight into the development of a collaborative relationship among project participants of the Panama Canal Expansion Program. I suggest that these practices can be placed on a collaboration continuum representing how they affect the product of cross-cultural collaboration. Although it is not my intention to relate the research findings to outcomes in terms of project performance, I propose that the collaboration continuum illustrates the relation between what actors say and do with regard to cross-cultural collaboration and how this fosters their collaborative relationship. Earlier, Huxham and Vangen (2000) introduced a collaboration continuum explaining the extent to which collaboration actually takes place between individuals or between organizations. From their perspective, organizations with little interest in collaboration are placed on the left extreme of the continuum and organizations that are fully involved in collaboration belong at the right side of the extreme (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). In my view, however, the collaboration continuum can reveal much more than whether or not collaboration takes place; it illustrates how collaboration is manifest in the daily practices of project participants. That is to say, the collaboration continuum reveals the outcomes of social processes of collaboration and its consequences for the collaborative relationship in the project organization. Indicating the practices of collaboration on the continuum gives insight into how these practices exert an influence upon the collaboration. Hence, while Huxham and Vangen’s (2000) collaboration continuum merely portrays the perspective of the involved organizations on their collaboration, I propose an extended version of the continuum showing the product of the internal dynamics and its outcomes for the collaborative relationship.

It is important to note here that practices of collaboration are perceived as flexible and ambiguous, but as established and routinized as well. In this study, practice is interpreted through a practice lens, seeing how actors undertake their everyday actions within a constantly evolving context and understanding the ‘situatedness’ of practices (Corradi et al., 2010). Various authors (e.g. Weick et al., 2005; Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009) have put forward that practices are embedded in the everyday life of actors, but that, while practicing, actors are reflexive about their practices and able...
to negotiate and shape their routine practices into new practices. In this process of continuous enactment, refinement, reproduction and change based on tacitly shared understandings within the practicing community, actors socially construct their own realities (Duijnhoven, 2010; Geiger, 2009). According to Weick et al. (2005: 419), “sense making should occur when people are socialized to make do, be resilient, treat constraints as self-imposed, strive for plausibility, keep showing up, use retrospect to get a sense of direction, and articulate descriptions that energize.” As such, sense making is about the interplay between micro level actions and interpretations. Until new processes of sense making occur, practices are established and routinized. Therefore, to understand practices we need to see them as both dynamic and fixed.

Such a balanced perspective on practices inspires us to recognize them in the everyday life of project participants. Hence, a classification of practices portrayed in this chapter illustrates routine practices in the project organization. One needs to bear in mind, however, that this classification is merely temporal and open to change at any time. Furthermore, it is important to know that these practices are invalid when seen without their context, as I could only discover them by studying them in action. The practices described in the preceding empirical chapters are a representation of all practices existing in the project organization at a certain moment. However, they are demonstrated in many different ways and at many different levels of the project organization. In another setting or at another given time, practices of collaboration might come to the fore differently and other practices might appear. Hence, alternative interpretations and other practices of collaboration may contest the central ideas behind the collaboration continuum. The data in this study, of course, do not let themselves be categorized strictly and placed on the collaborative continuum mechanically, yet the analysis has led me to distil these dominant constructions.

**ABC-practices**

The practices of collaboration from this study can be abstracted into A (adverse), B (building), C (connecting) practices. On the collaboration continuum, adverse practices (A), placed on the left end of the scale, are those doings and sayings that withhold collaboration or the development of a collaborative relationship. Building practices
Cross-Cultural Work in the Panama Canal Expansion Program: A Collabrium

(B), located towards the middle of the continuum, refer to actions and activities that attempt to bring about collaboration. And at the far right of the continuum we find connecting practices (C): undertakings that actually enhance collaboration between project participants. In order to place the manifest and concealed practices to this continuum, it is necessary to focus on the explanation and illustration of the practice in its context. That is, the setting in which the practices occurred indicate its association with the ABC-practices. Figure 8.2 illustrates, for the Panama Canal Expansion Program, how the manifest and concealed practices are connected to the collaborative continuum.

The intensive conflicts, to begin with, were manifest in the everyday practices of project participants and obstructed the development of a collaborative relationship. Actors struggled and fought for their idiosyncratic practices, which resulted in various conflicts in the project organization. As a result, collaboration was hindered and efforts to create a collaborative relationship were diminished. ‘Submarining’ is similar to this practice, but was more covert in the daily work environment. Consequently to the conflicts between project participants, both individuals and the organizations they represent held on to familiar behavior and practices rather than opening up for new roles and practices. These practices did not support collaboration nor could it improve a collaborative relationship; the practices withheld actors from developing their collaboration together. As such, conflicting conditions and submarining can be placed under adverse practices on the collaborative continuum. In essence, these practices of collaboration could also be called counter-practices of collaboration, or practices of non-collaboration, as they hinder a collaborative relationship to unfold.

The manifest practice ‘seeking consent’ can be assigned to building practices on the collaborative continuum. In the everyday practice of collaboration, actors build upon shared understandings and commonalities to create cohesion amongst them. They make an effort to improve their relationship. The practice ‘storytelling’ was less evident in the daily project organization. Project stories, a slogan, mantra or narrative, could bring actors closer together, create or maintain a shared feeling for the project. Through these practices participants were brought closer together and interrelation between them began to evolve. Aiming at improving collaboration or building a collaborative relationship, the practices finding common ground and narrating the
project belong to building practices. As explained earlier, building practices are placed in the center of the continuum because the effort to collaborate takes this group of practices away from the left end, where there is no collaboration, and moves it towards the right end, where collaboration is highly enacted.

Crafting reciprocal relations and synergizing are, respectively, the manifest practice and concealed practice fitting within the realm of connecting practices. Crafting reciprocal relations captures the actors’ drive to work together and actions to achieve a collaborative relationship. Hidden, but certainly present, synergizing practices were enacted with the ambition to have a collaborative relationship. Over time, project participants adjusted to each other, learned from each other and nurtured together into a workable collaboration. Situated at the right end of the continuum, connecting practices improve collaboration and aspire enhancing a collaborative relationship among the project participants and the organizations they represent.

All together, the collaboration continuum portrays a picture of the practices of collaboration emerging among the project participants and displays the affect of these practices on the development of a collaborative relationship. In a way, it addresses the quality of collaborative relationships, which is seen as a key factor in successful project outcomes, and provides an in-depth understanding of collaboration in project organizations (e.g. Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Dietrich et
It shows that adverse practices, like fighting about the low bid proposal, as we have seen in the GUPC organization, or the struggles about roles and authority, found in both the GUPC as well as the ACP-CH2M Hill project organizations, withhold project participants from developing a collaborative relationship. However, especially at conflict situations the actors’ differing values and practices come to the fore. Acting as triggers for changing practices, conflicts seem to be needed in a collaboration to create awareness of routine practices and to stimulate actors to reflect and negotiate about new practices (Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012). In essence, the adverse practices obstruct a collaborative relationship in practice, but, at the same time, they steer project participants towards enacting building practices. The building practices portray the actors’ effort to establish a collaborative relationship. In this study, practices like using metaphors, labeling cultures and sharing a passion for the profession emerged as building practices, because via these practices collaboration can slowly advance. Connecting practices give an actual push to collaboration. These practices, such as organizing activities, hiring bridging actors and cross-cultural code switching, enhance a collaborative relationship. For further comprehensiveness, Table 8.3 summarizes the ABC-practices in relation to the practices of collaboration in this study.

It is important to note that in a different context, or seen from an alternative interpretation, practices might be explained differently. This underscores the importance of the researcher’s idiosyncratic analysis and the study’s unique context. The connection between the practices of collaboration to the ABC-practices as described above is inherent to the Panama Canal Expansion Program and the project organizations under study. In other projects these relations could appear to be distinctive; other practices of collaboration might emerge and their connection to the ABC-practices might be different. In addition, I would like to emphasize that although the presentation of the practices might suggest a clear-cut, coherent line of practices applicable to any other mega project, this was certainly not my intention. The practices I presented in this study have guided me to unravel the practices of collaboration and their connection to the collaboration continuum as seen in the Panama Canal Expansion Program.
Table 8.3 ABC-practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABC-practices</th>
<th>Practices of Collaboration</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adverse practices:</td>
<td>Conflicting conditions</td>
<td>Actors become aware of taken for granted practices and reflect upon these practices.</td>
<td>Fighting about low bid proposal and profit/cost deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>withhold collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submarining</td>
<td></td>
<td>Actors recur to previous behavior and enact traditional habits rather than incorporate new roles and practices</td>
<td>Struggling about roles and authority</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building practices:</td>
<td>Seeking consent</td>
<td>Actors search for something that is shared by different groups</td>
<td>Using metaphors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempt to bring about</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td></td>
<td>Actors are guided by project stories</td>
<td>Sharing a passion for profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting practices:</td>
<td>Crafting reciprocal relations</td>
<td>Actors have a drive to collaborate and use their willingness for collaboration to build a relationship.</td>
<td>Organizing activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enhance collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergizing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Actors learn from each other and acceptance among them grows</td>
<td>Cross-cultural code-switching</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chaperoning</td>
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</tbody>
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Contribution to the Academic Debates

The collaboration continuum proves that a practice-based approach in project management is helpful in understanding how actors make sense of cross-cultural collaboration, what they actually do, how they do it, and under what circumstances their actions and activities are carried out. Traditional research on projects and the management of projects is mostly concerned with planning techniques, optimizing
project performance and developing methods for project management (Morris, 2011; Söderlund, 2004). Focused on developing best practices, this research tradition aims at increasing project efficiency and effectiveness. However, social processes and human behavior are often left out in these studies. What is missing in this stream of research is a critical approach exploring how relationships between individuals and collectives are being shaped and reshaped, and how power relations create and sustain social reality in projects (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). Hence, incorporating a social science perspective to gain more insight into the social complexities of projects and the management of projects is becoming a promising line of research (Blomquist et al., 2010; Bresnen et al., 2005a; Jacobsson & Söderholm, 2011; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006; Winter et al., 2006). Given the nature of this study, aiming to understand how collaboration is manifest in the everyday life of project participants, it contributes to this burgeoning stream of research.

In line with Blomquist et al. (2010), I believe that a practice approach in project management can help us understand the internal dynamics and micro activities that occur in a project organization. With a focus on what is actually going on in project settings when values, beliefs, experiences and expectations come together, a focus on practices can achieve a deeper understanding of the lived experience of its practitioners (Bresnen, 2009). The concept of practice enabled me to explain the complex social processes of cross-cultural collaboration as they occurred, and thus to understand what people actually do with regard to collaboration, and in what context practices of collaboration are carried out (Miettinen et al., 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003a; Orlikowski, 2010). Through ethnographic research methods I was able to unravel and explicate how project participants make sense of, account for, take action and deal with their everyday organizational life (Ybema et al., 2009). A fine-grained analysis of the micro activities with regard to collaboration and an analysis from ‘within’ of what actors actually do when they collaborate contribute to the understanding of projects and the field of project management research. With regard to the field of organizational ethnography, this study provides insight into doing ethnographic research in the construction industry and adds value for its longitudinal presence in complex processes of collaboration.
Studying the process of interaction in which practices are translated, negotiated, and new practices are generated allowed me to uncover the becomingness of collaboration in the social interaction among project participants. Insight into the nitty-gritty details of the development of a collaborative relationship and mundane details of the daily practices of collaboration has an explanatory value. It highlights that manifest practices and concealed practices coexist in a project organization and illustrates the interplay between practicing and reflection upon practices, as suggested by several scholars (e.g. Geiger, 2009; Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). Furthermore, this study makes us aware of internal dynamics within a project organization and emphasizes the impact of cross-cultural collaboration in the daily activities of project participants. A focus on the project participants’ practices gave insight into the cultural and institutional diversity and its consequences to the micro level of the project organization. What is more, the interaction between project partners illustrated how public values were enacted in their everyday practices. While scholars in the debate on safeguarding public values focus on the macro use of public values (e.g. Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; De Bruijn & Dicke, 2006; Van Gestel et al., 2008; Veeneman et al., 2009), this study took a bottom-up approach. It demonstrated that, at the micro level, public values were barely reflected. Public values often remained at the macro level of the project, while organizational, professional and personal values emerged on the work floor.

This study illustrates what happens in a cultural complex work environment, where a multiplicity of cultures, but also a wide variety of ideas, and interests, experiences and expectations come together (Boyacigiller et al., 2004). It emphasizes the significance of interaction, the latent power struggles and its influence on cross-cultural collaboration. Constructed in the social interaction among people, practices produce the actors’ social reality (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Geiger, 2009). Hence, this research contributes to the understanding of complexities, contradictions and paradoxes that are inherent to cross-cultural collaboration (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). The ABC-practices unfold and enrich the critical power of practices by explaining how practices affect collaboration in the everyday work life of project participants. As such, the collaborative continuum is not a set scale, but indicates the practices’ outcome on collaboration and the development of a collaborative relationship.
Ideas for Future Research

The present study has set out to investigate how collaboration manifests itself in the everyday work life of project participants in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. By adopting the practice-based approach, this study created insight into the social processes that make a project happen and illustrated project actuality (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006). Identifying practices of collaboration in this mega project provides an image of a project in action and demonstrates how project participants make sense of a cultural complex project setting. Build up from the actions and activities in situ, this research offers a different picture from the dominant approach on project management research.

For a deeper insight into social phenomena in project management, I suggest that incorporating ethnographic research methods is the path to follow. Further insight into the micro activities of project participants gives us a better understanding of how project participants make sense of and negotiate their everyday work life, and, with a focus on practices, we can learn what is actually being done as people do in project management. Moreover, as a means of enriching our understanding of cross-cultural collaboration in the management of projects, there is a need to complement this research with studies of collaboration within other social contexts. More specifically, there is a need for studies exploring how actors build and maintain collaborative relationships in different national, organizational and sectoral project environments. If the development of a collaborative relationship is context-bounded and can be different from one situation to another, it is relevant to explore where and when certain aspects of collaboration become emotionally, politically or naturally opportune for organizational actors. Additionally, a focus on discourses, rituals or symbols, as well as a combination between qualitative and quantitative research methods, will enhance our knowledge on the ‘people’ side of project management.

The practices of collaboration that I presented in this book are based on my interpretation and analyses of the fieldwork at the Panama Canal Expansion Program. The picture that I portrayed derives from my ‘repertoire of interpretations’ (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2010) and is colored by the dynamic momentum of the field research, the choices I made during the writing process and, not to forget, the interpretation of the reader. Although the practices described throughout the study highlight some of the
main issues that are at stake for project participants in an environment where cross-cultural collaboration is required, we should also remain open for and not overlook alternative interpretations for practices of collaboration. The practices presented in the preceding chapters guided me to unravel the ABC-practices out of the thick accounts about cross-cultural collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program. From my point of view, exposure of both manifest and concealed practices enhances our understanding of cross-cultural collaboration in project organizations and widens current research on practices. I would like to note that the practices of collaboration identified in this study might not comprise an exhaustive list. Further research in other project settings may identify additional practices, or place the practices on a different place of the collaborative continuum.

Whether a ‘negotiate culture’ evolved in the Panama Canal Expansion Program, as was found in earlier research on cross-cultural encounters (e.g. Brannen & Salk, 2000; Clausen, 2007), can only be determined in a follow-up of this study. In this study, data was only gathered in the first year of collaboration between the project partners. From what I could observe, as demonstrated in this book, features of a newly developed culture were in the making. Yet, a return to the field is required to further examine if and how a culture typical for this project emerged. Besides, a return to the field is desired to investigate whether another concept belongs in between the prevailing notions ‘collaborative inertia’ and ‘collaborative advantage’ (Huxham & Vangen, 2000, 2004). Instinctively, I feel that an additional concept occurs in the process of collaboration, namely ‘collaborative exertion’. Collaborative inertia refers to the negligible outcome of collaboration (Huxham & Vangen, 2000, 2004) and, as the word inertia expresses, shows a tendency to do nothing or to remain unchanged. When collaborative inertia occurs, practitioners undertake no actions that could make collaboration happen. In contrary, collaborative advantage captures the synergy argument reflecting considerable movements to achieve something that could only be done without working collaboratively (Huxham & Vangen, 2000, 2004). From my perspective, however, the concept ‘collaborative exertion’ is missing. Reflecting a slow motion toward collaboration outcomes, this concept captures the actors’ efforts to the product of collaboration. In between the lack of motion among actors at collaborative inertia and their fast motions resulting in collaborative
advantage, this concept exposes a slow motion towards collaboration outcomes. As said, it is merely a gut feeling. I was not able to go into depth to uncover this notion, so future research should disclose the viability of the concept.

At the end of this book, the ‘so what’ question forces itself upon us. What can we learn from this study on a practical level? If the process of collaboration has been put under the microscope, then what are the lessons learned? How does this study contribute to what actors in project organizations can do? Over the course of the research I often received these questions, and now, they will be answered in the following and final section of this book.

**Dear Project Participant**

In case you have read some of the preceding chapter in this book, it may come as no surprise that I claim that culture and collaboration should be high on the agenda in projects and the management of projects. Owing to the global nature of projects, and to the construction sector’s requirements to work together, project organizations nowadays consist of members residing from a wide variety of cultures. This study, in general, illustrates how project participants make sense of their cultural complex work environment and the process of collaboration, and creates awareness for the need to view the everyday work from a cultural perspective. In addition, this last section portrays five recommendations that can encourage working collaboratively in a project organization. The five P’s, partners, possibilities, patience, philosophy and promotion, capture my key recommendations for working in a cross-cultural project organization. I want to stress that this list is not exhaustive, nor does it give tools; it rather offers five pieces of advice supporting cross-cultural work in practice.

**Partners**

The journey towards a collaborative relationship that is successful for all project participants, starts early in the process of collaboration. Even before organizations decide to form a legal bond of collaboration, like a consortium or a joint venture, they need to unravel their idiosyncratic traits and learn about those of their possible partners. Experts can scan the organizations, their cultures, values, work practices as
well as their ideas and expectations for the project, which provides clear insight into whether or not organizations are aligned to work together. Project partners would do well by becoming acquainted with the organizations, and perhaps the individuals, with which one will be collaborating. A deeper insight into their organizations and its characteristics provides the partners with information on the differences and commonalities amongst them and involves a conversation about these topics. In the dialogue about starting the journey together, one decides upon the issues that are of great value for future collaboration and, together, organizations can decide whether to continue or withdraw from a collaborative relationship. When organizations are positive about working together, they are urged to consider how they will deal with the differences and similarities between them in the near future. Imagining a common future together depends on the discovery of common practices and shared interests, although these might be re-appropriated and re-interpreted (Hibbert & Huxham, 2010). Hence, the journey can only begin when project partners have explored their backgrounds and traditions, and have discussed and agreed upon how these habits and experiences will be translated into concrete practices. As problematic matters are identified and analyzed at an early stage, the risk of these issues sliding and escalating in the further process of collaboration is reduced. Furthermore, a continuous reflection on how these agreements come about on the work floor will advance a collaborative relationship. Along the journey of collaboration and project execution, project participants need to continually nurture the collaborative process.

**Possibilities**

An overview of the project partners and their specific traits, cultures and practices provides a deeper understanding of the project's landscape and portrays possibilities to work together. It is essential to be conscious about the wide variety of cultural differences and similarities that can occur in cross-cultural collaboration, and the possibilities for a fruitful collaboration in the daily work environment. Such possibilities lie in combing the skills and experiences of the project partners, in exploring novel ways of working together, and in obtaining an impression of the aspects in which one needs to further develop. It is important to bear in mind that culture exists at every level of the project and that there are various layers of culture. National,
organizational and professional, but also sectoral levels of culture affect the everyday work practices of project organizations as subcultures can evolve. Navigating through the unfamiliar cultures and practices enriches the project participants with new opportunities and challenges. That is, collaboration in a project organization is not just a matter of discarding old meanings and practices, it is more a matter of negotiating new meanings, adjusting existing work processes and initiating new practices (Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011). In the Panama Canal Expansion Program, for example, the CUSA operators were not used to paying attention to how they could enhance the outcome of their work, while for Jan de Nul operators this was common practice. They taught the CUSA operators how to twist and turn their machines less times a day so that the work could be done more efficiently (Fieldnotes, May 2010). Working collaboratively, the CUSA operators modified their practices so that their collaborative relationship with Jan de Nul advanced. The roles reversed at other occasions. Hence, awareness of the cultural diversity, (best) practices and distinct interests in the project organization provides an abundance of possibilities that can enhance the outcomes of collaboration.

**Patience**

It may be clear that for the development of a collaborative relationship proper attention needs to be paid to dissonant expectations and rooted practices. However, my advice is to remain patient when clashes occur and to recognize that avoiding conflicts and frustration among project participants is impossible. In fact, sometimes conflicts are needed to strengthen collaboration. They often contribute to the articulation of possible misinterpretations and more vital issues such as divergent goals for participation in the project. If well managed, conflicts stimulate openness about the underlying causes of tensions in the relationship and, therefore, act as a valuable ingredient in the process of collaboration (Vaaland, 2004).

It is my recommendation to adopt a more relaxed view about the role of conflict in the project by recognizing conflicts as a natural aspect of people working together. With regard to diminishing and amplifying collaboration, conflict can be either of the two. They diminish collaboration when they are bogged down in emotions and lead to distrust. In this situation, a collaborative relationship is unlikely to be fixed. On the
other hand, conflicts enhance collaboration when they motivate project members to discuss their ideas, perceptions and expectations about how collaboration among them should come about. In this case, the conflict can remain separate from the daily work and its presence can amplify a collaborative relationship in the organization. Furthermore, conflicts are discontinuities of practices and act as triggers for changing practices (Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012). At times of conflicts and serious incidents, actors switch from an un-reflexive mode towards a reflective mode of communication (Geiger, 2009). Yanow and Tsoukas (2009) called the moment when actors step out of their routine practice to focus on how this practice can be adjusted reflection-in-action, because, while practicing, actors reflect upon their practices and are able to change their routine practices into new practices. Hence, conflicts seize an opportunity to change embedded practices and initiate new practices. As such, my advice is to have patience towards the role of conflict and to embrace the principle of cultural clashes and the consequent tensions in the project organization. With the help of an outsider, a specialist that is neutral in the conflicts, these tensions can be used to enhance the collaborative relationship among partners, which can help project managers to prevent cost overruns and delays.

Philosophy

Referring to a narrative that reflects that goal of the project, a shared project philosophy can align the project members in their commitment for the project and support the development of a collaborative relationship. Pitsis et al. (2003) proved that a future perfect strategy, that is, constructing a project that could be imagined and already be completed, created commitment of the partners as they perceived the project as unique and felt excitement for working on this project. In this example, the project philosophy ensured that project members at all levels shared the same values, believed that the project was ‘something special’ and had an ultimate shared goal in mind, rather than partial success for the home organizations. Hence, providing a ‘script’ that project members can translate into their everyday work practices, a project narrative serves as a vehicle through which meanings are negotiated, shared and contested (Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008). It is therefore important that the project narrative captures a complete image of the project and can act as a guiding principle in the execution of the project and the process of collaboration.
One cannot construct nor spread a project narrative alone; stakeholders and other project partners need to be involved in the development of such an intervention. As this is a specialized, time-consuming and skill requiring task, it is advised to leave the process of formulating, framing and communicating the project philosophy to an expert. Furthermore, it is important to remember that counter narratives could evolve in the project organization. These narratives, telling a different story, should not be ignored or diminished, but rather be studied to understand their meaning. Hence, it is vital to continuously depict and reflect on the narrative of the project.

With regard to the recommendation of the project philosophy, elements such as a logo, a shared project language and mutual norms and values can motivate actors and create commitment amongst them. Besides, kick-off meetings, events around a phase transition and other project rituals can support the preservation of the narrative and accommodate the introduction of new practices. Finally, these interventions in the project organization have the power to construct a project identity among the project members.

Promotion

Finally, the last recommendation aims at the need to promote and support collaboration, because it is perceived as the critical success factor in projects and the management of projects (e.g. Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). This strong formula therefore requires serious attention and intensive support. In project organizations, actors need to distinguish diminishers and amplifiers of collaboration and recognize how these practices affect the development of a collaborative relationship. The collaborative continuum can be useful in this exercise. If the practices of collaboration are identified, one can decrease the diminishers and fuel the collaborative relationship by addressing amplifiers. Furthermore, as portrayed in the collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill, an innovative contract can demand new behavior of the project participants. When new behavior is required, actors should be guided in this direction so that they can develop practices belonging to this new behavior.
In the ideal world, a collaborative relationship is achieved when boundaries between companies blur (Keast et al., 2007). In this situation, which is called crossvergence, cultures and practices merge and a heterogeneous culture is constructed (Jacob, 2005). Similar, the hybridization approach perceives cultures as being shaped and reshaped through interactions with other cultures in which people consciously and unconsciously insert new meanings (Shimoni & Bergmann, 2006). It is important to note here, however, that the idea of ‘engineering’ a collaborative relationship underestimates the impact of social dynamics in the development of a collaborative relationship. Moreover, it is essential to recognize that collaboration is not the magic tool solving issues within a project organization. Consequently, partners needs to remain critical towards the theme of collaboration and, knowing how difficult it is to work together, think it through before actually starting this journey together. Especially in cultural complex work environments, it is advised to appoint someone who is occupied with the collaboration between cultural diverse partners and who can ensure that this topic receives its required attention.

In conclusion, these five P’s reflect my main advice for stimulating a collaborative work environment in project organizations. They highlight the importance of a cultural perspective in the management of projects and stress the need for explicit attention to cross-cultural collaboration. Unraveling the cultural complexity in a project organization, as is done in this study, helps us to understand the project actuality and to obtain better insight into the lived experiences of project participants. An equal focus on cultural differences and cultural similarities supports project participants in understanding other cultures, act accordingly and reduce the risk of blunders (Ofori-Dankwa & Ricks, 2000). As such, practitioners can take learning from this case study in their prevention activities to remain within budget and schedule. And perhaps, they will come to agree with me that culture and collaboration need to be high on the project management agenda.
Cross Culture Work: Practices of Collaboration in the Panama Canal Expansion Program

Dutch Summary
Cross Cultureel Werk: Praktijken van Samenwerking in het Uitbreidingsprogramma van het Panamakanaal

Spanish Summary
Trabajo Intercultural: Prácticas de Colaboración en la Ampliación del Canal de Panamá

Appendix 1

References

About the author

NGInfra PhD Thesis Series on Infrastructures
Serving as milestones in mankind’s development, national triumphs and technical advances, mega projects are a ubiquitous part of our everyday life. However, the construction processes of these mega projects often fail to meet expectations as they suffer from cost overruns, delays, and deficit in terms of quality and user satisfaction (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius, & Rothengatter, 2003; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). This problematic performance has attracted academic attention to the management of infrastructure projects. While most studies concentrate on themes such as policy making, contracting, expected outcomes, risks and project performance, both academics and practitioners call for more insight into the ‘people’ side of project management (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). Requiring a combination of skills, knowledge and resources that are organizationally dispersed, the construction of a mega project can only be completed when various parties collaborate. Since each party carries its own idiosyncratic cultures, interpretations, and priorities, we can consider project organizations as complex social settings. Hence, in this culturally complex work environment, collaboration is considered key for successful project outcomes (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006).

The objective of this study is to illustrate the internal dynamics between participants in a project organization, and how this affects collaboration in a mega project. The everyday organizational life in the Panama Canal Expansion Program provides insight into cultural complexity of collaboration and gives a better understanding of how project participants make sense of and deal with the cultural differences and similarities they encounter in their work environment. In this study I sought to understand how collaboration manifests itself in the daily practices of project participants in the Panama Canal Expansion Program.

The theoretical foundation for this research lies in the academic debates about project management and cross-cultural management. Within the field of project management, this study demonstrates the perspective that projects are unique organizational phenomena. Following this approach, researchers pay attention to the
context, culture, and behavior within the project and recognize the need to explore how the relationship between individuals and collectivities are being developed, and how power relations affect the project actors. They claim that project management research should focus on the ‘actuality’ in project organizations and should strive for the lived experiences of its participants (Cicmil et al., 2006). In the scientific discipline around cross-cultural management, this study connects with the perspective that recognizes organizations as a multiplicity of cultures. Culture is not perceived as equal to nation, but rather composed of explicit and tacit assumptions held by a group of people, guiding their perceptions, thoughts, feelings and behaviors that, through social interaction, are learned and passed on to new members of the group (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). In project organizations, where different partners such as public administrators, construction companies, engineers and subcontractors meet, collaboration is inevitable. Hence, numerous cultural differences and similarities, as well as distinctive practices and interests for participation, appear when firms and people come together to build a mega project.

Concerned with everyday work activities and the action and interaction between people, I adopted the practice-based approach to study collaboration. Research of practices examines the internal dynamics in the organization and is interested in what people do, how they do it, and under what circumstances they perform their actions; it focuses on the micro-level interactions. During a year of ethnographic fieldwork, in which I was present at all levels of the project organization, I gathered the data for this study. With a practice lens, I discovered what was actually going on in the project organization, unraveled the practices of collaboration that emerged, and came to understand how project participants make sense of the diversity of cultures in their daily work environment.

In the collaborative relationship within the consortium Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC), I detected practices that hindered the development of a collaborative relationship, diminishers of collaboration, and practices that were aimed at enhancing collaboration: amplifiers of collaboration. Chaperoning, a practice focused on guiding, teaching, and supervising novices in the world of project management, represents the collaboration between the ACP and CH2M Hill. These practices of collaboration portray a picture of how project participants make sense of collaboration in their everyday work life. In the process of collaboration, actors translated, negotiated, and
developed practices to find their way in the project organization. Although they first disagreed on the route and felt disorientated, actors soon concluded that working together was the way towards project completeness. I describe this journey towards developing a collaborative relationship as exploring a \textit{collablrinth}. This neology of ‘collaboration’ and ‘labyrinth’ reflects the complexity of collaboration.

In the collablrinth, six key practices of collaboration can be distinguished. First three manifest practices: (1) conflicting conditions, (2) seeking consent and (3) crafting reciprocal relations. And, second, three concealed practices: (1) submarining, (2) storytelling and (3) synergizing. ‘Conflicting conditions’ indicate the conflicts that obstructed collaboration in the project organization. ‘Seeking consent’ refers to the notion that actors explored for shared understandings, mutual interests and common features within the different organizational groups. The project participants’ willingness to collaborate is captured in ‘crafting reciprocal relations’. Used figuratively, ‘submarining’ depicts the act of distancing oneself from the project partners and operating autonomously without taking other project participants into account. ‘Storytelling’ portrays the stories and narratives that evolved in project organization to enhance a collaborative relationship. As project participants came to realize that collaboration is essential, they became more accepting to each other’s ideas, expectations, and practices, which are reflected in ‘synergizing’.

Placing these practices on the \textit{Collaboration Continuum} represents how they affect the product of cross-cultural collaboration. On the continuum, the practices of collaboration are divided into three categories: (A) Adverse practices, including all practices that hinder collaboration, (B) Building practices, referring to actions and activities that attempt to bring about collaboration, and (C) Connecting practices, undertakings that enhance collaboration. The continuum proves that a practice-based approach in project management is helpful in understanding what is actually going on in a project organization, how actors make sense of cross-cultural collaboration and in what context their practices are carried out.

Finally, I portray five key recommendations for working in a cross-cultural project organization. Highlighting the importance of a cultural perspective in the management of projects, these recommendations stress the need for explicit attention to cross-cultural collaboration. After all, culture and collaboration should be high on the project management agenda.
Dutch Summary

Cross Cultureel Werk: Praktijken van Samenwerking in het Uitbreidingsprogramma van het Panamakanaal

Een kennismaking met het veld

In onze samenleving zijn mega projecten overal aanwezig. Sinds jaar en dag vertegenwoordigen mega projecten mijlpalen in de ontwikkeling van de mensheid, dienen zij als nationale triomfen en zijn zij een blijk van technische vooruitgang. De tunnel die Frankrijk met Groot-Brittannië verbindt, het Empire State Building en de Nederlandse Delta Werken worden net als het Panamakanaal gezien als een van de zeven wonderen van de moderne wereld39. De bouw van deze mega projecten worden gekenmerkt door de grote omvang, de hoge realisatie kosten en het lange ontwikkelingsproces; het duurt vaak tientallen jaren voordat een mega project wordt opgeleverd. Tevens zijn er vaak veel partijen bij het constructieproces betrokken en heeft dit proces een flinke invloed op de economie, het milieu en de samenleving. Echter, resultaten van het bouwproces vallen meestal tegen: mega projecten kampen met kosten overschrijdingen, vertragingen en gebrek aan kwaliteit en gebruikersvriendelijkheid (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006).

In verschillende academische kringen wordt, en is er, onderzoek gedaan naar mega projecten. Over het algemeen richten deze onderzoeken zich op thema’s als beleidsontwikkeling, contracten, verwachte uitkomsten, risico’s en project resultaten, maar er is tevens de behoefte ontstaan om meer inzicht te krijgen in de ‘mens’-kant van project management (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). Aangezien er verschillende partijen betrokken zijn bij het bouw proces, elk met zijn eigen kennis, ervaring en specialiteit, kunnen we mega projecten zien als complexe sociale omgevingen. Immers, iedere partij brengt haar eigen, diepgewortelde, culturele waarden en werkwijzen mee. De project organisatie wordt daarom gekleurd door talrijke culturele verschillen en overeenkomsten, door specifieke gewoonten en gebruiken en door uiteenlopende interesses voor project deelname. In deze complexe omgeving wordt samenwerking gezien een kritische succes factor voor project resultaten (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006).

Cultuur speelt een belangrijke rol in samenwerkingsrelaties. Het idee dat cultuur gelijk gesteld kan worden aan nationaliteit voerde lange tijd de toon in onderzoeken naar cross-cultureel management (e.g. Hofstede, 1980). Inmiddels heeft er in dit onderzoeksveld een verschuiving plaatsgevonden naar een perspectief dat minder interesse heeft in het vergelijken van culturele aspecten, maar juist op zoek is naar de interactie tussen culturen, de invloed van cultuur op een organisatie en hoe mensen omgaan met de culturele complexiteit van de organisatie (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). Mensen in organisaties zijn continue bezig met het interpreteren en aanpassen van hun waarden, gebruiken en interesses. Ook geeft men een eigen interpretatie aan de sociale debatten en abstracte beweringen over publieke waarden die gelden in de samenleving. Efficiëntie, transparantie en veiligheid, bijvoorbeeld, zijn abstracte termen die betekenis krijgen in de uitvoering van een mega project. Het academische debat over het waarborgen van publieke waarden heeft tot op heden voornamelijk aandacht besteed aan een implementatie van bovenaf, terwijl het eveneens interessant is om te kijken hoe deze publieke waarden geïnterpreteerd en aangepast worden in het proces van samenwerking, waarbij een schat aan culturen, interesses en verwachtingen samen komen. Door specifiek aandacht te besteden aan de acties en interacties van project medewerkers op het micro niveau van de organisatie, richt dit onderzoek zich op de praktijken van samenwerking. Met andere woorden, wat doen mensen als ze samenwerken in een cultureel complexe werkomgeving? Dit brengt me bij het centrale thema van dit onderzoek.

In deze studie probeer ik te achterhalen hoe samenwerking tot uiting komt in de dagelijkse praktijk van project deelnemers in uitbreidings programma van het Panamakanaal. Centraal staan het verkrijgen van inzicht in de culturele complexiteit van samenwerking en het beschrijven hoe samenwerking tussen medewerkers in het mega project tot stand komt. Een belangrijk uitgangspunt hierbij is het bestuderen hoe zij (publieke) waarden, gebruiken en interesses interpreteren en aanpassen om zo te begrijpen hoe actoren betekenis geven aan de culturele verschillen en overeenkomsten in hun werkomgeving.

De hoge impact die mega projecten hebben op de samenleving en het feit dat eerdere onderzoeken hebben aangetoond dat cultuurverschillen een oorzaak zijn van project fiasco's (e.g. Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006)
Praktijken van samenwerking in mega projecten

De academische discussies over project management en cross-cultureel management vormen de theoretische basis voor dit onderzoek. Binnen het veld dat gericht is op projecten en het managen van projecten bestaat een grote verscheidenheid aan onderzoeksbenaderingen. De traditionele benadering wendt zich tot projecten vanuit een technisch oogpunt en is gericht op het ontwikkelen van betere werkmethoden zodat de doelmatigheid en effectiviteit van project management verhoogd kunnen worden. Het doel van deze benadering is dat projecten op tijd, binnen budget en volgens bestek worden opgeleverd. Een andere benadering binnen dit onderzoeksveld vindt zijn oorsprong in de sociale wetenschappen en bestudeert de gedrag- en organisatieaspecten van project organisaties (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Söderlund, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). Deze benadering, waarbij dit onderzoek zich aansluit, beschouwt projecten als unieke organisatiefenomenen. Vanuit dit perspectief zijn projecten tijdelijke, sociale overeenkomsten waarbij onderzoekers aandacht besteden aan de context, cultuur en opvattingen binnen het project. Tevens is er vraag naar inzicht in hoe relaties tussen individuen en groepen zich ontwikkelen en hoe machtsrelaties invloed hebben op de sociale werkelijkheid van project medewerkers. Onderzoekers stellen dat er aandacht besteed dient te worden aan de ‘project actualiteit’, de dagelijkse gang van zaken binnen project organisaties, en zij vinden het belangrijk om de ervaringen van project deelnemers vast te leggen (Cicmil et al., 2006). Door een project organisatie van binnenuit te bekijken kan gedrag in deze organisaties worden beschreven en wordt kennis over de interne dynamieken van een project organisatie vergaard.
Recentelijk is binnen het veld van project management een benadering geïntroduceerd waarbij praktijken in het middelpunt staan. Deze benadering (de *Practice Turn*) legt het accent op actie en interactie, op de details van het werk en bestudeert wat mensen doen en zeggen omtrent een specifieke gebeurtenis of bezigheid. Complex organisatie verschijnselen kunnen middels het praktijk concept worden uitgelegd. Dat wil zeggen dat met behulp van dit concept inzicht verkregen wordt in wat mensen doen, hoe zij dat doen en onder welke omstandigheden zij hun acties uitvoeren. Het deelnemen aan een praktijk is een continue proces waarin men, op basis van gedeelde impliciete kennis, gezamenlijk de praktijk uitvoert, verfijnt, herhaalt en verandert (Geiger, 2009). In dit proces neemt men regelmatig een rustmoment waarin betekenis wordt gegeven aan de praktijk alvorens deze weer verder te ontwikkelen. Men stapt dan als het ware uit de routine om te reflecteren en betekenis te geven aan wat er gebeurd is en hoe de praktijk aangescherpt kan worden tot een verbeterde of nieuwe praktijk. Zoals gezegd, de aandacht voor praktijken laat zien wat er daadwerkelijk gaande is in een project organisatie en duidt hoe medewerkers betekenis geven aan de verscheidenheid van culturen en gebruiken in hun dagelijkse werkomgeving.

In de wetenschappelijke discipline rondom cross-cultureel management vindt dit onderzoek aansluiting bij de stroming die organisaties omschrijft als een veelvoud van culturen. Vanuit dit perspectief vormen actoren gedeelde assumpties binnen de organisatie, maar verkrijgen zij ook andere assumpties van buiten de organisatie (Boyacigiller et al., 2004). In dit perspectief wordt cultuur niet als evenredig aan nationaliteit toegekend, maar wordt het gezien als een bundel van impliciete en expliciete assumpties die de percepties, gedachtes, gevoelens en het gedrag van een groep mensen beïnvloedt omdat deze door interactie worden aangeleerd en overgedragen (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). Wanneer mensen samen komen in een project organisatie is hun afzonderlijke identiteit nog steeds geworteld in de thuis organisatie, in hun beroep en in andere groepen waar men deel van uit maakt (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). Dat betekent dat in samenwerkingsrelaties, waarbij verschillende culturen en werkwijzen elkaar ontmoeten, mensen soms afstand moeten nemen van enkele traditionele gewoonten en gebruiken. Zij interpreteren hun gewoonten en gebruiken en dienen deze wellicht aan te passen.
om samenwerking mogelijk te maken. De onderzoekers Huxham en Vangen (2004) stellen dat samenwerking twee kanten uit kan gaan: het kan dusdanig tegenvallen dat de uitkomst van samenwerking beneden de verwachting is, of het kan voordelen opleveren die de partijen afzonderlijk van elkaar niet kunnen behalen.

In mega projecten is samenwerking onvermijdelijk: verschillende organisaties moeten hun kennis, vaardigheden en ervaringen samenvoegen om het project te realiseren. Iedere partij brengt haar eigen cultuur en werkpraktijken mee, haar gevestigde ideeën en gewoontes, en haar specifieke belang en perspectief op deelname aan het project. Desondanks zijn zij van elkaar afhankelijk. Met name in de bouwsector zijn er voorbeelden te vinden van problemen in samenwerkingsverbanden tussen organisaties. Na hevige kritiek op tegenvallende project resultaten, gebrek aan integratie en een cultuur waarin de schuld wordt afgeschoven in plaats van naar een oplossing wordt gezocht, is de bouwsector genoodzaakt om zich te concentreren op een betere samenwerking (Dietrich et al., 2010; Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011; Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008). Opvallend is echter dat, ondanks de moeilijkheden van samenwerking en de grote culturele diversiteit, er weinig bekend is over de bewuste en onbewuste gevolgen van deze kenmerken op het dagelijkse niveau van project organisaties (Ainamo et al., 2010). Door gebruik te maken van het praktijkconcept en dus te kijken naar de dagelijkse gewoonten en gebruiken van actoren heeft dit onderzoek als doel inzicht te geven in de interne dynamieken rondom de culturele complexiteit. Daarnaast is het streven om een beter beeld te ontwikkelen van samenwerkingsprocessen op het micro niveau van de project organisatie.

**Etnografie in de praktijk**

De wetenschapsfilosofische basis voor dit onderzoek ligt in de sociaal constructivistische ontologie en interpretatieve epistemologie. Dit perspectief berust op de gedachte dat een sociale werkelijkheid wordt geconstrueerd in de interacties en intersubjectieve interpretaties van mensen. Deze geconstrueerde werkelijkheid is gevuld met zowel een culturele en historische context als met morele, openbare en persoonlijke waarden waarbij de onderzoeker een actieve bijdrage levert aan het proces van de sociale constructie (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Ybema et al., 2009). Dit in tegenstelling tot het positivisme, waarbij onderzoekers uitgaan van een

Gezien het gegeven dat dit onderzoek een beter beeld wil krijgen van de dagelijkse praktijk in de project organisatie en benieuwd is naar hoe project medewerkers betekenis geven aan de culturele complexiteit van hun werkomgeving, sluit een etnografische methodologie goed aan. Geïnspireerd door antropologie, wordt middels organisatie-etenografie een fenomeen binnen de organisatie van dichtbij bestudeert. Dit betekent dat de onderzoeker het verschijnsel voor een lange tijd bestudeerd, onderdeel wordt van wat mensen bezigt en hoe men over deze bezigheid spreekt. Tevens is de onderzoeker sensitief voor hoe men betekenis geeft aan deze activiteit en de context van de organisatie (Ybema et al., 2009). Juist omdat de onderzoeker een belangrijke rol speelt in de interpretatie van de sociale werkelijkheid, is reflexiviteit essentieel. Deze reflexiviteit uit zich in een gedetailleerde en transparante beschrijving van hoe het onderzoek heeft plaats gevonden, van de gemaakte keuzes en van de onderzoeker haar persoonlijke achtergrond en rol binnen het onderzoek. Etnografisch onderzoek wordt gepresenteerd in een etnografie: een sterk gedetailleerde beschrijving van het onderzoeksveld zodat de lezer het gevoel krijgt aanwezig te zijn geweest (Bate, 1997).

Het uitbreidingsprogramma van het Panamakanaal werd als casus voor dit onderzoek gekozen. Dit mega project voldeed aan de eisen voor deze studie: het ligt buiten Nederland, op een locatie (Centraal Amerika) waar nog weinig mega projecten onderzocht waren, de voertaal van het project was Engels en, nog belangrijker, ik kreeg toegang tot dit project. Van juli 2009 tot juli 2010 was ik dagelijks aanwezig in de project organisatie. Rijkswaterstaat bracht me in contact met ACP (Autoridad del Canal de Panamá) en met hulp van de Nederlandse Ambassade in Panama leerde
ik mensen binnen het consortium GUPC (Grupo Unidos por el Canal) kennen. Op alle niveaus van de project organisatie kon ik observeren en interviews uitvoeren. Ik sprak met medewerkers op de bouwplaats, opzichters, administratief personeel en managers over hun ideeën, gevoelens, ervaringen en overtuigingen wat betreft samenwerking in het project. Deze interviews hadden een open karakter waardoor respondenten spontaan konden spreken over thema’s die hen aan het hart lagen. De observaties vonden plaats in de project kantoren gelegen aan de Atlantische Oceaan (in het dorp Gatún) en de Grote Oceaan (in Cocolí). Zowel bij ACP als bij GUPC liep ik met voormannen, engineers en project managers mee om hun dagelijkse bezigheden te observeren. Tevens was ik aanwezig bij vergaderingen, speciale gelegenheden van de organisaties en kon ik tusendoor vrij rondlopen in de kantoren. Ik noteerde wat er werd gezegd, maakte tekeningen van de kantoorinrichtingen en beschreef waar mensen zaten. Ook hield ik een persoonlijk dagboek bij. Naast de interviews en observaties verkreeg ik informatie over het mega project en haar context via documenten. Zo verzamelde ik onder andere krantenartikelen, brochures, presentaties, beleidsdocumenten, jaarrapporten, organigrammen, contracten, wetenschappelijke onderzoeken, documenten van de aanbesteding, foto’s, kaarten en video materiaal. Met behulp van het kwalitatieve data analyse programma Atlas. ti analyseerde ik de onderzoeksgerevens en begon ik het schrijfproces. Ik begon met de empirische hoofdstukken van dit boek, waarin uitgebreide beschrijvingen van de praktijken van samenwerking die in het onderzoek naar voren kwamen inzicht geven in de interne dynamieken binnen de project organisatie. Ik liet enkele sleutelrespondenten mijn teksten lezen en vroeg hen om commentaar, voornamelijk ter bevestiging, maar ook omdat ik hen inzicht wilde geven in de etnografische stijl waarin de data wordt gepresenteerd. Tevens lazen mijn professoren, academische collega’s en enkele project managers mijn teksten, presenteerde ik op verschillende academische conferenties en publiceerde ik een artikel in een wetenschappelijk tijdschrift (zie Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012).

Zoals bij het nemen van een foto, kan een beeld vanuit verschillende perspectieven geschetst worden. Het verhaal dat ik presenteer in dit proefschrift is gebaseerd op mijn perspectief en interpretatie, vanuit hoe ik de situatie heb bekeken. Mijn culturele achtergrond: Nederlandse vrouw, opgegroeid in een Westerse maatschappij,
geschoold in (HBO) Personeelsmanagement en (WO) Cultuur, Organisatie en Management, en de opvoeding die ik heb genoten, zijn van invloed geweest op mijn kijk op het onderzoeksveld. Enerzijds was ik regelmatig een vreemdeling in het veld, wat me hielp om bepaalde zaken op te merken, terwijl anderen deze als normaal beschouwden. Anderzijds werd ik vriendelijk opgenomen in de project organisatie en voelde ik me snel thuis in. Nadat ik het veldwerk had afgesloten bleef ik op de hoogte van de ontwikkelingen in het mega project, hield ik contact met sleutelrespondenten, en bezocht ik Panama nog enkele malen zodat ik onderzoeksdata en voorlopige analyses kon verifiëren.

Het Panamakanaal: een blik terug om vooruit te kijken
Grenzend aan Costa Rica en Colombia verbindt Panama Midden- en Zuid-Amerika. Al sinds de ontdekking van het land zijn er ideeën over het bouwen van een binnenweg door Midden Amerika die de Atlantisch Oceaan en de Grote Oceaan met elkaar in verbinding brengt. In 1881, toen Panama nog een provincie van Colombia was, startten de Fransen met de bouw van een kanaal op zeeniveau door Panama. Onder leiding van de bekende Suez Kanaal ingenieur, Ferdinand de Lesseps, probeerde men te vechten tegen overstromingen, landverschuivingen, corruptie en de aanhoudende gele koorts en malaria epidemicen, maar dat ging mis en in 1889 het project kwam ten einde (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977; Parker, 2009). De president van Amerika, Theodore Roosevelt, kwam direct in actie. Overtuigd dat een kanaal van immens belang was voor de ontwikkeling van Amerika, zowel economisch als ter bescherming van de kustlijn, ondersteunde hij een staatsgreep waarmee Panama onafhankelijk werd van Colombia. Er werd afgesproken dat Amerika de beschikking kreeg over een gebied van tien mijl breed langs het kanaal, de Kanaal Zone, waarin Amerika volledige sovereiniteit kon genieten. Als gevolg van de afspraken werd Panama op drie manieren afhankelijk van Amerika. Ten eerste werd een tweeledig betaal systeem ingevoerd waarbij Amerikanen betaald kregen in gouden munten, terwijl Panamezen en andere kanaalbouwers in de minder waardevolle zilveren munt werden betaald. Ten tweede werden Panamezen als lagere bevolkingsgroep beschouwd en uitgesloten middels bordjes als “alleen blanken”. Ten derde zorgde de acceptatie van de Amerikaanse dollar als legaal betaalmiddel ervoor dat Panama
geen eigen financieel beleid kon voeren. Ergo, op papier was het kanaal van Panama en onder controle van Amerika, maar in werkelijkheid werd de Kanaal Zone gezien als een Amerikaanse staat waarin Amerikaanse wet- en regelgeving van kracht waren (Harding, 2006).

Op 15 augustus 1914 werd het Panamakanaal officieel geopend. Het project had tien jaar geduurd, had mensen uit de hele wereld aangetrokken en werd zes maanden eerder opgeleverd tegen een kostprijs die USD$ 23.000.000,- onder de geschatte prijs lag (McCullough, 1977). Na de opening bleef het Panamakanaal, tot frustratie van de Panamezen, in handen van de Amerikanen. Jarenlang waren er discussies over wie het kanaal in beheer zou moeten hebben, maar pas in 1977 ondertekenden de Panamese president Omar Torrijos en de Amerikaanse president Jimmy Carter nieuwe afspraken over het Panamakanaal. Er werd besloten om de waterweg geleidelijk over te dragen aan Panama en vanaf 31 december 1999 is Panama officieel eigenaar van het Panamakanaal. Sindsdien is ACP volledig verantwoordelijk voor de uitvoering, het beheer, het management, het onderhoud, de beveiliging en verbeteringen van het kanaal.


Het complete uitbreidingsprogramma is verdeeld in vier onderdelen. Deel 1 beslaat het ontwerp en de bouw van een nieuwe set sluizen. Deel 2 omvat de grondverzet
werkzaamheden die nodig zijn om plaats te maken voor de nieuwe sluizen en de nieuwe aanvoerroute. Het derde deel richt zich op de baggerwerkzaamheden die nodig zijn om het kanaal te verbreden en verdiepen. Deel 4 van het programma heeft als doel om de water toevoer naar het kanaal te verbeteren, want om meer sluizen in gebruik te kunnen nemen is meer water nodig. Binnen dit onderzoek ligt de nadruk op het eerste deel van het programma, het meest prestigieuze onderdeel van het mega project: het Third Set of Locks Project. Dit project, dat geschat is op US$ 3.2 miljard is het duurste project binnen het gehele uitbereidingsprogramma, welke een berekende totaalprijs heeft van US$ 5.2 miljard. Ter ondersteuning van de project management taken heeft ACP het Amerikaanse adviesbureau CH2M Hill in de arm geslagen. Na een aanbestedingprocedure besloten ACP en CH2M Hill om het consortium GUPC in te huren voor de uitvoering van dit deel van het project. GUPC wordt gevormd door de bedrijven Sacyr uit Spanje, Impregilo uit Italië, Jan de Nul uit België en CUSA uit Panama.

Tussenspel: de weg naar samenwerking
Op 8 juli 2009 wordt tijdens een spannende ceremonie bekend gemaakt welk consortium de aanbesteding voor het ontwerpen en bouwen van de nieuwe sluizen in het Panamakanaal heeft gewonnen. ACP kondigde aan dat GUPC de meeste punten heeft gehaald voor het technische voorstel. Dat is belangrijk, maar omdat dit puntenaantal slechts iets groter was dan wat de andere partijen behaalden, speelde ook het prijsvoorstel van iedere partij een grote rol. ACP maakte bekend dat GUPC de laagste prijs voor het project heeft geboden: US$ 3.118.880.001,- en daarmee het aanbestedingsproces wint. Tijdens de ceremonie komt GUPC er echter achter dat ACP een hoger bedrag had gereserveerd voor de uitvoer van het project, wat een bittere nasmaak geeft. Het gevoel dat er te laag geboden is bekruipet de project partijen van GUPC. Discussies over hoe kosten en winst onderling verdeeld moeten worden voerden de toon. Ook waren er moeilijkheden rondom de overgang van de aanbestedingsfase naar de uitvoeringsfase. Kortom, de samenwerking tussen de partijen binnen GUPC kwam onder grote druk te staan.
Praktijken binnen de GUPC project organisatie: samenwerking verhinderen

In dit eerste empirische hoofdstuk laat ik zien hoe samenwerking tot uiting kwam tussen de project medewerkers van GUPC. Verschillende praktijken van samenwerking tonen aan hoe actoren betekenis gaven aan en omgingen met de culturele complexiteit in hun dagelijkse werkzaamheden. Medewerkers gebruikten metaforen om de organisatie en de interne dynamieken binnen de projectorganisatie te beschrijven. De metaforen die naar voren kwamen zijn: ‘oorlog’, ‘gearrangeerd huwelijk’, ‘bergbeklimmen’, dieren en ‘overheidsinstelling’. Deze werden gebruikt om te reflecteren op de situatie in de project organisatie en hielpen project medewerkers om elkaar te begrijpen in het samenwerkingsproces. Het gebruik van metaforen illustreert de gedachten, gevoelens, interacties en ervaringen van project medewerkers en toont tevens aan hoe cross-culturele samenwerking in de project organisatie vorm kreeg.

Om de complexiteit van de project organisatie te vereenvoudigen, maar ook om te kunnen identificeren en standaardiseren, maakten actoren gebruik van culturele etiketten. Het nationaal cultuur etiket werd gebruikt om mensen te duiden op basis van nationaliteit en stereotyperingen die kenmerkend zijn voor een land. Wat opvalt is dat naast het gebruik van de etiketten ‘Spanjaarden’, ‘Italianen’, ‘Belgen’ en ‘Panamezen’ er twee etiketten ontstonden die deze groepen nog verder simplificeerden. Gebaseerd op de locaties van de hoofdkantoren van de thuis organisaties in Europa verdeelden de etiketten ‘zuiderlingen’ en ‘noorderlingen’ de medewerkers binnen GUPC in slechts twee culturele groepen. Opmerkelijk is dat deze etiketten slechts in bepaalde situaties werden toegepast. Wanneer men sprak over werkhouding dan werden Spanjaarden en Italianen niet onder hetzelfde etiket geschaard, want wat dit thema betreft zag men een duidelijk verschil tussen beide culturen. Het nationaal cultuur etiket was diep geworteld in de dagelijkse gesprekken en praktijken binnen de project organisatie. Regelmatig ging het hierbij om het creëren van afstand tussen medewerkers in plaats van het versterken van de samenwerking. Het organisatie cultuur etiket had hetzelfde effect. Dit etiket, gebaseerd op een algemeen beeld dat actoren hadden over de thuis organisaties en de daarbij behorende culturele waarden en praktijken, voedde de subjectieve interpretaties van medewerkers over de groepen binnen GUPC. Het gebruik van metaforen en etiketten laat zien dat project medewerkers op zoek waren naar
een manier om de complexiteit van de organisatie te begrijpen, men zocht naar overeenkomsten en gemeenschappelijke interesse. Echter, op de werkvloer beletten deze praktijken het proces van samenwerking.

Ook de ruimtelijke indeling van het project had invloed op de samenwerking binnen GUPC. Het projectkantoor aan de Atlantische Oceaan werd voornamelijk gerund door medewerkers van Sacyr, terwijl het projectkantoor aan de Grote Oceaan door Impregilo medewerkers werd geleid. In de dagelijkse omgang werd steevast verschil gemaakt tussen de twee locaties, waardoor er weinig aansluiting tussen de twee projectkantoren was. Naast de projectkantoren was er ook het GUPC hoofdkantoor, gelegen in Corozal Oeste, vlakbij Panama Stad. Project medewerkers identificeerden zich sterk met de locatie waar ze werkten, en markeerden grenzen tussen de drie locaties van het project. Ze voelden zich afgezonderd van het hoofdkantoor, maar onderscheidden zich ook sterk van de andere project locaties.

Verder blijkt uit observaties in de project organisatie dat medewerkers behoefte hadden aan een duidelijke structuur. Er bleek geen eenduidige organisatie diagram te zijn, waardoor een helder inzicht in de formele relaties binnen GUPC ontbrak. Het resultaat van de ruimtelijke indeling van de project organisatie en het gebrek aan een heldere organisatie structuur was dat medewerkers zich vast hielden aan traditionele gewoontes en gebruiken.

De uitkomsten van de praktijken genoemd in dit hoofdstuk laat een differentiatie, segregatie en fragmentatie zien tussen de project medewerkers. Aangezien actoren voornamelijk aandacht besteedden aan onderlinge verschillen en grenzen werd de emotionele afstand vergroot; er ontstond een ‘kanaal’ tussen hen. De praktijken genoemd in dit hoofdstuk noem ik daarom ‘verhinderaars van samenwerking’.

**Samenwerking binnen GUPC: versterkende praktijken**

In navolging op het vorige hoofdstuk presenteer ik in dit hoofdstuk praktijken van samenwerking die de project medewerkers uitvoerden, vormden en ontwikkelden ten behoeve van een samenwerkingsrelatie in de project organisatie. Ondanks de moeilijkheden binnen GUPC zagen project medewerkers dat het aanpassen aan elkaar en het delen van kennis met elkaar noodzakelijk was om vooruitgang in het project te realiseren.
Zo vond men elkaar op basis van gedeelde interesses. De passie die men voor het vak heeft bracht project medewerkers bij elkaar. Men sprak over andere mega projecten waaraan men had gewerkt, over opleidingen die men had genoten en over de passie die ze deelden. Men sprak dezelfde taal. Binnen de project organisatie werd tevens de mantra ‘het werk moet gedaan worden’ gedeeld. Deze mantra was dagelijks op de werkvloer van GUPC te horen en vertegenwoordigde een pragmatische werkhouding van project medewerkers die gedreven waren om het project af te ronden. De gedeelde interesses en deze mantra hielpen project medewerkers om een relatie op te bouwen en tot samenwerking te komen.

Enkele maanden na de start van de uitvoeringsfase kondigden ‘bruggenbouwers’ zich aan: mensen met een neutrale positie in de project organisatie begonnen als tussenpersoon te fungeren. In eerste instantie waren zij ingehuurd voor hun specifieke kennis en ervaring, in voornamelijk Amerikaanse mega projecten, maar zij ontwikkelden zich tevens als belangrijke personen die een brug konden slaan tussen de verschillende project medewerkers. Deze bruggenbouwers bleken essentieel in het samenwerkingsproces binnen GUPC. Zij traden op als vertalers, deelden hun kennis en ervaringen, en waren, omdat ze geen relatie hadden met een van de thuis organisaties, onpartijdig in conflicten. Juist omdat deze personen minder verbonden waren met GUPC konden zij vrijer en flexibeler opereren, en gaven zij tevens een andere kijk op de alledaagse project situatie.

In interacties tussen project medewerkers begon men zich aan te passen aan de ander. Actoren veranderden hun taal of gedrag om op deze manier samen een beter resultaat te bereiken. Men leerde de taal van de ander kennen, door Spaanse of Engelse les te nemen, waardoor het taalverschil kleiner werd en de interactie en samenwerking verbeterden. Ook pasten mensen hun werkhouding aan en veranderden zij enkele praktijken binnen hun werk. Binnen GUPC paste een andere werkhouding beter en door praktijken aan te passen werd de onderlinge samenwerking sterker. Verder werden er ook nieuwe praktijken ontwikkeld, waar een technische bibliotheek speciaal voor de leden van de project organisatie een voorbeeld van is.

Tot slot werd er ook op een informeel niveau gewerkt aan de samenwerking tussen project medewerkers. Actoren hadden de behoefte om elkaar beter te leren
kennen, om de verschillende culturele achtergronden te mengen en om tijd met elkaar door te brengen. Er werden daarom, vanaf de werkvloer, verschillende sociale activiteiten georganiseerd. Deze activiteiten stimuleerden medewerkers niet alleen om meer dan alleen het dagelijkse werk met elkaar te delen, er ontstonden ook vriendschappen binnen GUPC. Project medewerkers hebben kennelijk een natuurlijke drijfveer om samen te werken en zijn bereidwillig om een samenwerkingsrelatie op te bouwen.

De praktijken die in dit hoofdstuk worden gepresenteerd delen het doel om samenwerking binnen de project organisatie te verbeteren en noem ik daarom ‘versterkers van samenwerking’. Project medewerkers integreerden en waren betrokken. Dit betekent dat, ondanks de venijnige situatie in de dagelijkse werk omgeving, er een onderliggende behoefte was tot samenwerken die de medewerkers met elkaar verbond.

**Chaperonneren: samenwerking tussen ACP en CH2M Hill**

Aangezien ACP nooit eerder een mega project ter grootte van het uitbreidingsprogramma van het Panamakanaal had uitgevoerd, werd besloten hulp van een ervaren adviesbureau in te schakelen. Het gerenommeerde Amerikaanse kantoor CH2M Hill won de aanbesteding voor project management in het mega project. Echter, al snel bleek dat beide partijen verschillende ideeën hadden over hoe deze samenwerking vorm moest krijgen.

ACP beschreef in de aanbestedingsdocumenten dat het op zoek was naar een partij die de organisatie kon ondersteunen en adviseren bij de uitvoering van de project management taken. De externe partij zou het project niet autonoom uitvoeren, maar juist samenwerken met de medewerkers van ACP om hen het vak te leren. ACP had een intensieve samenwerkingsrelatie voor ogen waarbij de rol van het adviesbureau lag in het trainen, adviseren en sturen van de ACP medewerkers. Anderzijds, CH2M Hill medewerkers veronderstelden een standaard uitvoering van een project management opdracht. Zij dachten de controle en leiding van het project over te nemen, om de dagelijkse procedures en processen binnen het project te begeleiden en afgerekend te worden op het project resultaat. Het contract met ACP vroeg om een ander soort gedrag, anders dan wat de adviseurs gewend waren.
ACP beschreef nauwkeurig hoe ze de samenwerking met de adviseurs voor ogen hadden. Ik noem deze manier van samenwerking ‘chaperonneren’. Een chaperonne begeleidt en beschermt een nieuweling, leert de nieuwkomer de gewoonten en gebruiken, deelt ervaringen en geeft advies over hoe zich te gedragen. ACP ontwierp een nieuwe manier van samenwerking waarbij medewerkers nauw betrokken waren bij de dagelijkse werkzaamheden in het mega project. Op sleutelposities werden twee mensen geplaatst: een ACP medewerker en een CH2M Hill adviseur. Voor de CH2M Hill adviseurs was deze vorm van samenwerking nieuw. Normaliter hebben zij de vrijheid om een project uit te voeren, om besluiten te nemen en worden zij verantwoordelijk gehouden voor de uitkomst van een project. In dit project was dat anders. Officieel hield ACP alle autoriteit en verantwoordelijkheid, terwijl CH2M Hill, in de rol van chaperonne, het werk van ACP medewerkers overzag, hen praktijken van project management aan leerden en het tijdsplan en budget in de gaten hield. Deze vorm van samenwerking was voor ACP medewerkers niet geheel nieuw. Al in het aanbestedingsproces had ACP de intentie uitgesproken op deze manier te willen werken, namelijk op dezelfde wijze als hoe het kanaal destijds was overgedragen aan Panama. Ook toen werkten Amerikanen en Panamezen zij aan zij om kennis te delen.

De ervaringen met het chaperonneren liepen ver uiteen. CH2M Hill medewerkers voelden zich voornamelijk ongemakkelijk in rol van begeleider omdat ze nooit eerder op deze manier een project hadden uitgevoerd. Binnen ACP waren er gemengde gevoelens over de aanwezigheid van de adviseurs. Sommige medewerkers zagen het nut niet in van een adviseur aan hun zijde, terwijl anderen blij waren dat de Amerikanen aanwezig waren. Verder bleken de fundamentele verschillen tussen ACP en CH2M Hill het samenwerken te belemmeren. ACP is een publieke organisatie en CH2M Hill een private onderneming, wat resulteerde in uiteenlopende normen en waarden tussen deze organisaties. Desalniettemin besloten beide partijen om de samenwerking voort te zetten.

Om de samenwerking te stimuleren werd de slagzin ‘één team, één missie’ nieuw leven ingeblazen. Deze slagzin komt uit de tijd waarin het kanaal werd overgedragen aan Panama en was destijds bedoeld om een soepele samenwerking te creëren. Twee persoonlijke verhalen van medewerkers in de project organisatie laten zien hoe deze samenwerking zich openbaarde. Ook beschrijf ik, ter illustratie van het
concept chaperonneren, een vergadering waarbij ACP medewerkers en CH2M Hill consultants deelnemen. Deze voorbeelden geven aan dat samenwerken lastiger was dan deze slagzin deed suggereren.

Het hoofdstuk laat zien dat verschillende interpretaties van samenwerking kunnen leiden tot conflict en een machtsstrijd tussen de partijen. In dit project vonden ACP en CH2M Hill langzaamaan een manier om de samenwerking vorm te geven: ACP medewerkers namen de interne, politieke taken binnen de organisatie op zich, terwijl de adviseurs zich op de technische zaken richtten en de leiding namen in de project kantoren. Tevens toont dit hoofdstuk aan dat hoewel een contract beschrijft welke verwachtingen er zijn wat betreft samenwerking, de gebruikelijke praktijken zijn diep geworteld in de dagelijkse werkzaamheden van project medewerkers.

Cross-Cultureel Werk in het uitbreidingsprogramma van het Panamakanaal: een collabyrinth

In het concluderende hoofdstuk van dit proefschrift analyseer ik de bevindingen van het onderzoek en geef ik antwoord op de onderzoeksvragen. Dat samenwerking een essentieel thema is in de uitvoering van een mega project kwam in deze studie duidelijk naar voren. De project organisatie, bestaande uit een doolhof van verschillende (nationale, organisatie en professionele) culturen, identiteiten en praktijken, en gecombineerd met diverse belangen en interesses voor deelname, vormt een complexe werkomgeving. In dit ingewikkelde netwerk van interacties is samenwerking een vereiste. Samenwerken is zo lastig, dat de onderzoekers Huxham en Vangen (2004) stellen dat men samenwerking beter kan vermijden. In de uitvoering van een mega project kan dat niet. In dit proces is samenwerking onvermijdelijk. Alleen kan een organisatie een project van deze orde niet uitvoeren en vaak is specifieke kennis vereist waardoor samenwerking met andere partijen noodzakelijk is.

Binnen het uitbreidingsprogramma van het Panamakanaal hebben we gezien dat, in het proces van samenwerken, project medewerkers reflecteerden op hun praktijken en deze aanpasten om hun weg te vinden in de project organisatie. Terwijl zij betekenis gaven aan de complexiteit van de dagelijkse gang van zaken vertaalden zij deze naar meer eenvoudige en begrijpelijke vormen. Ongeacht de institutionele
verschillen tussen de organisaties of de conventionele waarden en praktijken, project medewerkers hadden de behoefte om een samenwerkingsrelatie op te bouwen. Samenhorigheid en persoonlijke betrokkenheid stimuleerden de actoren om een samenwerkingsrelatie tot stand te brengen. Door te reflecteren op hun gewoonten en gebruiken en deze aan te passen, ook wel reflectie-in-actie genoemd (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009), of door nieuwe praktijken te ontwikkelen, kon samenwerking van de grond komen. Ik stel dat het ontwikkelen van een samenwerkingsverband gezien kan worden als een ‘collabyrinth’. Deze combinatie van collaboration en labyrint weerspiegelt namelijk de complexiteit van samenwerking.

Er kwamen verschillende praktijken van samenwerking naar voren welke laten zien hoe actoren betekenis geven aan en omgaan met de complexiteit van hun dagelijkse werkomgeving. Deze praktijken, zoals getoond in de empirische hoofdstukken, kunnen verdeeld worden in zichtbare praktijken en verborgen praktijken. De zichtbare praktijken zijn acties en activiteiten die bij bestudering van praktijken direct naar voren kwamen (Gherardi, 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003b; Orlikowski, 2010). In het collabyrinth zijn drie zichtbare praktijken vertoond. De eerste is ‘conflicterende omstandigheden’. Dit verwijst naar de conflicten binnen de samenwerking in het project en laat zien dat conflicten dwongen tot reflectie waardoor actoren zich bewust werden van zichzelf en de situatie. De tweede zichtbare praktijk is ‘overeenstemming zoeken’, dat refereert naar de overeenkomsten die men zocht om te kunnen samenwerken. De behoefte om samen te werken en de bereidwilligheid van project medewerkers om een relatie op te bouwen komt tot uiting in de derde zichtbare praktijk, ‘vriendschappelijke relaties bouwen’. De verborgen praktijken waren niet direct te observeren, maar lagen onder de oppervlakte, waren impliciet en lastiger te omschrijven (Corradi et al., 2010; Gherardi, 2009). De eerste verborgen praktijk is ‘duikboot gedrag’. Figuurlijk bedoeld, refereert deze praktijk naar het gedrag waarbij project medewerkers autonoom opereren, zonder rekening te houden met andere deelnemers in het project. ‘Verhalen vertellen’ is de tweede verborgen praktijk. Hierbij gaat het om de verhalen die in het project de ronde doen en medewerkers met elkaar verbinden. De laatste verborgen praktijk is ‘synergie bereiken’, waarbij actoren open staan om van elkaar te leren en zich aanpassen om een samenwerkingsrelatie te realiseren.
In de conclusie van het onderzoek til ik de praktijken van samenwerking naar een abstract niveau en verbind ik ze aan een lijn van samenwerking. Deze lijn, het *Collaboration Continuum*, laat de invloed van de praktijk op de samenwerking zien. Hoewel ik niet de intentie heb om de bevindingen van het onderzoek te combineren aan de uitkomsten van het project, introduceer ik wel een manier om de relatie tussen praktijken van samenwerking en de ontwikkeling van samenwerking te laten zien.

Op het continuüm zijn de praktijken van samenwerking verdeeld in drie categorieën: (A) tegenwerkende praktijken, (B) opbouwende praktijken en (C) verbindende praktijken. De eerste categorie omvat alle praktijken die samenwerking belemmeren, in de tweede categorie komen de praktijken aan bod die proberen samenwerking tot stand te brengen en de derde categorie duidt de praktijken die daadwerkelijk een samenwerking verwezenlijken. Het continuüm bewijst dat aandacht voor praktijken in project management essentieel is om beter te begrijpen hoe actoren betekenis geven aan cross-culturele samenwerking en te weten wat zij doen, hoe zij dat doen en onder welke omstandigheden zij hun praktijken uitvoeren.

Om meer inzicht te krijgen in sociale fenomenen in project management, adviseer ik onderzoekers om etnografische onderzoeksmethoden te gebruiken. Een betere kijk op wat er dagelijks gebeurd in een project organisatie biedt inzicht in hoe project medewerkers betekenis geven aan de dagelijkse werkomgeving. Middels specifieke aandacht voor praktijken leren we wat het is dat mensen doen in project management. Bovendien is het, om meer te weten te komen over cross-culturele samenwerking in project management, van belang om onderzoeken naar samenwerking in andere projecten te initiëren. Verder zou onderzoek naar discoursen, rituelen of symbolen, en een combinatie tussen kwalitatief en kwantitatief onderzoek onze kennis over de 'mens'-kant van project management kunnen vergroten.

Ter afsluiting van dit onderzoek presenteer ik vijf aanbevelingen voor mensen werkzaam in de praktijk van projecten en project management. De eerste aanbeveling is het leren kennen van de partij met wie een samenwerking eventueel wordt aangegaan. Al voordat een contract getekend is kan getest worden of samenwerken daadwerkelijk vruchtbaar kan zijn. Een expert kan een scan maken van de organisatie, haar cultuur, de essentiële waarden en werkpraktijken, maar ook van de voornemens en verwachtingen voor project deelname. Een helder inzicht in iedere organisatie,
Dutch Summary

en haar karakteristieken, geeft informatie over de verschillen en overeenkomsten tussen de partijen en biedt ondersteuning in een gesprek over deze thema's. Het vroegtijdig identificeren van de kenmerken van iedere partij verkleint het risico dat deze later voor problemen zorgen. Daarnaast is het van belang om ook tijdens een samenwerkingsverband regelmatig te reflecteren en dit proces veelvuldig te voeden met activiteiten die de samenwerking blijven stimuleren.

Een tweede aanbeveling is om bewustwording te creëren voor de talrijke mogelijkheden van een cross-culturele samenwerking. De verscheidenheid van culturele verschillen en overeenkomsten verrijkt de project medewerkers met nieuwe kansen en uitdagingen. Zulke mogelijkheden kan men vinden in het combineren van kennis en vaardigheden, in het verkennen van nieuwe manieren van werken en in het verkrijgen van inzicht in welke aspecten verdere ontwikkeling behoeven. Een groter bewustzijn van de culturele diversiteit, de verschillende belangen voor project deelname en andere manieren van werken bieden een overvloed aan mogelijkheden die de uitkomst van samenwerking verbetert.

De derde aanbeveling is geduldig te blijven wanneer er onenigheid en frustratie ontstaat bij project deelnemers. Conflicten zijn onvermijdelijk en soms juist noodzakelijk om de samenwerking te versterken. Mits goed begeleid, bevorderen conflicten openheid en stimuleren zij mensen om de onderliggende spanningen te uiten. Alleen wanneer conflicten verzanden in emoties en leiden tot wantrouwen, verhinderen zij de samenwerking. Echter, conflicten versterken de samenwerking wanneer men de ruimte krijgt ideeën, perspectieven en verwachtingen uit te spreken. Het is daarom mijn advies om conflicten te aanvaren als een natuurlijk onderdeel van samenwerking en deze in te zetten om praktijken aan te passen of nieuwe praktijken te ontwikkelen. Op deze manier kan een conflict fungeren als de start van een veranderingsproces.

De vierde aanbeveling verwijst naar het introduceren van een project filosofie. Een verhaal dat het doel van het project weergeeft, vergroot de betrokkenheid en versterkt een samenwerkingsrelatie. Een filosofie dient een compleet beeld te geven van het project zodat het als leidraad kan dienen bij de uitvoering van het project en vertaald kan worden naar de dagelijkse bezigheden van project medewerkers. Het vormen van een project filosofie kan men niet alleen, hulp van de project partijen en
andere belanghebbenden is noodzakelijk. Dit is een gespecialiseerde en tijdrovende taak. Het is daarom raadzaam om het formuleren van een filosofie over te laten aan een deskundige. Ter ontwikkeling van een project filosofie kunnen elementen zoals een logo, een project taal, en gedeelde normen en waarden ingevoerd worden om medewerkers te motiveren en betrokkenheid te creëren. Uiteindelijk kan deze interventie leiden tot een nieuwe identiteit voor project medewerkers.

De vijfde en tevens laatste aanbeveling is samenwerking serieuze aandacht en intensive ondersteuning te geven. Promotie van samenwerking binnen de project organisatie is noodzakelijk. Praktijken van samenwerking kunnen benoemd worden en tevens gebruikt worden in het stimuleren van samenwerking: verhinderders kunnen verkleind worden terwijl versterkers juist extra aandacht mogen genieten. Bovendien, wanneer nieuw gedrag in de samenwerkingsrelatie wordt vereist, dienen project medewerkers getraind en gestuurd te worden in de nieuwe werkzaamheden en gedragingen. Project medewerkers worden geacht kritisch te blijven naar het thema samenwerking en, wetende hoe moeilijk samenwerking is, geadviseerd elkaar goed te bestuderen voordat men het avontuur van samenwerken aangaat.

Deze vijf aanbevelingen reflecteren mijn advies om samenwerking in project organisaties te stimuleren. Zij benadrukken het belang van een cultureel perspectief op project management en laten zien dat expliciete aandacht voor cross-culturele samenwerking noodzakelijk is. Na het lezen van dit onderzoek is men het wellicht met me eens dat cultuur en samenwerking hoog op de project management agenda dienen te prijken.
Spanish Summary

Trabajo Intercultural:
Prácticas de Colaboración en la Ampliación del Canal de Panamá

Introducción en el campo de la investigación

Los megaproyectos forman una parte omnipresente de nuestra vida cotidiana, sirviendo como hitos en el desarrollo de la humanidad, triunfos nacionales y avances técnicos. Entre el túnel del canal que conecta el Reino Unido y Francia, el edificio del Empire State que una vez fue el edificio más alto del mundo y los Delta Works en Holanda que fueron construidos para proteger el país de las inundaciones, la sociedad americana de ingenieros civiles (American Society of Civil Engineers) enumera el canal de Panamá como una de las siete maravillas del mundo moderno. Los procesos de la construcción de megaproyectos experimentan una gran cantidad de problemas con respecto a la realización en tiempo, en presupuesto y en el alcance. Frecuentemente, estos proyectos no cumplen con las expectativas porque se sufren sobrecostos, retrasos y déficit en la calidad y la satisfacción de los usuarios (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Flyvbjerg et al., 2003; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006).

Los resultados problemáticos de los proyectos en la infraestructura han atraído la atención académica. Aunque principalmente estos estudios se centran en temas como la creación de políticas, la contratación, los resultados esperados, los riesgos y los rendimientos, los académicos y los practicantes sienten que hay una necesidad por una visión más clara sobre la parte “humana” de la gestión de proyectos (Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). Debido a que hay varias partes implicadas en el proceso de la construcción, cada quien con su propio conocimiento, experiencia y especialidad, podemos ver los megaproyectos como complejos entornos sociales. Después de todo, cada parte trae sus propias prácticas de trabajo y valores culturales arraigados en su organización. Por lo tanto, la organización del proyecto está coloreada por las numerosas diferencias y similitudes culturales, por las prácticas y costumbres específicas y por los diversos motivos para participar en el proyecto. En este entorno complejo, se considera la colaboración como un factor crítico para el éxito de los resultados del proyecto (Cicmil & Marshall, 2005; Cooke-Davies, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006).

40 American Society of Civil Engineers, www.asce.org (visitado por la última vez, October 8, 2012).
La cultura desempeña una parte muy importante en las relaciones de colaboración. La idea de que la cultura puede ser equiparada con la nacionalidad ha influenciado los estudios sobre la gestión intercultural por mucho tiempo (e.g. Hofstede, 1980). Por lo pronto, en este campo de investigación, un cambio hacia una perspectiva que se interesa menos en la comparación de los aspectos culturales, pero que está enfocada en la interacción entre las culturas, la influencia de la cultura en una organización y cómo la gente enfrenta la complejidad cultural de la organización, ya ha sucedido (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). Las personas en las organizaciones están constantemente activas para interpretar y ajustar sus valores, costumbres e intereses. También les dan su propia interpretación a los debates sociales y declaraciones abstractas acerca de los valores públicos que prevalecen en la sociedad. La eficiencia, la transparencia y la seguridad, por ejemplo, son términos abstractos que reciben significación en la ejecución de un mega proyecto. El debate académico sobre la garantía de los valores públicos se ha centrado principalmente en la implementación de arriba hacia abajo, mientras también es interesante ver cómo estos valores públicos son interpretados y adaptados en el proceso de colaboración, cuando una gran cantidad de culturas, motivos y expectativas se unen. A través de poner atención específica a las acciones y interacciones del personal del proyecto en el nivel micro de la organización, esta investigación se centra en las prácticas de colaboración. En otras palabras, que hace la gente cuando trabajan juntos en un entorno complejo cultural? Esto me lleva al tema central de esta investigación.

En esta investigación trato de revelar cómo la colaboración se refleja en la práctica diaria de los participantes del proyecto en el programa de la ampliación del Canal de Panamá. Se enfoca en la comprensión de la complejidad cultural de la colaboración y en describir cómo la colaboración está creada entre los empleados del mega proyecto. Un principio básico con esta enfoque es estudiar cómo ellos interpretan y adaptan los valores (públicos), las costumbres y los intereses para entender cómo los actores dan sentido a las diferencias y similitudes culturales en su entorno de trabajo.

El gran impacto que los megaproyectos tienen en la sociedad y también el hecho de que los estudios anteriores han demostrado que las diferencias culturales son una de las causas por la decepción de los proyectos (e.g. Bresnen & Marshall, 2002; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006) son un estímulo para conocer la dinámica interna del
megaproyecto de la ampliación del Canal de Panamá. Por eso, esta investigación responde a la demanda (académica) por estudios empíricos en megaproyectos y contribuye al conocimiento sobre los asuntos cotidianos de las organizaciones de proyectos. Esto demuestra que las prácticas de colaboración se dan en la interacción entre los actores que juntan una multitud de culturas, motivos y experiencias. Este conocimiento da una visión de la complejidad cultural y es importante para comprender y mejorar los resultados del proyecto.

Prácticas de colaboración en mega proyectos
Los debates académicos sobre la gestión de proyectos y la gestión intercultural forman la base teórica para este estudio. Dentro del campo de investigación que se centra en los proyectos y la gestión de proyectos existe una amplia variedad de perspectivas de investigación. La perspectiva tradicional de proyectos se enfoca desde un punto de vista técnico y su objetivo es el desarrollo de mejores métodos de trabajo a fin de que la eficiencia y la eficacia de la gestión de proyectos pueda ser aumentada. El propósito de este enfoque es que los proyectos se entreguen a tiempo, dentro del presupuesto y de acuerdo con el alcance. Otra perspectiva en este campo de investigación tiene sus raíces intelectuales en la ciencias sociales y está interesado en la gestión de proyectos como una práctica social, así que estudia los aspectos de comportamiento y de organización dentro de los proyectos (Cicmil & Hodgson, 2006; Söderlund, 2004; Van Marrewijk & Veenswijk, 2006). Este enfoque considera los proyectos como únicos fenómenos organizacionales y esta investigación se conecta con ese punto de vista. Desde esta perspectiva, los proyectos son percibidos como arreglos temporales y sociales donde los investigadores prestan atención al contexto, la cultura y las creencias propias dentro del proyecto. Además existe una demanda para la comprensión de cómo las relaciones entre los individuos y los grupos se desarrollan y cómo las relaciones de poder afectan la realidad social del personal del proyecto. Los investigadores afirman que debería prestarse atención a ‘la actualidad del proyecto’, a los asuntos cotidianos de las organizaciones de proyectos y les resulta importante anotar las experiencias de los participantes de los proyectos (Cicmil et al., 2006). A través de estudiar la organización del proyecto desde adentro es posible describir el comportamiento en estas organizaciones y así se acumula el conocimiento sobre la dinámica interna de la organización del proyecto.
Spanish Summary

Recientemente, en el campo de la gestión de proyectos, se presentó un enfoque en que las prácticas son el centro de atención. Este enfoque (se llama Practice Turn) pone el énfasis en la acción y la interacción, en los detalles del trabajo y examina lo que la gente hace y dice acerca de un evento o actividad específica. A través del concepto de la práctica se pueden explicar complejos fenómenos organizacionales. Esto significa que el uso de este concepto da una visión de qué hacen las personas, cómo lo hacen y en qué condiciones realizan sus acciones. La participación en una práctica es un proceso continuo en el cual, sobre la base del entendimiento compartido tácitamente, las personas en grupo realizan, refinan, repiten y cambian la práctica (Geiger, 2009). En este proceso se toma regularmente un tiempo de estabilidad en que se da significado a la práctica antes de desarrollarla más. Uno da un paso fuera de la rutina para reflexionar y dar sentido a lo que sucedió y determinar cómo se puede afinar la práctica hasta tener una práctica nueva o mejorada. Como se ha mencionado, la atención por las prácticas demuestra lo que realmente está sucediendo en una organización del proyecto e indica cómo las personas dan sentido a la diversidad de culturas y costumbres de su entorno de trabajo cotidiano.

En la disciplina académica acerca de la gestión intercultural, este investigación se alinea con la perspectiva que reconoce las organizaciones como una multiplicidad de culturas. Según esta perspectiva, los actores crean supuestos compartidos dentro de la organización, pero también se obtienen otros supuestos de fuera de la organización (Boyacigiller et al., 2004). En esta perspectiva, la cultura no está proporcionalmente relacionada a la nacionalidad, pero es visto como un conjunto de supuestos implícitos y explícitos que afectan las percepciones, pensamientos, sentimientos y comportamientos de un grupo de personas porque estos supuestos se aprenden y se transmiten a través de la interacción (Sackmann & Philips, 2004). Cuando las personas se juntan en una organización del proyecto, su identidad individual está todavía arraigada en la organización de origen, en su profesión y en otros grupos en que se participa (Sackmann & Friesl, 2007). Esto significa que en las relaciones de colaboración, donde las diferentes culturas y prácticas de trabajo se encuentran, la gente a veces tiene que tomar distancia de algunas costumbres y prácticas tradicionales. Ellos interpretan sus hábitos y costumbres y probablemente tienen que adaptarse para hacer la colaboración posible. Los investigadores Huxham
Spanish Summary

y Vangen (2004) afirman que colaboración puede ir en ambos sentidos: puede ser tan decepcionante que el resultado de la colaboración está debajo de la expectativas o se puede producir beneficios que las partes por separado no podrían lograr.

En megaproyectos la colaboración es inevitable: diferentes organizaciones tienen que compartir sus conocimientos, habilidades y experiencias para poder realizar el proyecto. Cada parte aporta su propia cultura y las prácticas de trabajo, sus ideas y costumbres establecidas y sus específicos intereses y perspectivas sobre la participación en el proyecto. Sin embargo, son interdependientes. Particularmente en el sector de la construcción, hay ejemplos de problemas en la colaboración entre las organizaciones. Después de fuertes críticas a los resultados decepcionantes de los proyectos, la falta de integración y una cultura en la que se buscan culpables en lugar de soluciones, el sector de la construcción se obliga a enfocarse en mejorar la colaboración (Dietrich et al., 2010; Hartmann & Bresnen, 2011; Veenswijk & Berendse, 2008). Lo que llama la atención es que, a pesar de las dificultades de la colaboración y de la diversidad cultural, existe poca información acerca de los efectos conscientes e inconscientes de estas características en el nivel cotidiano de las organizaciones de proyectos (Ainamo et al., 2010). Al hacer uso del concepto de la práctica y así estudiar a los hábitos y costumbres cotidianas de los actores, esta investigación tiene como objetivo dar una visión de la dinámica interna en torno a la complejidad cultural. Además, la intención es desarrollar una mejor comprensión de los procesos de colaboración a nivel micro de la organización del proyecto.

**Etnografía en la práctica**

La base filosófica de este estudio radica en la ontología constructivista social y la epistemología interpretativa. Esta perspectiva está basada en la idea de que la realidad social se construye en las interacciones y las interpretaciones intersubjetivas de las personas. Esta realidad construida está llena tanto de un contexto cultural e histórico como los valores morales, públicos y personales; el investigador tiene una contribución activa en el proceso de construcción social.

(Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Ybema et al., 2009). Esto está en contraste con el positivismo, en qué los investigadores asumen una realidad social que consiste en hechos que el investigador debe identificar y categorizar. Constructivistas sociales
tratan de entender la realidad social mediante la comprensión de cómo la gente da sentido a su realidad social, en cuyo contexto desempeña un papel importante. Una metodología de investigación constructivo-interpretativo, también llamado investigación interpretativa, se relaciona con esta (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

El foco de la investigación interpretativa es el papel del investigador: él/ella es parte de la práctica cotidiana. El asunto es que el investigador puede observar, preguntar y experimentar lo que experimenta el actor y describe esto por medio de sus propias interpretaciones.

Dado el hecho de que este estudio quiere obtener una mejor imagen de la práctica diaria en la organización del proyecto y es curioso por cómo el personal del proyecto da sentido a la complejidad cultural de su entorno, una metodología etnográfica se adapta muy bien. Inspirado por la antropología, la etnografía organizacional es una manera para estudiar de cerca fenómenos dentro de la organización. Eso significa que el investigador estudia el fenómeno durante mucho tiempo, forma parte de lo que la gente hace y cómo la gente habla sobre esta actividad. Asimismo, el investigador es sensible a cómo alguien da sentido a esta actividad y al contexto de la organización (Ybema et al., 2009). Precisamente porque el investigador desempeña un papel importante en la interpretación de la realidad social, la reflexividad es esencial. Esta reflexión se expresa en una descripción detallada y clara de cómo la investigación se ha llevado a cabo, las decisiones tomadas y los antecedentes personales del investigador y su función en la investigación. La investigación etnográfica se presenta en una forma que se llama ‘etnografía’: una descripción muy detallada del campo para que el lector tenga la sensación de haber estado presente (Bate, 1997).

El programa de la ampliación del Canal de Panamá fue seleccionado como un caso para este estudio. Este megaproyecto cumplió con los requisitos para esta investigación: se encuentra fuera de los Países Bajos, en un lugar (América Central) donde pocos megaproyectos fueron examinados, el lenguaje del proyecto era Inglés y, más importante aún, yo tenía acceso a este proyecto. Entre julio de 2009 y julio de 2010 estaba presente diariamente en la organización del proyecto. Rijkswaterstaat (el Ministerio Holandés de Obras Públicas y Gestión del Agua) me puso en contacto con la Autoridad del Canal de Panamá, y con la ayuda de la Embajada de Holanda en Panamá conocí gente dentro del consorcio Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC). En
todos los niveles de la organización del proyecto pude observar y realizar entrevistas. Hablé con los trabajadores en las obras de construcción, supervisores, personal administrativo y gerentes acerca de sus ideas, sentimientos, experiencias y creencias con respecto a colaboración en el proyecto. Estas entrevistas tuvieron un carácter abierto para que los encuestados pudieran hablar espontáneamente sobre temas que les afectan hasta las capas del corazón. Las observaciones fueron hechas en las oficinas del proyecto ubicadas al lado del Océano Atlántico (en el pueblo Gatún) y el Pacífico (en Cocolí). En ambos, en ACP y GUPC, he seguido a los supervisores, ingenieros y gerentes de proyecto para observar sus actividades diarias. También estaba presente en las reuniones, ocasiones especiales de las organizaciones y me podría mover libremente en las oficinas. Anoté lo que dijeron, hice dibujos del diseño de las oficinas y he descrito donde la gente estaba sentada. Además, yo llevó un diario personal. Aparte de las entrevistas y observaciones, a través de documentos obtuve información sobre el megaproyecto y su contexto. Así que recogí, entre otras cosas, artículos de prensa, folletos, presentaciones, documentos de la política, informes anuales, organigramas, contratos, estudios científicos, documentos de la licitación, fotografías, mapas y material de video. Utilizando el programa para el análisis de datos cualitativos Atlas.ti analicé los datos y empecé el proceso de escribir. 

Empecé con los capítulos empíricos de este libro, cuyas descripciones detalladas de las prácticas de colaboración que surgieron en la investigación dan una visión de la dinámica interna dentro de la organización del proyecto. A algunas personas claves las dejé leer mis textos y les pedí darme sus comentarios, principalmente para la confirmación, pero también porque quería darles una idea del estilo etnográfico en que se presentan los datos. Así mismo mi profesores, colegas académicos y algunos directores del proyecto leyeron mis textos, también los he presentado en varias conferencias académicas y publiqué un artículo en una revista científica (vea Smits & Van Marrewijk, 2012).

Como cuando se toma una fotografía, una imagen se expone desde diferentes perspectivas. Así mismo, la historia que les presento en esta tesis se basa en mi perspectiva e interpretación, es escrita por como yo he visto la situación. Mis antecedentes culturales, es decir, mujer holandesa, criada en una sociedad occidental, con educación superior en Recursos Humanos y una maestría en Cultura, Organización
Spanish Summary

y Administración y la enseñanza que he disfrutado, han influido en mi forma de ver el campo de la investigación. Por un lado, a menudo era una desconocida en el campo, lo que ayudó a darme cuenta a algunas cosas que otros consideran normal. Por otro lado, estaba incluida amablemente en la organización del proyecto y pronto me sentí como en casa en Panamá. Después de completar el trabajo de campo me mantengo informada del desarrollo del proyecto, mantuve contacto con los informantes clave y visité Panamá por un par de veces para poder verificar los datos de investigación y análisis preliminar.

El Canal de Panamá: una mirada hacia atrás para mirar hacia delante
Panamá, teniendo fronteras con Costa Rica y Colombia, conecta América Central con América del Sur. Desde el descubrimiento del país hay ideas sobre la construcción de un acceso directo a través de América Central que comunicara el Océano Atlántico y el Océano Pacífico. En 1881, cuando Panamá aún era una provincia de Colombia, los franceses comenzaron la construcción de un canal a nivel del mar por Panamá. Bajo la dirección del famoso ingeniero del Canal de Suez, Ferdinand de Lesseps, trataron de luchar contra las inundaciones, deslizamientos de tierra, la corrupción y las persistentes epidemias de fiebre amarilla y la malaria, pero eso salió mal y en 1889 terminó el proyecto (Greene, 2009; McCullough, 1977; Parker, 2009). El presidente de Estados Unidos, Theodore Roosevelt, entró en acción inmediatamente. Convencido de que un canal sería de gran importancia tanto para el desarrollo económico de América como para proteger las costas, el apoyó un golpe de estado que resultó en la independencia de Panamá de Colombia. Se acordó que Estados Unidos obtenía la posesión de un área ancho de diez millas a lado del canal, la Zona del Canal, en que Estados Unidos podría disfrutar la plena soberanía. Como resultado de los acuerdos, Panamá fue dependiendo de Estados Unidos en tres formas. Primero, un sistema de nómina de doble nivel fue implementado en cual los estadounidenses fueron pagados en monedas de oro, mientras que los panameños y otros trabajadores del canal fueron pagados en la moneda de plata, que tenía un valor menor. Segundo, los panameños eran considerados como ciudadanos de clase menor y excluidos de la vida pública con señales como “sólo para blancos”. Tercero, con la aceptación del dólar de Estados Unidos como moneda de curso legal, Panamá
no podría llevar a cabo su propia política financiera. Por lo tanto, en el papel el canal estaba en manos panameños y bajo el control de los Estados Unidos, sin embargo, en la práctica, la Zona del Canal fue tratada como un territorio soberano donde la leyes estadounidenses y el poder estaban supremo (Harding, 2006).

En el 15 de agosto de 1914 se inauguró oficialmente el Canal de Panamá. El proyecto duró diez años, había atraído a gente de todo el mundo y se terminó seis meses antes a un costo de USD $23.000.000, que estaba debajo el precio estimado (McCullough, 1977). Después de la apertura, el Canal de Panamá quedó en manos de los norteamericanos, lo cual causó frustración en los panameños. Durante años hubo discusiones acerca de quien debe administrar el canal, pero sólo hasta 1977 el presidente de Panamá Omar Torrijos y el presidente de Estados Unidos Jimmy Carter firmaron nuevos acuerdos sobre el Canal de Panamá. Se decidió que transferían el canal de Panamá gradualmente y el 31 de diciembre de 1999 Panamá se convirtió en el propietario oficial del Canal de Panamá. A partir de éste momento la ACP es totalmente responsable de la operación, la administración, el funcionamiento, la conservación, el mantenimiento, el mejoramiento y modernización del Canal. Hoy en día el Canal de Panamá opera como se entregó hace más de noventa años. Una travesía del Atlántico al Pacífico toma aproximadamente ocho a diez horas. Utilizando esclusas, los buques son levantados al alto nivel de canal a veintiséis metros. Un barco con las dimensiones máximas de 294.1 metros de largo, 32.3 metros de ancho y 12.04 metros de profundidad se llama Panamax. Los buques con un formato más grande, llamado Postpanamax, no pueden cruzar el canal, todavía deben tomar la ruta alternativa a través de la punta sur de Sudamérica y el Cabo de Hornos en Chile. En 2009 pasaron, al día, más de cuarenta barcos por el Canal de Panamá. Contenedores pagaron promedio US$ 300.000 para el cruce del Océano Atlántico al Océano Pacífico. Particularmente para aumentar la capacidad de la vía acuática, pero también para seguir siendo competitivos en el mercado marítimo global, en 2006 la ACP introdujo el plan para la ampliación del Canal de Panamá de cual fue aprobado por un referéndum.

El programa de expansión completo se divide en cuatro partes. Parte 1 cubre el diseño y la construcción de un nuevo juego de esclusas. Parte 2 incluye las excavaciones necesarias para dar cabida a las esclusas y los canales de acceso. La tercera parte se
centra en las operaciones de dragado necesarias para ampliar y profundizar el canal. Parte 4 del programa tiene como objetivo mejorar el suministro de agua, porque para usar más esclusas se necesita más agua. Dentro de esta investigación el enfoque está en la primera parte del programa, la parte más prestigiosa del mega proyecto: el proyecto del Tercer Juego de Esclusas. Este proyecto está calculado en US$ 3.2 mil millones y es el proyecto más caro en todo el programa de ampliación, que tiene un precio total estimado de US$ 5.2 mil millones. Para apoyar con las tareas de gestión del proyecto la ACP contrató la consultoría estadounidense CH2M Hill. Después de un procedimiento de licitación decidieron la ACP y CH2M Hill que el consorcio GUPC fuera contratado para la ejecución de esta parte del proyecto. GUPC está formado por las empresas Sacyr de España, Impregilo de Italia, Jan de Nul de Bélgica y CUSA de Panamá.

**Intermedio: preparando el escenario para la colaboración**

El 8 de julio de 2009, durante una ceremonia emocionante, se anunció que consorcio ha ganado la licitación para el diseño y construcción de las nuevas esclusas en el Canal de Panamá. La ACP declaró que GUPC logró la mayoría de los puntos para la propuesta técnica. Esto es importante porque aunque GUPC ganó la puntuación más alta, la diferencia con los resultados técnicos de los otros consorcios era relativamente pequeño, así que las propuestas de precios juega un papel enorme. La ACP anunció que GUPC ha mandado el precio más bajo para este proyecto: US$ 3.118.880.001 y por lo tanto gana la licitación. Sin embargo, durante la ceremonia GUPC se da cuenta que la ACP tenía reservado un precio más alto por la ejecución del proyecto, lo que les deja un sabor amargo. Los socios del proyecto GUPC tiene la sensación de que ofrecieron un precio demasiado bajo. Discusiones sobre cómo los gastos y los beneficios debe dividirse entre las partes dominaban. Además hubo dificultades entorno a la transición de la fase de licitación para la fase de implementación. En resumen, la colaboración entre las partes de GUPC fue objeto de una gran presión.
Prácticas dentro la organización GUPC: disminuir la colaboración

En este primer capítulo empírico, se muestra cómo la colaboración se refleja entre el personal del consorcio GUPC. Diferentes prácticas de colaboración enseñan cómo los actores dieron sentido y enfrentaron la complejidad cultural en su trabajo diario. Los empleados han utilizado metáforas para describir la organización y las dinámicas internas en la organización del proyecto. Las metáforas que surgieron son: ‘guerra’, ‘matrimonio arreglado’, ‘escalar la montaña’, ‘animales’ e ‘institución gubernamental’. Estas se utilizaron para reflexionar sobre la situación de la organización del proyecto y apoyaron al personal del proyecto para comprender entre ellos el proceso de colaboración. La utilización de metáforas ilustra los pensamientos, sentimientos, interacciones y experiencias del personal del proyecto y también muestra cómo la colaboración entre culturas en la organización del proyecto tomó forma.

No solo para simplificar la complejidad de la organización del proyecto, sino también para identificar y estandarizar, los actores hicieron uso de etiquetas culturales. La etiqueta de cultura nacional se utiliza para indicar la gente en la base de la nacionalidad y los estereotipos que caracterizan un país. Lo que llama la atención es que, a lado de la utilización de las etiquetas ‘españoles’, ‘italianos’, ‘belgas’ y ‘panameños’, también manifestaron dos etiquetas que simplificaron estos grupos más. Basado en la ubicación de la red de las organizaciones con origen en Europa, las etiquetas ‘sureños’ y ‘norteños’ dividieron a los empleados de GUPC en sólo dos grupos culturales. Sorprendentemente, estas etiquetas se utilizaron sólo en ciertas situaciones. Cuando se habló de la actitud hacia el trabajo de los españoles y los italianos no se agruparon bajo la misma etiqueta, porque sobre este tema había una diferencia clara entre las dos culturas. La etiqueta de la cultura nacional estaba profundamente arraigada en las conversaciones y prácticas cotidianas dentro de la organización del proyecto. Con frecuencia se trataba de crear distancia entre las personas en lugar de fortalecer la colaboración. La etiqueta de la cultura organizacional tuvo el mismo efecto. Esta etiqueta, basada en la imagen general que los actores tenían sobre las organizaciones de origen y los valores y prácticas asociadas, alimentó las interpretaciones subjetivas de los empleados sobre los grupos dentro GUPC. El uso de metáforas y etiquetas demuestra que el personal del proyecto buscaba una manera para entender la complejidad de la organización, se buscaron similitudes e
intereses comunes. Sin embargo, en el lugar de trabajo estas prácticas bloquearon el proceso de colaboración.

También la distribución de los espacios del proyecto ha afectado la colaboración dentro GUPC. La oficina del proyecto en el Atlántico fue ejecutado principalmente por los empleados de Sacyr, mientras que la oficina del proyecto en el Pacífico fue dirigida por personal de Impregilo. En las relaciones diarias siempre hicieron una diferencia entre las dos ubicaciones por lo cual había poca conexión entre las dos oficinas del proyecto. Aparte de las oficinas del proyecto también estaba la sede de GUPC, ubicado en Corozal Oeste, cerca de la ciudad de Panamá. El personal del proyecto se identificó con la ubicación en la que trabajaron y se marcaron fronteras entre los tres sitios del proyectos. Se sentían aislados de la sede, pero también se diferenciaban fuertemente de los otros sitios del proyecto.

Además, las observaciones en la organización del proyecto ilustraron que los empleados querían una estructura organizacional clara. No había un organigrama alineado, por lo que faltaba una compresión clara de las relaciones formales dentro GUPC. El resultado de la distribución de espacios de la organización del proyecto y la falta de una estructura alineada de la organización hacía que los empleados se aferraran a las costumbres y hábitos tradicionales.

Los resultados de las prácticas mencionadas en este capítulo muestran la diferenciación, segregación y fragmentación entre el personal del proyecto. Dado que los actores principalmente prestaron atención a las diferencias y las fronteras, se aumentó la distancia emocional, surgió un ‘canal’ entre ellos. Por lo tanto, yo llamo las prácticas indicadas en este capítulo ‘disminuidores de la colaboración’.

**Colaboración dentro GUPC: prácticas de amplificación**

Siguiendo con el capítulo anterior presento en este capítulo las prácticas de colaboración que el personal del proyecto realizó, formó y desarrolló para obtener una relación de colaboración en la organización del proyecto. A pesar de las dificultades dentro GUPC los empleados del proyecto notaron que adaptarse entre ellos y compartir los conocimientos con los demás era necesario para el progreso del proyecto.
Así que encontraron entre ellos intereses compartidos. La pasión que tienen por la profesión ha reunido al personal del proyecto. Hablaron de otros mega proyectos en que habían trabajado, de la educación que tenían y de la pasión que compartían. Hablaban el mismo idioma. Dentro de la organización del proyecto también compartieron el mantra ‘hay que hacer el trabajo’. Este mantra se escuchaba a diario en el lugar de trabajo de GUPC y representaba una actitud pragmática del personal del proyecto que fueron determinantes para terminar el proyecto. Los intereses comunes y este mantra ayudaron los trabajadores para construir una relación y lograr colaboración entre ellos.

Unos meses después del inicio de la fase de ejecución se anunciaron ‘los constructores de puentes’: las personas con una posición neutral en la organización del proyecto comenzaron a actuar como intermediarios. Inicialmente, ellos fueron contratados por sus conocimientos y experiencia específicos, principalmente en los mega proyectos estadounidenses, además ellos también se desarrollaron como personas claves que podrían cerrar las brechas entre las diferentes personas del proyecto. Resultó que estos constructores de puentes eran esenciales en el proceso de colaboración dentro GUPC. Ellos actuaban como traductores, compartieron sus conocimientos y experiencias y eran, porque no tenían ninguna relación con una de las organizaciones de origen, imparciales en los conflictos. Precisamente porque estos individuos estaban menos conectados con GUPC ellos podían operar con mayor libertad y flexibilidad y también ellos dieron una perspectiva diferente sobre la situación cotidiana del proyecto.

En la interacciones entre el personal del proyecto se comenzó a adaptar la una a la otra. Los actores cambiaron su lenguaje o comportamiento para poder de lograr juntos un mejor resultado. Aprendieron la lengua de la otra persona, a través de clases de español o inglés, por lo que la diferencia de idioma era más pequeña y la interacción y colaboración mejoraban. Las personas también adaptaron su actitud hacia el trabajo y cambiaron algunas prácticas en su trabajo. Una diferente actitud hacia el trabajo encajaba mejor dentro de GUPC y por la adaptación de las prácticas lograron una mejor colaboración entre ellos. Además se han desarrollado nuevas prácticas, por ejemplo la biblioteca técnica hecha especialmente para los miembros de la organización del proyecto.
Por último, también trabajaron juntos en un nivel informal para mejorar la colaboración entre el personal del proyecto. Los actores tenían la necesidad de llegar a conocer mejor a los demás, a mezclar los diferentes orígenes culturales y a pasar tiempo juntos. Por lo tanto habían organizado, desde el lugar de trabajo, varias actividades sociales. Estos actividades no solo animaron a los empleados para compartir su trabajo diario con los demás, sino que también crearon amistades dentro de GUPC. Supuestamente, el personal del proyecto siente una conducción natural para trabajar juntos y esta dispuesto a construir una relación de colaboración.

Las prácticas presentadas en este capítulo comparten el objetivo de mejorar la colaboración dentro de la organización del proyecto y por lo tanto yo les llamo ‘amplificadores de colaboración’. Los participantes del proyecto se integraron y estaban involucrados. Eso significa que, a pesar de la situación desagradable en el ambiente de trabajo diario, había una necesidad subyacente para colaborar que juntó los empleados.

Chaperoning: colaboración entre ACP y CH2M Hill
Dado que la ACP nunca realizó un mega proyecto de la magnitud del programa de ampliación del Canal de Panamá, decidió pedir ayuda de una consultoría conocida. La reconocida firma norteamericana CH2M Hill ganó la licitación para la gestión de proyectos en el mega proyecto. Sin embargo, pronto quedó claro que ambas partes tenían diferentes ideas acerca de cómo esta colaboración debía configurarse.

La ACP describió en los documentos de licitación que estaba buscando una parte que podría apoyar y asesorar la organización con la ejecución de las tareas de gestión de proyectos. La parte externa no podría funcionar de modo autónomo, pero debería colaborar con el personal de la ACP para ponerse al tanta en el trabajo. La ACP tenía planeado una colaboración intensiva en la que la consultoría se cuenta con un papel de capacitar, asesorar y dirigir el personal de la ACP. Por otro lado, los empleados de CH2M Hill asumieron una implementación estándar de una asignación de gestión del proyecto. Ellos pensaban que estarían a cargo del control y la gestión del proyecto, que estarían liderando los procedimientos y procesos diarios del proyecto y que serían considerados responsables por los resultados. Sin embargo, el contrato con la ACP pide otro tipo de comportamiento, diferente a lo que los consultores estaban acostumbrados.
La ACP describió precisamente cómo se imaginó la colaboración con los consultores. Yo llamo a esta forma de colaboración ‘chaperoning’. Un chaperón guía y protege a un principiante, enseña al aprendiz las costumbres y prácticas, comparte sus experiencias y da consejos sobre cómo comportarse. La ACP diseñó una nueva forma de colaboración en que los empleados estaban muy involucrados en las operaciones diarias del mega proyecto. En puestos claves se colocaron dos personas: un empleado de la ACP y un consultor de CH2M Hill. Esta forma de colaboración era nueva para los consultores de CH2M Hill. Normalmente ellos tienen la libertad para ejecutar un proyecto, para tomar decisiones y ellos están acostumbrados a ser responsables por los resultados de un proyecto. En este proyecto fue diferente. Oficialmente la ACP mantuvo toda la autoridad y la responsabilidad mientras que CH2M Hill, en el papel de chaperón, supervisó el trabajo de los empleados de la ACP, les enseñó las prácticas de gestión de proyectos y vigiló el calendario y el presupuesto. Esta forma de colaboración no era totalmente nueva para el personal de la ACP. Ya en el proceso de contratación la ACP expresó la intención de trabajar en esta manera, es decir, de la misma manera como la forma en que el canal fue transferido a Panamá. En esta época los estadounidenses y los panameños también trabajaron codo a codo para compartir sus conocimientos.

Las experiencias con chaperoning eran muy distintos. Los empleados de CH2M Hill se sentían totalmente incómodos en el papel de facilitador porque nunca habían realizado proyectos en este estilo. Dentro de la ACP hubo sentimientos mezclados acerca de la presencia de los consultores. Algunos empleados no veían ningún beneficio en tener un asesor a su lado, mientras que otros estaban contentos de que los americanos estaban presentes. También apareció que las diferencias fundamentales entre la ACP y CH2M Hill obstaculizaron la colaboración. La ACP es una organización pública y CH2M Hill es una empresa privada, lo que resultó en diferentes normas y valores entre estas organizaciones. De todos modos, ambos partes decidieron a continuar la colaboración.

Para promover la colaboración el lema ‘un equipo, una misión’ se revitalizó. Este lema se origina en el tiempo en que el canal fue transferido a Panamá y estuvo introducido para crear una colaboración suave. Dos historias personales de la gente en la organización del proyecto muestran cómo se da esta colaboración. También describí, para ilustrar el concepto chaperoning, una reunión en la que el personal...
de la ACP y los consultores de CH2M Hill participan. Estos ejemplos indican que la colaboración era más difícil de lo que el lema sugirió.

El capítulo demuestra que diferentes interpretaciones acerca de colaboración pueden causar conflictos y una lucha por el poder entre las partes. En este proyecto la ACP y CH2M Hill encontraron lentamente una manera para dar forma a la colaboración: el personal de la ACP se dedicó a las tareas internas y políticas dentro de la organización, mientras que los consultores se enfocaron en las tareas técnicas y asumieron el liderazgo en las oficinas del proyecto. Además, este capítulo muestra que, aunque el contrato describe las expectativas en cuanto a la colaboración, las prácticas tradicionales están arraigadas profundamente en el trabajo diario del personal del proyecto.

**El trabajo intercultural en la ampliación del Canal de Panamá: un colaberinto**

En el último capítulo de esta tesis analizo los hallazgos y doy respuestas a las preguntas de la investigación. La colaboración es un tema crucial en la ejecución de un mega proyecto, lo que esta demostrado claramente en este estudio. La organización del proyecto, que consiste en un laberinto de diferentes culturas (nacionales, organizacionales y profesionales), identidades y prácticas, combinada con distintas perspectivas e intereses para la participación, forma un entorno de trabajo complejo. En esta compleja red de interacciones, la colaboración es necesaria. Trabajar juntos es tan difícil que los investigadores Huxham en Vangen (2004) sugieren que es mejor evitar la colaboración. En la ejecución de un mega proyecto, eso es imposible. En este proceso la colaboración es inevitable. Una organización sola no puede ejecutar un proyecto de esta magnitud y a menudo se requiere de conocimientos específicos, por lo tanto, colaborar con otras partes, es indispensable.

En el programa de la ampliación del Canal de Panamá hemos visto que, en el proceso de colaboración, el personal del proyecto reflejó sus prácticas y las adaptó para encontrar su camino en la organización del proyecto. Mientras que se daba sentido a la complejidad del trabajo cotidiano, se tradujeron las prácticas a formas más simples y comprensibles. A pesar de las diferencias institucionales entre las organizaciones o los valores y prácticas convencionales, el personal del proyecto tuvo la necesidad de construir una relación de colaboración. La sensación de estar
juntos y la involucración personal animaron a los actores para fundar una relación colaborativa. El reflexionar sobre sus hábitos y costumbres y adaptarlas, también se llama ‘reflexión en la acción’ (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009), o al desarrollar nuevas prácticas, la colaboración puede despegar. Yo sugiero que el desarrollo de una alianza puede ser visto como un ‘colaberinto’. Esta combinación de las palabras colaboración y laberinto revela la complejidad de la colaboración.

Habían surgido diferentes prácticas de colaboración que muestran cómo los actores dan sentido y manejan la complejidad de su entorno de trabajo diario. Estas prácticas, como se muestra en los capítulos empíricos, se pueden dividir en prácticas manifestadas y prácticas ocultas. Las prácticas manifestadas son aquellas acciones y actividades que estaban directamente visibles y que eran evidentes en los encuentros cotidianos entre los participantes del proyecto (Gherardi, 2009; Nicolini et al., 2003b; Orlikowski, 2010). Dentro el colaberinto tres prácticas manifestadas pasaron a primer plano. La primera es ‘condiciones conflictivas’. Esto se refiere a los conflictos dentro de la colaboración en el proyecto y demuestra que los conflictos obligaron a los actores a tomar conciencia de ellos mismos y la situación. La segunda práctica manifestada es ‘buscando el consentimiento’, que se refiera a los acuerdos que trataban de encontrar para trabajar juntos. La necesidad para trabajar juntos y la disposición del personal del proyecto para construir una relación se refleja en la tercera práctica manifestada, ‘construyendo relaciones recíprocas’.

Las prácticas ocultas no se pude observar directamente porque estaban debajo de la superficie, estaban implicitas y difíciles de describir (Corradi et al., 2010; Gherardi, 2009). La primera práctica oculta es ‘comportamiento submarino’. En sentido figurado, la práctica se refiere al comportamiento en que el personal del proyecto opera autónomamente, sin tener en cuenta de los otros participantes en el proyecto. ‘Narrando cuentos’ es la segunda práctica oculta. Esta se refiere a las historias que circulan en el proyecto y conectan los empleados. La última práctica oculta es ‘lograr sinergia’, en que los actores están abiertos para aprender unos de otros y adaptarse para conseguir una relación colaborativa.

En la conclusión de la investigación yo levantó las prácticas de colaboración a un nivel abstracto y las conectó a una línea de colaboración. Esta línea, el Collaboration Continuum, indica la influencia de la práctica en la colaboración. Aunque no es mi
intención conectar los hallazgos de la investigación con los resultados del proyecto, presento una forma para enseñar la relación entre las prácticas de colaboración y el desarrollo de la colaboración. En el continuum, las prácticas de colaboración son divididos en tres categorías: (A) prácticas adversas, (B) prácticas de construcción, (C) prácticas de conexión. La primera categoría incluye todas las prácticas que impiden la colaboración, la segunda categoría contiene las prácticas que tratan de establecer la colaboración y en la tercera categoría se refiere a las prácticas que logran la colaboración. El continuum muestra que el enfoque en las prácticas en la gestión de proyectos es esencial para una mejor comprensión de cómo los actores dan sentido a la colaboración intercultural y para saber lo que hacen, cómo lo hacen y en qué circunstancias se ejecutan sus prácticas.

Para lograr una visión más clara de los fenómenos sociales en la gestión de proyectos, aconsejo a los investigadores el uso de los métodos de investigación etnográficas. Una mirada más cercana de lo que está sucediendo diario en una organización del proyecto da una idea de cómo el personal del proyecto da sentido al entorno del trabajo cotidiano. A través de la atención especial a las prácticas aprendemos qué es lo que hace la gente en la gestión de proyectos. Por otra parte, para saber más acerca la colaboración intercultural en la gestión de proyectos, es importante iniciar otros estudios en la colaboración en otros proyectos. Además, investigaciones a los discursos, rituales, símbolos y una combinación de métodos cualitativa y cuantitativa, podría aumentar nuestro conocimiento sobre el lado ‘humano’ de la gestión de proyectos.

Para terminar esta investigación presento cinco recomendaciones para las personas que trabajan en la práctica de proyectos y la gestión de proyectos. La primera recomendación es familiarizarse con las partes con cual se estará colaborando. Aún antes que se firme un contrato puede ser probado si la colaboración sería fructífera. Un experto no sólo puede hacer un análisis de la organización, su cultura, los valores esenciales y las prácticas de trabajo, sino también de las intenciones y expectativas de la participación del proyecto. Un entendimiento claro de cada organización y sus características, ofrece información sobre las diferencias y similitudes entre las partes y proporciona apoyo en una conversación sobre estos temas. La identificación anticipada de las características de cada parte reduce el riesgo de problemas posteriores.
También es importante reflexionar sobre la relación colaborativa y aumentar este proceso frecuentemente con actividades que siguen fomentando la colaboración.

Una segunda recomendación es crear conciencia sobre las numerosas posibilidades de la colaboración intercultural. La diversidad de las diferencias y similitudes culturales enriquece el personal del proyecto con nuevas oportunidades y desafíos. Estas oportunidades se pueden encontrar en la combinación de conocimientos y habilidades, en la exploración de nuevas maneras de trabajo y en la comprensión de cuáles aspectos aún necesitan ser desarrollados más. Un mayor conciencia de la diversidad cultural, los diferentes intereses para la participación en el proyecto y otras maneras de trabajo proporcionan una gran cantidad de posibilidades que mejoran el resultado de la colaboración.

La tercera recomendación es tener paciencia cuando hay un desacuerdo y frustración entre los participantes del proyecto. Los conflictos son inevitables y, a veces, son necesarios para fortalecer la colaboración. A condición de que sean bien guiados, los conflictos promueven apertura y animan a la gente para expresar las tensiones subyacentes. Sólo cuando los conflictos terminan en emociones, conducen a desconfianza e impiden la colaboración. Sin embargo, los conflictos fortalecen la colaboración cuando hay espacio en que la gente puede externalizar sus ideas, perspectivas y expectativas. Por lo tanto, mi consejo es aceptar los conflictos como una parte natural de la colaboración y usarlos para adaptar prácticas o desarrollar nuevas. De esta manera un conflicto puede actuar como el inicio de un proceso de cambio.

La cuarta recomendación se refiere a la introducción de una filosofía de proyecto. Una historia que enseña el objetivo del proyecto aumenta la participación y fortalece una relación colaborativa. Una filosofía tiene que dar una visión completa del propósito del proyecto para que pueda servir como guía en la ejecución del proyecto y pueda ser traducido a las actividades diarias del personal del proyecto. La formación de una filosofía del proyecto no se puede hacer solo, así que la ayuda de las partes del proyecto y otras partes interesadas es necesaria. Esta es una tarea especializada y requiere mucho tiempo, por tanto, es conveniente formular una filosofía en manos de un experto. Para desarrollar una filosofía de proyectos se puede introducir elementos tales como un logotipo, un idioma del proyecto y las normas y valores compartidos
para motivar a los empleados y crear su participación. Últimamente, esta intervención puede dar lugar a una nueva identidad para el personal del proyecto.

La quinta y última recomendación es dar seria atención a la colaboración y soportarla intensivamente. Fomentar la colaboración dentro la organización del proyecto es fundamental. Las prácticas de colaboración puede ser identificadas y también ser utilizadas para estimular la colaboración: se puede reducir a los disminuidores mientras que se ponen más atención en los amplificadores. Por otra parte, cuando un comportamiento nuevo esta requerido en la relación colaborativa, se debe entrenar y manejar el personal del proyecto por sus nuevas actividades y comportamientos. Empleados del proyecto están obligados a seguir estando críticos con el tema de la colaboración y, sabiendo lo difícil de la colaboración, se aconseja estudiar el uno al otro antes de que se entrar a la aventura de trabajar juntos.

Estas cinco recomendaciones reflejan mi consejo de enfocar en la colaboración en las organizaciones de proyectos. Enfatizan la importancia de una perspectiva cultural en la gestión de proyectos y demuestran que la atención explícita a la colaboración intercultural es necesaria. Después de leer este estudio, podrán estar de acuerdo conmigo que la cultura y la colaboración deben ser prioritarios en la agenda de la gestión de proyectos.
Appendix 1
ACP Organization Chart
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About the Author

Karen Smits was born on June 17, 1982, in ‘s-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. In 2003, after conducting research on organizational culture during the merger of three public organizations, she finished her undergraduate studies in Human Resource Management at the Hogeschool ‘s-Hertogenbosch, the Netherlands. She then worked in the field of Human Resources and traveled in South East Asia and South America. In 2005 she started the Pre-master's program on Culture, Organization and Management at VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Karen obtained her Master's degree with a study on entrepreneurship among the Mennonites in Blue Creek, Belize, in 2008. In that same year she started as a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Culture, Organization and Management, which later merged into the Department of Organization Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, VU University Amsterdam.

Karen's research revolves around relationships and processes within and between organizations. Particularly, she is interested in collaboration, culture and behavior. How people make sense of the cultural complexity in their everyday work life is a primary interest in her academic work. During the Ph.D. project she presented her study at different international conferences, taught in various academic courses and mentored several students in the completion of their Master's thesis projects. Currently, Karen works as a researcher and advisor in the Latin America region. She supports organizational members in developing cross-cultural collaboration, organizational change and growth initiatives. She has also been hired for research projects that unravel employee experiences and distinguish lessons learned.
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