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# Political behavior in collaborative innovation spaces: outlining triggers, behaviors and shaping mechanisms

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**Innovation management research often underestimates the social and political nature of innovation processes, leading it to fail to fully explain why many innovative projects experience delays and/or failure. As many organizations engage in collaborative innovation processes involving multiple partners, we must also recognize that such environments are fertile ground for actors to utilize political behavior to pursue their agendas. While political behavior is often dismissed as destructive, it can be a necessary and essential part of pushing collaborative innovation processes forward. This study explores how political behavior can shape spaces for collaboration. We draw on four extensive qualitative studies of collaborative initiatives and outline a three-stage model of shaping collaborative innovation spaces. The model includes background triggers, political behaviors, and four shaping mechanisms. We discuss the influence of the model and the managerial implications of the political nature of collaborative spaces, contributing to the current debate on collaborative innovation spaces.**

## 1. Introduction

There is little doubt that innovation is more likely to occur ‘at the interstices’ of collaborating groups and organizations (Powell et al., 1996; Carlile, 2002; Greer and Lei, 2012; Ollila and Yström, 2016; Heil and Bornemann, 2018; Najafi-Tavani et al., 2018; Irving et al., 2020). However, the innovation management community is currently discussing how to achieve sustainable spaces for collaborative innovation, building upon a renewed interest among scholars and practitioners to explore ‘spaces’ in organization and management studies (see e.g., Clegg and Kornberger, 2006; Beyes and Steyaert, 2012).

In this paper, we consider space, whether physical, virtual, or cognitive, as a process shaped by continuous interaction and negotiation (Murphy, 2002) among collaborative parties. In relation to shaping space, collaborative innovation processes<sup>1</sup> pose a particular challenge, as they typically involve less formalized organizational structures and practices (Ollila and Yström, 2016; Yström and Agogué, 2020), and power distribution among actors can be ambiguous, creating room for negotiation among partners. Diversity in opinion, values, interpretations, and goals considered pivotal for collaborative innovation processes, can trigger political behavior (Tushman, 1977; Markus, 1983; Gray and

Wood, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 2001). As noted by multiple past studies, the use of political behavior can differ throughout a collaboration's lifespan. Contractual arrangements may appear fair, with well-defined roles for participating actors, but in practice actors strive to renegotiate the power distribution (Gray and Wood, 1991) by using political behavior to manipulate the collaborative agenda; or to ensure progress in the collaboration and reach the desired outcomes (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). While a certain amount of political behavior, such as moves to influence others, manage meaning, and control the fate of innovation over time (Thompson and Purdy, 2009) can be necessary for the survival of the collaboration, it can also be detrimental and lead to inflexible positions and difficulties in reaching desired outcomes. Employing political behavior in collaborative innovation processes is thus a delicate balancing act with unpredictable and highly idiographic outcomes.

Frost and Egri (1991) argued that politics is the inevitable result of self-interested competition and resource dependencies between actors. Given that an overwhelming number of inter-organizational arrangements fail to deliver desired outcomes (Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000), or end up in states of collaborative inertia (Huxham and Vangen, 2004), investigating how political behavior may play a role in shaping spaces for collaborative innovation is necessary to contrast the illegitimate and self-serving perspectives on political behavior that tend to dominate current research (Buchanan and Badham, 1999).

Political behavior can be understood as 'power in action' (Buchanan and Badham, 2008). Power exists not only on the surface of organizational life, but is embedded deep in organizations' structures, values, beliefs, and practices (Frost and Egri, 1991; Dougherty and Hardy, 1996; Thompson and Purdy, 2009). Political actions manifest not only as daily contests and struggles in collaborations, but also as a means of influencing perceptions and the framing of events or actions (Thompson and Purdy, 2009). Political behavior, thus, is an unavoidable part of collaborative innovation spaces, where 'space' is understood as a dynamic process of temporary states (physical, virtual, and cognitive), situated in-the-making, shaped by interaction, and manifested in a sense of meaning (why) and order of things (how and when) (de Certeau, 1984). 'Space' is visible through, for example, the value attributed to certain activities, the prioritization of tasks, and negotiation of order among partners (Nathan and Mitroff, 1991).

Following Frost and Egri (1991) suggesting that innovation must be acknowledged as a social and political process to better understand failures or

delays in innovation, we recognize the recursive relationship between human agency and context in innovation processes, where human action can influence structures, which in turn constrain or influence further human action (Giddens, 1979). The contemporary nature and implication of political behavior in shaping spaces for collaborative innovation has not attracted sufficient attention, and more empirical research is required to explicate collaborative tensions (Bogers et al., 2017; Dahlander et al., 2021). This study contributes by integrating perspectives on political behavior and space with current knowledge on collaborative innovation, benefitting both practitioners and the innovation management research community. Our inquiry is guided by the following research question: *How does political behavior shape spaces for collaborative innovation?* We draw on four extensive qualitative studies on collaborative innovation initiatives that illustrate how political behavior shapes spaces for collaborative innovation. Based on our analysis, we outline a three-stage model of shaping collaborative innovation spaces. We also discuss the value of acknowledging political behavior and its role in creating sustainable collaborative innovation spaces.

## 2. Conceptual background

### 2.1. Collaborative innovation dynamics, political behavior, and shaping space

Several streams of literature relate to collaborative innovation dynamics, political behavior, and shaping space. One stream examines the types of collaborations between organizations from a strategic point of view, such as *alliances* (Faems et al., 2008; Adegbesan and Higgins, 2011), *cooperative and collaborative initiatives* (Hamel et al., 1989; Dyer and Singh, 1998; Chesbrough and Appleyard, 2007; Baldwin and von Hippel, 2011; Davis and Eisenhardt, 2011), *partnerships and joint ventures* (Hennart, 1988; Hill and Hellriegel, 1994; Lin and Germain, 1998; Corsi et al., 2022), *networks* (Powell, 1990; Tidd, 1993; Provan and Kenis, 2008), and *platforms* (Ciborra, 1996; Gawer and Cusumano, 2002), to mention a few. The focus here is on how inter-organizational collaboration improves performance by combining respective competences, increasing access to knowledge, spreading risk, and enhancing flexibility (Amara, 1990; Nohria et al., 1992; Chesbrough, 2006; Bogers and West, 2012). This line of research mainly concentrates on the focal firm and its environment, and according to Phillips et al. (2000), it provides less

insight into dynamics at the inter-organizational level. It also represents a rather static view of collaboration, not fully acknowledging the interaction between partners as constituting collaboration (Ollila and Yström, 2016).

A second stream focuses on collaborative dynamics, acknowledging inter-organizational collaboration as an unstructured organizational phenomenon where deciding on the purpose of joint action is an outcome of partnership rather than the starting point (Phillips et al., 2000). Collaboration is viewed as an emergent process shaping shared rules, norms, and structures by grappling with differences through negotiation and consensus-building (Gray and Purdy, 2018; Phillips et al., 2000). This work acknowledges that while divergent ideas are often what makes joint work valuable, in practice, making those ideas converge is cumbersome and necessary to complete work (Vangen and Huxham, 2011). It can be incredibly difficult to achieve a collaborative advantage by synthesizing differences (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Vangen, 2017). Organizational representatives handle a goal paradox because both the congruence and diversity of the partner organizations' goals influence the success of their collaboration (Vangen and Huxham, 2011). Rather than resolving differences, representatives work with them (Cunliffe and Locke, 2020). Studies on the dynamics of collaborative innovation have addressed *negotiating and developing collaborative relationships* (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994); *the role of conflict* (Hardy and Phillips, 1998); *decision-making in networks* (Elg and Johansson, 1997); *relationships between the effects of collaboration and the nature of the collaborations that produce them* (Hardy et al., 2003), and *the politics of networked innovation* (Swan and Scarbrough, 2005). Although this work provides valuable insights into power and influence, it does not explicate the use of tactics to gain power in inter-organizational collaboration. It is important to further understand the dynamics of collaborative innovation from a political behavior perspective.

A third stream is research on organizational politics and political behavior. Building on political theory and inherently being a relational theory, this study focuses on the power dynamics of the inter-organizational domain (Gray and Wood, 1991). One strand of research highlights organizational politics as inevitable and an inherent organizational phenomenon in collaboration which should be considered as driving change and innovation. Phillips et al. (2000) argued that collaboration excludes control through legitimate authority (Ouchi, 1980). Collaborative partners are relatively autonomous and must be convinced to act. Accordingly, power and politics

are critical issues in collaboration integrated into the continuous negotiation of roles and responsibilities. Positioning and politicking exist within all organizational contexts (Huxham, 2003; Buchanan and Badham, 2008), and are pivotal for innovation to occur (Frost and Egri, 1991; Hislop et al., 2001). Studying the creation of networks for innovation, Hislop et al. (2001) revealed how politics shaped the scope of change, influenced agenda formation and which people were involved in (and excluded from) decision-making processes, the value attached to bodies of knowledge, and the way meaning was managed. They concluded that political behavior is essential for the innovation process.

Another strand focuses on political behavior, describing definitions and uses. Morgan (1997) argues that while people admit in private that much 'wheeling and dealing' surrounds them at work, this is seldom discussed in public. This could be because collaboration implies working toward a common goal without exploiting the collaboration for personal benefit. Politics is a contested term, and there are multiple definitions of what constitutes political activity in organizations (Morgan, 1997; Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Butcher and Clarke, 1999; Pinto, 2000; Ammeter et al., 2002). Ammeter et al. (2004) adopted a non-pejorative view of politics, characterizing politics as neither good nor bad, but rather as a fact of life woven into the fabric of organizations. If we consider political behavior to be individuals reconciling their different interests through consultation and negotiation (Morgan, 1997), or behaviors to acquire power for use toward one's preferred outcomes (Pfeffer, 1981), then politics is neither inadmissible nor an 'out of frame' activity but a process of working toward a common goal. This paper considers political behavior as the practical domain of power in action, worked out through the use of techniques and tactics of influence (Buchanan and Badham, 1999). We build on Vangen and Huxham (2003)'s description of political behavior as directing others toward specific goals, imposing a specific understanding of an issue, engaging in stealthy behavior, networking and building relationships with others to form alliances.

The fourth stream is research on organizational space. In organizational studies, there has been an urge to renew focus on space (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004) to further our understanding of organizational constructs. Work in this field considers space as a place for various activities. Collaborative innovation includes hackathons (Hausberg and Spaeth, 2020), open laboratories (Fritzsche et al., 2020), living labs (Almirall and Wareham, 2011; Leminen et al., 2012), maker



spaces (Mersand, 2021), and fab labs (Mortara and Parisot, 2018). Here, the focus is on how physical, virtual, and cognitive spaces offer places for various actors to jointly participate in innovation (Leminen et al., 2020). It has been suggested that human cognition's interaction with the environment is the source of new knowledge. Peschl and Fundneider (2012) claimed that environmental structures become part of cognitive processes and thereby play an important role in knowledge construction.

Another strand depicts 'space as processual and performative, open-ended and multiple, practiced and of the everyday' (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012, p. 47). de Certeau (1984) suggests that space should be understood as a multi-valued unity of conflicting perspectives. Space is then a relatively consolidated outcome continually being renegotiated, and this dynamic quality can lead to of transformation and appropriation. Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith (1991) argued that human interaction produces space. Space is neither naturally given nor immutable, but rather a product of interrelations always in the making, never 'a totally coherent and interrelated system of interconnections' (Massey, 1999, p. 280), thus both being disrupted and being disruptive. This strand of research suggests that human interaction shapes collaborative spaces. Some individuals engage in what de Certeau (1984) labels 'tactics,' practices to insinuate their own agenda into the organizational space they are part of. This could imply political behavior, such as strategic communication, networking, and lobbying, creating impressions and bending rules silently (Buchanan and Badham, 2008). Accordingly, political behavior (as any other behavior) is inherently spatial, that is, it has the potential to shape space through the distribution of activities, authority, functions, value, individuals, or groups. de Certeau (1984) argues that such behavior defines who is 'legitimate' and gives sense to certain issues while marginalizing others. In shaping a collaborative space, political behavior implies a disruption of the established order by reconfiguring actors in the social system.

## 2.2. A political perspective on the shaping of collaborative space

We consider inter-organizational collaboration for innovation as an emergent process shaping shared rules, norms, and structures through individuals' grappling with differences through negotiation and consensus-building (Phillips et al., 2000;

Gray and Purdy, 2018). Space is considered a process shaped by continuous interaction and negotiation (Murphy, 2002) among collaborative parties, thus transcending the distinction between physical, virtual, and cognitive spaces. Moreover, we recognize that there is political potential inherent in collaborative innovation processes which can be actualized in political behavior when individuals are interacting. Political behavior thereby becomes a medium in shaping collaborative spaces to change the order of things in a collaboration. By studying the shaping of space through social and political processes, it is possible to better understand the dynamics causing failures, delays, or progress in collaborative innovation (Frost and Egri, 1991). Thus, the guiding question of our inquiry is: *How does political behavior shape spaces for collaborative innovation?*

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research design

Four qualitative case studies on collaborative initiatives set in the Western European mobility and automotive sectors were conducted. A theoretical and purposive sampling strategy was used (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) to identify cases of collaborative initiatives that (1) pursued collaborative innovation, (2) formulated a joint purpose for collaboration, and (3) had expressed managerial challenges due to there being multiple stakeholders (see Table 1 for details).

### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

A qualitative research approach with interviews and observations (see Table 2 for details) enabled the exploring of the complex phenomenon of organizational politics occurring in real-life settings (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Additionally, this approach enabled us to capture political dynamics in real time rather than retrospectively (Thompson and Purdy, 2009).

Open-ended interviews were adopted to enable the analysis of thoughts and reasoning, providing an understanding of political game playing. The interviews focused on the practice of collaboration, intended collaborative outcomes, examples of collaborative success, struggles with collaborations, and reflections on behaviors. While the interviews typically started with general questions, interviewees gradually opened up and shared more stories of collaborative dynamics. Still, reporting across

**Table 1.** Summary of main characteristics of the four cases

Case	Case A	Case B	Case C	Case D
Organizational construct	Incorporated test bed owned by one university and one research institute	Platform/community with two core industrial partners	Research competence center hosted by a university	Living lab organized by a large municipality
Focus area	Road safety	Information and communication technology	Traffic safety	Urban transport solutions
No of partners	12 organizations from academia, industry, and society	35 organizations from academia, industry, and society	37 organizations from academia, industry, and society	15 organizations from industry, academia, and society
Established	2007 (facility inaugurated 2014)	2013	2006	2013
Management structure	Board and CEO	Project manager	Shareholder's meeting, Board, Director and Reference groups	Partner group (all partners), Steering group (core partners), Coordinators, Project groups

**Table 2.** Summary of study design and data collection in each case

Case	A	B	C	D
Time period studied	2013–2014	2014–2015	2009–2017	2015–2018
Data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 semi-structured interviews with CEO and partner representatives</li> <li>2 seminars/workshops</li> <li>approx. 10 hr of participatory observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18 semi-structured interviews</li> <li>2 seminars/workshops</li> <li>approx. 20 hr of participatory observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>71 semi-structured interviews with director (<math>n = 24</math>), partner representatives (<math>n = 28</math>), partner representatives (<math>n = 18</math>) etc.</li> <li>10 seminars/workshops</li> <li>approx. 500 hr of participatory observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19 reflective conversations with partners, coordinators, partner representatives</li> <li>2 seminars/workshops</li> <li>approx. 140 hr of participatory observations of project/coordinator meetings</li> </ul>

cases varies as interviewees were encouraged to only disclose what they felt comfortable with, but also because the extent of data collection varied. Interviews lasted 45–90 min, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interviewees' names have been anonymized to protect their identities.

We began analysis by identifying situations in which collaborative dynamics changed. Then, we focused on utterances and uses of political behavior, following the format of open and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). The observational data available and researchers' involvement in seminars enriched the contextual understanding of each case and facilitated the triangulation of emerging insights, allowing the researchers to situate political behavior.

Based on our analysis, we present four accounts of how political behavior shaped collaborative space, situating such behavior in preceding and proceeding actions and events. The accounts do not aspire to represent all political behavior in the collaborations at that time. Clearly, the examples are limited in scope, detail, and representativeness, but their value lies in their being descriptive and illustrative (Buchanan and Badham, 1999).

#### 4. Political behavior shaping collaborative space

The accounts of political behavior<sup>2</sup> offer glimpses into actors' sense making of situations. Each account is followed by a short reflection, explicating our interpretation of the collaborative space shaped by political behavior. Additional supporting quotes are provided in Appendix Tables A1–A4.

##### 4.1. Political behavior used to shape a joint purpose

###### 4.1.1. Background – all partners' needs are not accommodated

When the initiative in Case A was set up, an academic partner and a research institute stepped up and took significant economic risk by becoming owners. The facility relied heavily on commercial customers, in parallel with research interests that legitimized such risk-taking from the owners. Still, as the opening of the facility drew closer in 2014 and the implementation of a complex business model was put to test, the needs of the academic partner were downplayed in boardroom discussions. It resembled a hostage situation when it became clear that the owners had little to say in

relation to the stronger commercial interests, as also explained by Dave, one of the owner's representatives: *'I am concerned about the perception that research in [Case A], and also the "open" research, is completely directed by the short-term needs of the industry.'*

To effectively utilize the facility for collaborative research and innovative projects, academic researchers were dependent on equipment and resources that they did not have and could not afford to purchase with standard research grants, as explained by Sergio, one of the academics involved: *'[Academic] Researchers are disadvantaged in contrast to the industrial users because we don't have cars. [The industrial partners] they have their vehicles, but we in the worst case must apply for equipment like a car in our research budgets.'* Researchers were initially expected to pay the same rate as commercial customers renting the facilities. Such customers would also be prioritized for 'prime time slots', as stated by Gavin, the facility manager: *'When the wheels start turning and we have a high booking demand, then it will be difficult to prioritize the research. [...] If I should act as a responsible operating manager for testing, then I should cancel the research or shift it to a time when there is less demand.'* Despite significant governmental funding for applied research being allocated to Case A to ensure a strong researcher presence at the facility, the conflictual setting exposes the divergent views held regarding the purpose and use of the facility among partners.

###### 4.1.2. Identified political behavior

The industrial partners fought to take **control over the resources** distributed through governmental channels: *'The industry says "it's our money" and then I say "no, it's probably a bit of both" [...] but as long as the researchers cannot specify what they intend to do research on, everything gets so f\*cking ridiculous because they [researchers] are challenged by industry asking "so what are you going to do?" and [the researchers] say, "well, we don't know yet"'* (Mark, CEO, case A). There was a **reluctance to commit resources** to invest in equipment that researchers needed: *'[Equipment] is a matter of priorities within the financial frame of [Case A] [...] and right now, equipment has ended up at the bottom of the priority list'* (John, industrial representative partner). As a result, the industrial partners **delayed** the board from **acting on the researchers' needs** until the situation became unbearable, as suggested by Dave, an owner representative: *'I think it has been very difficult for*

[owner 1] to understand what is going on' indicating a **lack of transparency**.

The academics, as described by Sergio, in turn responded by **unionizing** and initiating a researcher community group raising the concerns of said group: 'The [researcher] community should be formally represented in the [Case A] user group. In that sense, getting a formal vote, if there is [voting]. This should be ensured because if only industrial partners play the game, we are disadvantaged as researchers.' The formation of this group helped secure commitments to investments in facility-owned equipment and led to a revision of the facility's business model. However, the collaborative space, years later, is still marked by the idea 'commercial first, research second'.

#### 4.1.3. Reflection

When the industrial partners act as if the facility is only for their benefit, stating that commercial activities should be prioritized over research, and take it upon themselves to define who the primary users are, they use political behavior to create a specific order and power distribution (Gray and Wood, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 2001) among the partners. This political behavior reveals a deeper structure embedded in values, beliefs, and practices (Frost and Egri, 1991; Thompson and Purdy, 2009) positioning commercial activities as more important than academic research. The academics resorted to taking a formal route to reclaim part of their control over the distribution of resources, reclaiming their stake in the collaboration. This account illustrates how political behavior was used to negotiate the intended and *de facto* joint purpose of the facility as an innovative platform. It was this negotiation around the joint purpose of the facility that shaped a collaborative space which acknowledges the diverse interests and conflicting perspectives of the invested parties (de Certeau, 1984). The negotiation informed the actors on 'how to go on' collectively.

### 4.2. Political behavior used to shape relationships between partners

#### 4.2.1. Background – partners not acting as peers

Originally, Case B was initiated to break up old business relationships and restructure the landscape of the actors, building relationships as peers rather than buyers, suppliers, and competitors, so as to provide an accommodating environment for the innovation and maintenance of competence in an automotive ICT. However, the project manager, Ben, said that the partners were sending

junior officials with no decision-making mandate to the round table meetings (the decision body of the platform), which made the meetings '*observational meetings instead of meetings where members accomplish something together, which is not good at all.*' During the interviews, we noted that the partners, original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), Tier1 suppliers, and consultancy companies struggled with repositioning themselves as well as other partners. The struggles concerned changes in roles, including rights and duties, when interacting as 'equal' peers. Hank, a representative from a Tier1 organization, said: '*The hardware and software will be separated, and the software will be an important part and the OEMs want to have better control of this. Therefore, they partly want to develop it themselves, and have firms closely connected to them doing it for them. This platform [Case B] is part of their strategy, and they gain insights into the software developing firms' potential through competition [Open Innovations] and Market days. We are not the target group for the platform.*' Alex, representing a consultancy firm, stated: '*the consultancy firms are sitting there waiting for what the OEMs are going to say today,*' 'everyone is sitting there around the table as nestlings saying okay and looking at the OEMs.' These accounts indicate that the platform failed to provide an accommodating environment, but rather generated a competitive and suspicious climate where mainly one OEM invited small consultancy firms to compete with established Tier1 suppliers for future business deals.

#### 4.2.2. Identified political behavior

One of the annual activities was the Open Innovation competition, which aimed to support collaboration between associated partners (Tier1 suppliers and consultancy companies lacking an established role in the supply chain industry) joining forces in the competition. Instead, this event turned out to be **controlling the roles** of competing suppliers. Mike, a representative of a Tier1 organization explained: '*we are supposed to go there and show our products, participate in Open Innovation competitions, and contribute with our innovations openly for the OEMs. This is not of interest to us.*' The competition was exploited by the core partners, as they had created **the routine** that only core partners could create the initiatives, and the remaining partners needed to wait to be invited. Bill, a representative of a Tier1 organization said, '*it is the Tier1 suppliers that get stuck. The OEMs obtain what they want. They want to get access to smaller companies, which are quick to*



generate innovations on their platform [...]. What do the Tier1 suppliers get? They do not even have control over the choice of subcontractors. In the worst case, they might be forced to work with subcontractors that are not mature enough to work in the automotive industry.' Smaller consultancy firms did not clearly benefit from the Open Innovation competition activity either, but the core partners were not called out on their actions. This **staging and distributing of rights** for one's own benefit exemplifies political behavior restricting other partners from the same rights to influence and benefit from collaboration. Bill called the competitions 'scams' which the 'poor' participants would eventually realize. He also said that *'the platform needs to grow in size through the introduction of new international OEM partners...we need some new blood...it would put pressure on the associate partners.'* According to the platform's webpage, some changes were eventually made to recapture the ambition of being an accommodating environment for innovation. The Test room, an innovation arena for testing and demonstrations, was launched to enable companies other than (without excluding) traditional suppliers to become involved, and no more Open Innovation competition were arranged. In January 2016, a new Tier1 supplier joined as a core partner, and in February 2016, one of the already associated partners became the fourth core partner. In December 2018, the board decided to shut down the platform.

#### 4.2.3. Reflections

By only allowing themselves to take initiative, the core partners indicated that they have all the power, and that the associated partners are dependent on them, thus positioning themselves as legitimate and others less noticeable (de Certeau, 1984). This political behavior implies a deeper structure (Thompson and Purdy, 2009) shaping the order of partners (Nathan and Mitroff, 1991) which preserves traditional roles rather than supporting new roles. The project manager handled this by terminating the competition, mainly favoring the traditional roles, and instead launched the Test room and expanded the group of core partners. This account illustrates how political behavior was used by the core partners (the OEMs) to disrupt the intended new order, where stakeholders would be peers, by upholding traditional relationships and thus remaining in control of the landscape of current and potential suppliers. It was this interaction around the positioning of the actors in relation to each other (de Certeau, 1984) that shaped a collaborative space preserving the 'old' network of relationships that

was supposed to be abandoned when the collaboration was launched. Failure to establish new relations and roles could be one reason why the collaboration was ultimately dissolved.

### 4.3. Political behavior used to shape the content of the collaboration

#### 4.3.1. Background – defining the 'right' and

##### *'wrong' projects in the collaborative portfolio*

When the collaboration in Case C had been ongoing for approximately three years, discussions on the focus and scope of the collaboration intensified. Many partners contemplated their motivation for continued partnership, considering past accomplishments and the projected direction of the collaboration. The scope of the collaboration was balancing on a delicate line between applied and fundamental research. The partners held different views, as exemplified by Steve, from an industrial partner: *'Whether it is clearly stated or not, I do not know, but applied research has no place within [Case C] right now, that is my definite opinion.'* The primary activity of Case C was the hosting of a significant number of projects with several partners (but not necessarily all), and this resulted in discussions about what were the 'right' kind of projects to be pursued within the scope of the collaboration. Arnold, from another industrial partner stated: *'What we really want to do is ensure that we start the right kind of projects. But I think we might have different views on the projects... Some would clearly like more projects resulting in solutions, things, or even cars, so to say. Others might feel that this is about research, meaning our main goal should be knowledge.'* Although some structures and processes have emerged for how to select among project ideas presented by partners, it is an ongoing debate that has created uncertainty regarding the requirements and criteria for project selection and ultimately the content of the collaboration.

#### 4.3.2. Identified political behavior

This fundamental divide concerning the 'right' and 'wrong' kinds of projects set the scene for political behavior according to Frank from one of the research partners: *'If you look at the whole of [Case C], it is still sprawling, going in many different directions, and you may find it triggering that there are different agendas when you meet at the shareholders' meeting, and some are only there to monitor. But there is a lot of politics going on.'*

Several participants said that to ensure that 'the right kind' of projects were conducted in the collaboration, they **selectively engaged** in projects

clearly linked to their own agenda, as exemplified by Lenny from one of the industrial partners: *'Before you throw in some money in all the interesting projects, you need to think carefully about whether they are in line with our own strategic long-term plan.'* Also implied was a heavy reliance on partners to propose new ideas, as explained by Andrew from a societal partner: *'It is not exactly an open brainstorming about which projects to do, it is completely based on initiatives from the partners.'* Because of this selective engagement, the partners were able to **withhold resources** (e.g., time, competence, etc.) from certain projects that might be important to the joint agenda but not relevant to the partners themselves. This behavior aligned the project portfolio with the partner's agenda, at the expense of others.

To have a project proposal approved by Case C's management, partners would sometimes engage in **informal pre-negotiations** with pre-selected partners, **securing allies** for their proposals before presenting them. Thus, not all partners were able to partake in projects as they might have liked. As stated by Margaret, the director of Case C: *'Just because you are part of the collaboration, does not mean you have the right to be in every project.'* This meant that partners who were not 'present' at the table at the right time, did not have any significant influence on the collaboration's content, as explained by Steve: *'All of a sudden, a project [proposal] might appear at a meeting and if you have not been part of the club from the start, then it can be very difficult to state at the meetings that we would like to join and elbow our way into this particular project.'* The backdoor negotiations were somewhat accepted as a common practice as the collaboration was dependent on the resources and willingness of core partners. However, Margaret, also used political behavior such as **increasing the status of less central partners** by giving such partners important formal roles to keep them committed to the joint purpose. At writing, the initiative remains strong due to management's continuous support for continuous dialog on the content of the collaboration and dedication to managing partner relations.

#### 4.3.3. Reflection

The multiple perceptions of what are the 'right' kinds of projects illustrate a situated continuous understanding of the present and future content of the collaboration. The circumstances allowed central and negotiating partners to take it upon themselves to define project selection criteria and assess what fits within the current scope, sometimes

circumventing discussions in established management structures, excluding potential collaborators. This was, to some extent, balanced through actions from others to promote the interests of less central partners and reinforce a more equal power distribution (Gray and Wood, 1991; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). However, as partners' interests and willingness to commit resources remain critical to the survival of the collaboration, such wheeling and dealing becomes unavoidable as partners have their own interests to protect (Swan and Scarbrough, 2005). This account illustrates how political behavior was used to influence the content and scope of the collaboration to fit individual organizational strategies while still being relevant to the collective. It was the negotiation and interaction around the value attributed to certain activities, and the prioritization of tasks (Nathan and Mitroff, 1991), which shaped a collaborative space allowing and demanding continuous dialog regarding the project portfolio, ensuring the sustained commitment of the partners.

### 4.4. Political behavior used to shape the contribution of each partner in the collaboration

#### 4.4.1. Background – unease and potential conflict among partners due to the ambiguity of their contributions

According to an official report created by Case D, all partners contribute to activities in the living lab. These activities have several mutual dependencies among different partners. No partner had the authority to tell another what they should do. However, the uncharted territory with various groups and tasks, structured or unstructured, was challenging for some partners. As Julia, representative of an academic partner explained: *'I was totally lost in the beginning. It seemed as if the others had clear tasks and deliverables, for example, a bus stop or a charging pole.'* She continued *'we were there to contribute with our brand or some sort of credibility, I understood this after a while.'* Mary, one of the representatives from the municipality explained: *'we delivered what was demanded, we built the bus stops, and we were good at this in the collaboration, but we didn't have the ability to consider what R&D needs we have that we could realize and test in the living lab. ... A lot of the possibilities that were developed in the collaboration we did not have a channel for utilizing, not even close... we had to have this to make the living lab a practical testbed for us.'* Several representatives described how they struggled to ensure

that value was created through collaboration. The Chairman of the steering group, Nick, also representing an automotive company, said: *'Maybe it's not useful to define everything 100 percent, because I think one part of the success in [the living lab] has been that we have everyone sitting around the table and everyone has felt that it's their project, you know. Even though everyone knows that "that guy" has not contributed very much.'* The representative from the municipality, Mary, said, *'we have heard so many times, "this is the way you should do it", but we are collaborating [in the living lab]...we should be able to say what we can and want to develop.'* A contrasting view is that of Sandy, a representative from an automotive company, who said that *'this collaboration is a true collaboration since we do not have the buyer-supplier roles...we can talk about other things that we normally do not talk about... it is not a negotiation... but of course in the long run we want to sell buses.'* These circumstances suggest that it is not clear how the partners contributed to the collaboration, and that some partners attempted to assume the authority of telling others what to do.

#### 4.4.2. Identified political behavior

The coordinators told us how they juggled supporting the organizations to establish the ideal of equality, while recognizing that 'how things work' in collaboration is shaped by the influence of a few organizational representatives, and mainly bigger industrial partners. The coordinators appeared to be concerned by the actions of certain partners, causing difficulties in mediations between organizational representatives. In one meeting with the coordinators, Francis told us about the relationship between the formal agreements and contracts, outlining how partner organizations relate to one another, and the emergent (functional) ways of getting things done. Alex, the other coordinator, commented that *'the tough discussions happen outside of groups.'* The coordinators were mindful of the power dynamics between the various actors involved (industrial, academic, and public sector), and were alert to potential conflicts and the risk of a lack of initiative and momentum that could collapse the collaboration. The coordinators orchestrated the collaboration by guiding Nick, the chairman of the steering group. They worked meticulously to prepare the steering group meetings together with Nick, in terms of **setting the agenda** to influence the meeting so that it provided the desired outcome. Alex described how she gave the chairman *'a list of what he needed to say at what point,'* to secure partners' engagement and commitment and maintain momentum moving into the next phase of the collaboration. Francis explained: *'We push...What we do is that*

*when things stall, or when we see that things need to be done...So, there's a situation that needs to be dealt with, then we talk to the people involved. We play, we encourage, we give tips, we flatter, and we bring in other people with mandates, and sometimes, as Alex said, we take the escalation route, even though we are not allowed. And we make it known that whatever it is, is not going very well.'* Hence, sometimes the coordinators had **informal one-to-one pre-meetings to cast partners for different roles and scripted what remarks** they should make. When observing de-brief meetings including with the two coordinators we learned who the coordinators had a *'quick word in their ear'* with. The coordinators knew that certain points would have a greater effect if brought forward by a specific partner. The main result of the collaboration in the living lab was implemented in 2016. The collaboration moved on to the next phase, and the coordinators kept the partners interested and committed to a joint agenda, including expanding to new vehicles and geographical areas. The living lab collaboration is still ongoing.

#### 4.4.3. Reflection

When scripting actions and lines for partner representatives, the coordinators direct others toward specific goals and impose a specific understanding of issues, showing that such political behavior can be used to manipulate behavior toward achieving collective goals and a joint agenda (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). Giving partners a voice and addressing their issues balances the unevenly distributed power within the collaboration, creating a sense of purpose and contribution, redefining some partners' status and orientation. Such political behavior also shapes the order of things (Thompson and Purdy, 2009), allowing for partners to be equal despite their contributing in different ways. This account illustrates how political behavior was used by the coordinators to influence partners' understanding of each other's contribution and create awareness of the value of less central partners. It was the interaction and negotiation around the contributions of the partners that shaped a collaborative space valuing diversity and giving a sense of relevance to each partner's participation (de Certeau, 1984), thus securing the long-term engagement and commitment of the partners.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. A model of political behavior shaping spaces for collaborative innovation

The analysis indicates that the shaping of collaborative space was unique in each case, but that the

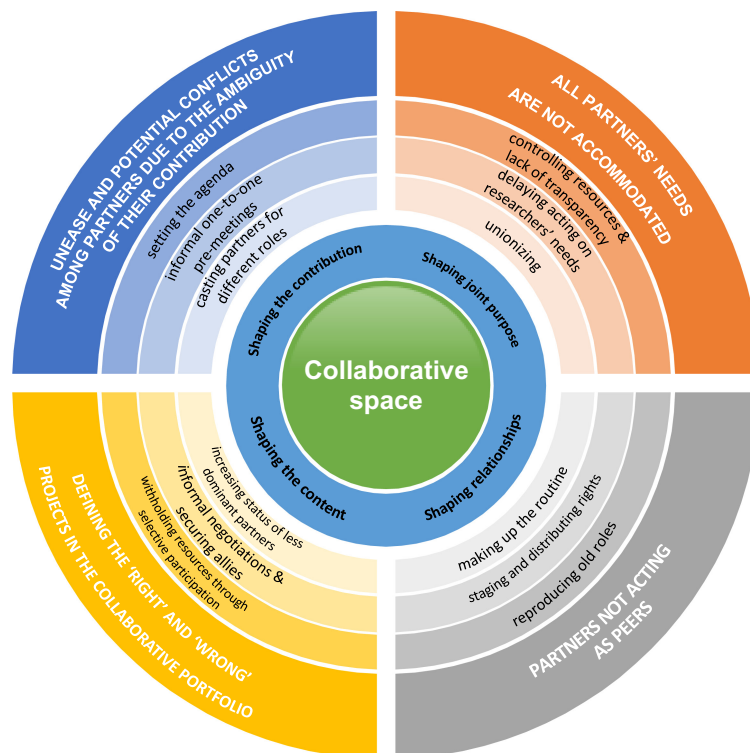
process follows three common stages: a triggering background, political behavior, and shaping mechanisms (see Figure 1). While the accounts represent a limited selection, they offer a qualitative foundation for analytical generalization that can inform theory building on how political behaviors are used to shape collaborative spaces (de Certeau, 1984).

The four triggers of political behavior (Frost and Egri, 1991) in the model: (1) all partners' needs are not accommodated, (2) partners not acting as peers, (3) defining the right and wrong projects in the collaborative portfolio, and (4) unease and potential conflict among partners due to the ambiguity of their contribution, can be related to characteristics of collaborative innovation (e.g., less formalized organizational structures and practices) (Ollila and Yström, 2016; Yström and Agogué, 2020), ambiguous power distribution (Gray and Wood, 1991; Hislop et al., 2001), diversity in opinion, values, interpretations, and goals (Tushman, 1977; Markus, 1983; Gray and Wood, 1991; Eden and Huxham, 2001; Huxham and Vangen, 2004) and the negation of orders (Nathan and Mitroff, 1991).

The accounts show that political behaviors emerge as a response to the prevailing circumstances in the collaboration (the triggers), for better or worse, and are thus the result of context-specific

actions and reactions at a particular time and place. It is important to note that the same political behavior can result in different outcomes in different situations, prohibiting any declaration of 'bad' or 'good' behaviors (Buchanan and Badham, 1999). The analysis indicates that political behavior shapes different dimensions of collaborative spaces through four shaping mechanisms: (1) shaping the purpose, (2) shaping the relationships, (3) shaping the content, and (4) shaping the contribution (outlined in Figure 1). Shaping space through social interaction (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991) implies that the above mechanisms are active whenever participants in a collaboration engage in these topics. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of potential shaping mechanisms.

Moreover, the analysis indicates that the collaborative space being shaped by political behavior can be both favorable and detrimental for collaboration. Three cases presented spaces supporting collaboration. In case A, diverse interests were acknowledged. In case C, demanded continuous dialog regarding the project's portfolio was encouraged. In case D, each partner's participation was given a sense of relevance. Such collaborative spaces informed participants' actions as a collective, ensuring sustained engagement and commitment. In case B, political behavior shaped the collaborative space, preserving traditional



**Figure 1.** A model of political behavior shaping spaces for collaborative innovation.



relationships that hindered partners' collaboration as peers. Acknowledging that human interaction creates space that is processual, performative, open-ended, and multiple (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012), leads to acknowledging that space, in turn, generates human behavior and interaction, and influences our values and identity. Hence, collaborative space can generate actions among partners that might otherwise not have occurred (de Certeau, 1984). This is an important aspect of collaborative dynamics and building toward a holistic understanding of the emergence and development of collaborative innovation spaces.

The shaping of space can nuance the discussion of the use of political behaviors in collaborative innovation processes. As previously noted, political behavior can render collaboration ineffective (Huxham and Vangen, 2004) or disintegrate collaboration altogether if the situation is not properly managed. However, as argued by Hardy et al. (2005), political behavior can function as a trigger or a foundation for positive actions, healthy discussions, and constructive debate on important topics, enforcing mutual commitment to joint goals and increasing the understanding of different motives.

This study's main contribution rests on the critical call by Frost and Egri (1991) to consider innovation as a social and political process. We propose a model for political behavior and how it shapes collaborative spaces, increasing our understanding of the dynamics of collaborative innovation. The model contributes to and complements current innovation management literature by demonstrating the shaping of space for collaboration in three stages. This study addresses the call for more in-depth qualitative research (Bogers et al., 2017; Dahlander et al., 2021) and extends and deepens previous research on the dynamics of collaborative innovation (e.g., Gray and Wood, 1991; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Elg and Johansson, 1997; Hardy et al., 2003; Huxham and Vangen, 2004; Swan and Scarbrough, 2005). By outlining four shaping mechanisms and the roles taken by various representatives, this study complements studies focusing on the political behavior of collaboration managers (Vangen and Huxham, 2003; Ollila and Yström, 2017), and how to transition from strategic to transformational multi-actor collaboration (Westerlund and Rajala, 2010; Coghlan and Coughlan, 2015; Yström et al., 2019).

## 5.2. Managerial implications

Our study legitimizes concerns related to the characteristics of collaborative innovation and how these can be triggers for political behavior that can be used

by all stakeholders to influence collaborative spaces. This introduces a dynamic perspective on managing collaborative innovation by pointing to the need to see collaboration as more than what is agreed upon on paper. Managers should thus be aware of and expect political behavior to occur, and by close involvement and engagement, it is possible to pick up on early signals of such behavior. A political perspective can offer new managerial paths, both proactive and reactive. An example is implementing structures and routines promoting dialog and joint sense making to increase transparency and distribute power.

## 5.3. Limitations and further research

This study is based on four qualitative case studies, and there are limitations to this design. Our conclusions and continued early theory building can be refined through longitudinal, processual studies that provide further insights into how power and politics influence the emergence of collaborative spaces. Specifically, such studies could focus on validating, challenging, or amending the identified shaping mechanisms to elaborate on the contingent nature of political behaviors and their outcomes. Another limitation is that our theoretical perspective on space as processual did not specifically consider physical, virtual, or cognitive spaces and how political behavior might be used to shape these spaces of collaborative innovation. Research focusing on these could provide more comprehensive and actionable knowledge of how political behavior shapes collaborative space.

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## Data availability statement

Data subject to third party restrictions.

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## Notes

1. Innovation activities or innovation processes involving multiple actors, organizations or individuals transcending boundaries (within or across organizations) with the purpose of creating and developing new products, services, policies, processes or business solutions (Yström and Agogué, 2020, p. 141).
2. Political behaviors have been marked in bold for clarification of what specific behavior we have identified in each account.

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APPENDIX A

**Table A1.** Illustrative quotes case A

Background All partners' needs are not accommodated	Illustrative quotes
	<p>[Case A] is a facility where the automotive industry can run experiments on... [...] And then there are researchers who perceive the possibilities in different ways for the proving ground and then the task for [Case A] is getting more challenging because they would need to serve us in a different way. (Sergio, Academic representative)</p> <p>[The industrial partners A &amp; B] but also [Partner C] and [Partner D] have opened up to a rather unconventional solution which implies that they neither own nor control a facility needed for their commercial operations and development, they have so to say, 'laid their destiny in our hands'. (Dave, Owner representative)</p> <p>The 18 million [public funding] is part of our cash flow and [...] there are very different views on whose money it is. If you are on the industry side and part of running [publicly funded] projects, then you have all the power, then it is industry's money and they act in line with that in all situations [...]. (Mark, CEO, case A)</p> <p>When the wheels start turning and we have a high booking demand, then it will be difficult to prioritize the research. [...] If I should act as a responsible operating manager of testing then I should cancel the research or shift it to a time when there is less demand. (Gavin, facility manager, case A)</p> <p>I don't want us to reach a point where they say 'well if we sell more slots then we have more income to do even more', that's great but don't forget the balance that needs to be maintained for this to be a good facility. We must be prepared to sacrifice some slots for research to have a chance [to have access] [...] but it has to be on the condition that researchers don't have to pay the full price, otherwise it will not work out. (Dave, Owner representative)</p> <p>But then we have the... there could be the problem that research questions that are not of primary interest for the automotive industry, are sort of excluded, so we need to find a way to get access in parallel or outside the [publicly] funded test track time or try to find a way where we can use a small part of this test track time for let us say free research. (Sergio, Academic representative)</p> <p>I am concerned about the perception that research at [Case A], also the 'open' research, is directed by the short-term needs of industry. (Dave, Owner representative)</p> <p>Researchers have the problem in contrast to the industrial users that by nature we don't have cars. [The partners], they have their vehicles, but we in the worst case have to apply for equipment like a car in our research budgets which is a significant portion of a financial budget if we would like to buy a car, equip a car with [the] technical sensors and lock mechanisms and data log-in mechanisms and also maintaining such a car, in the worst case employing a technician to take care of the car. This is something where in the best case, I would like to outsource this as a standardized platform to [the Case A initiative] and in the best case just reserve part of my budget for renting such equipment from [the Case A initiative]. (Sergio, Academic representative)</p>

(Continues)

Table A1. (Continued)

Political behavior	Illustrative quotes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>control over resources</li> <li>delayed acting on researchers' needs</li> <li>lack of transparency</li> <li>unionizing</li> </ul>	<p>The industry says 'it's our money' and then I say 'no, it's probably a bit of both' [...] but as long as the research side cannot specify what they intend to do research on, everything gets so f*cking ridiculous because they [researchers] are challenged by industry asking 'so what are you going to do?' and [the researchers] say 'well, we don't know yet'. (Mark, CEO, Case A)</p> <p>'Q: Are there ongoing discussions in the board about this?' -A: 'Yes, all the time, and in some eyes too much to the extent that it disturbs their focus on delivering to customers.' (Dave, Owner representative)</p> <p>We have structures to deal with the problems, and I hope we can avoid big problems. We have demanded from [Case A] that we should have a joint steering group for [Case A] and for traffic control, and then we also have a steering group to handle the projects. (John, Industrial partner representative)</p> <p>[The CEO of the other owner] also has a board with people like [industry representative] and he goes through the roof, he thinks that we are prioritizing research before customers and so on. But that does not mean that we surrender, but we need to find paths forward that creates a solution, we do not strive for conflict, we want to make this work. (Dave, Owner representative)</p> <p>[Equipment] is a matter of priorities within the financial frames of [Case A], [...] what to prioritize, and right now equipment is at the bottom of the list. (John, Industrial partner representative)</p> <p>There will be two phases, one is building that facility and there it is a very tight budget, it is impossible to squeeze out any more money there. But then, when that is finished, then we will transition to new loans from the banks. So, we have one routine for building it and another for running it. And then we will replace some people on the board because we will need to move into a completely different way of operating. (Sara, Owner representative)</p> <p>I think it has been very difficult for the [owner] board to understand what is going on. (Dave, Owner representative)</p> <p>My hope is that our visions and expectations are discussed on the right levels. I mean, I can only carry these needs to the right discussion partners, but we are one part of the big game... (Sergio, Academic representative)</p> <p>[Case A] should not push to exclude individual researchers because they feel a pressure from the commercial customers, or because they only see the economic benefits of customers paying in a different way, and here we must be very clear in the board that if we discover something like this, we need to put our foot down. (Dave, Owner representative)</p> <p>The community should be formally represented in the [Case A] User Group. In that sense getting a formal vote, if there is a [voting]. So that should be ensured because if only the industrial partners play the game, we have a disadvantage as researchers, so in that sense it should be formal in that way. [...] It might look like a union, but we should respect the freedom of the researchers. We should not restrict them. And we should also prevent if possible political games and such a set-up. [...] So [this] is a challenging task but, yeah, I think having the community where we can articulate what our desires and wishes and needs are, this is important for the researchers in that area. (Sergio, Academic representative)</p> <p>There has not been any larger room to influence the design [of the facility], but it is still possible to influence your own research agenda depending on what will be available. (Dave, Owner representative)</p>

**Table A2.** Illustrative quotes case B

Background Partners not acting as peers	Illustrative quotes
	<p>Monitoring meetings instead of a place you go to for accomplishing something together which is not good at all. (Ben, project manager case B)</p> <p>you need to keep an eye on what is going on. I get the sense, honestly, that this is the motive for most participants, to know what is going on and what others are doing. (Hank, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>all these types of collaborations are building on that you try to find business opportunities. That is how it is, and it is quite clear that some of these firms can find business opportunities in this forum. (Alex, consulting company)</p> <p>Most actors are looking for the money...they are listening to and waiting for what Steven and Peter from [the OEM] is going to say. (Alex, consulting company)</p> <p>Right now, it feels more like a place for firms to court [the OEM], to show what they can to get in and for [the OEM] to scan what others are doing, but [the OEM] is not open about what they are doing, and we just stand on the side and watch. (Mike, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>the consultancy firms are sitting there waiting for what the OEMs are going to say today...all are sitting there around the table as nestlings saying okay and looking at the OEMs. (Alex, consulting company)</p> <p>the hardware and software will be separated, and the software will be an important part and the OEMs want to have better control of this. Therefore, they partly want to develop it themselves and partly have firms closely connected to them doing it for them. This platform [case B] is part of their strategy and they get insights into the software developing firms' potential through the [Open Innovation] competitions and Market days. We are actually not the target group for the platform. (Hank, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>The access to competence will be problematic and it is of interest for all of us. Will there be competence to do the development we need in the future? Will we attract individuals to study programs focusing on automotive? Do we need more PhD positions for automotive applications? And so on. This challenge is still common for us, but we have not addressed it in [case B]. (Mike, Tier1 organization)</p>

(Continues)

**Table A2.** (Continued)

	Illustrative quotes
<p>Political behavior</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control roles</li> <li>• Make up the routines</li> <li>• Stage and distribute rights</li> </ul>	<p>we are supposed to come there and show our products, participate in Open Innovation competitions, and contribute with our innovations openly for the OEMs. This is not of interest for us (Mike, Tier1 organization) again, I see the risk that this will become another club of internal mutual idolatry where we pat each other's backs saying, 'nice to meet you today again'. (Alex, consulting company)</p> <p>that we should produce something and show it in a competition, we would not do it for several reasons for example IP. We would get very little out of the hours we would invest...we will not participate in this way. (Hank, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>it is the Tier1 that get stuck. The OEMs get what they want. They want to get access to smaller companies, which are quick in generating innovations on their platform and then we have the Tier1 taking the guaranteed commitment. What do the Tier 1 get? They do not even get control over the choice of subcontractors. In worst case they might be forced to work with subcontractors that aren't mature enough to work in the automotive industry. (Bill, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>if it would be the case that the winner gets into [the OEM] to sell something than it might be worthwhile investing the time. But if you only get applause and yes you won but you didn't win anything, then you have worked for free with developing an idea that you present to the board. This makes the collaboration a place for consultancy firms to present themselves for [the OEMs]. (Mike, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>the platform needs to grow in size by bring in new international OEM partners....we need some new blood...it would create pressure on the associate partners. (Hank, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>there is a high risk that this becomes a place for mutual admiration...which makes it difficult for another partner to enter....we need impulses from the outside. (Hank, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>if we have additional to [automotive core partner 1] and [automotive core partner 2] a third partner also in the automotive industry than maybe [automotive core partner 1] don't want to participate any more...I think it would improve [case B]...but it is a huge challenge to go there. (Bill, Tier1 organization)</p> <p>we need to be bigger...international or something...better initiatives than these competitions, because the competitions are a fraud maybe the wrong word, but it is kind of like that and these poor participants will realize this eventually...that it is 100% [automotive core partner 1] and 0% [automotive core partner 2] that hide behind. (Hank, Tier1 organization)</p>



**Table A3.** Illustrative quotes case C

Background Defining 'right' and 'wrong' projects in the collaborative portfolio	Illustrative quotes
	<p>[Case C]. ... it is a hub for competence building and collaboration among the partners and actors, but you have to try to be a bit objective in such a situation and look at the best interests of the projects... and what it is that [Case C] really wants to achieve. (Lenny, industrial partner)</p> <p>[Case C] is supposed to run the kind of projects or develop the kind of competence that generates value further down the line. That means if [industry partner A] and [industry partner B] should be part of this, then they need to feel that they get something in return, they should notice that the research conducted at [University partner] through [Case C] shorten the time to implementation, or that they open up new paths for development that had not been considered before. (Greg, Public funder representative)</p> <p>I think we have a good, substantial discussion around projects that we initiate, people ask questions and there is a good dialog. What we really want to do is make sure that we start the right kind of projects. But there are some different perceptions about the projects [...]. Some would prefer projects that result in solutions and results and such, [...] solutions, things, cars if that was possible. Others may feel that this is more about research, so it is knowledge that is the main thing to be created. (Arnold, Industrial partner)</p> <p>Whether it is explicitly stated or not, I don't know, but applied research has no place within [Case C] right now, that is my decided opinion. (Steve, industrial partner)</p> <p>It is simply the case that we have other individuals here who don't necessarily agree with what Arnold [industrial partner] or Karen [industrial partner] feel is the most important, just because they have already counted on using the money for their own projects. So there, we have a kind of conflict. (Donna, Academic partner)</p> <p>I would not say there is a resistance [towards new partners], it is more about these big organizations who are part, at least bigger compared to us, and that there is inertia in the organizations. And potentially some suspicion in terms of competition between different kinds of industries and academic partners... (Frank, Research institute partner)</p>

(Continues)

Table A3. (Continued)

	Illustrative quotes
Political behavior	
• withholding resources through selective participation	It is not like it is an open brainstorming about which projects, it is more based on initiatives from different partners completely. And I don't know, maybe that is good because it becomes very focused on what the industry wants. Overall, [Case C] is dominated by industrial interests. It could really be considered a shortcoming that there are not more initiatives coming from the academic partners or researchers. (Andrew, Societal partner)
• informal negotiations	We have individual companies who feel that a particular project proposal is too close to their own operations to be comfortable. [...] when it is too close to the product, it does not work. (Lenny, industrial partner representative)
• securing allies	If you look at the whole of [Case C], it is still sprawling, going in many different directions, and you may find it triggering when you meet at the shareholders' meeting that there are different agendas, and some are only there to monitor. But there is a lot of politics going on. (Frank, Research institute partner)
• increasing status of less dominant partners	Before you throw in some money in all the projects that are interesting, then you need to think carefully about if this is in line with our own strategic long-term plan. (Lenny, Industrial partner)
	I have a responsibility from [industrial partner] to make sure that the direction [of Case C] is in line with what is interesting for [industrial partner]. (Cynthia, Industrial partner)
	The purpose is to put together projects that we can use to benefit our long-term business, so we participate in the areas where we want to be, and that can continue into new or improved products. (Harry, Industrial partner)
	But you can go into a project if you are from [an industrial partner] where you work with a lot of other things, and always at the back of your mind is how am I going to use the outcomes of this project, right? (Donna, academic partner)
	It has been quite a lot of fundamental research projects and we don't find that particularly useful, but then there is the whole range of projects, some are very applied. [...] but I think it has been almost too much [fundamental projects], a lot of the money has gone to some professor of a few PhD students, but we are not interested in that. We want innovation or to apply research as soon as possible, that is our interest and if we can do it at an early stage and there is a customer wanting it, then that strengthens our position. (Hamilton, technology consultant partner)
	It is not exactly an open brainstorming about which projects to do, it is completely based on initiatives from the partners. (Andrew, Societal partner)
	We put in a lot of time before [starting a project] thinking about which partners that we want, that we think would be right. (Frank, Research institute partner)
	There were a few requests where they kind of... let the other party know that they prefer to do it on their own... and then we have not argued against it because it is not a good idea if one of the partners does not want to include you from the start. (Lenny, Industrial partner)
	All of a sudden, a project [proposal] might appear at a meeting and if you have not been part of the club from the start, then it can be very difficult to state at the meetings that we would like to join and elbow our way into this particular project. (Steve, Industrial partner)
	In those situations [if a partner drops out] then we expect [Case C] to show good leadership, and that there is some flexibility in re-defining the scope of the project so that it can still produce value but in different forms. (Lenny, Industrial partner)
	I think one of the main tasks for [Case C] is to act as a project broker. That is one of the tasks, but that does not mean that all partners must be part of everything, it would be impossible to handle 22 partners in all projects. (Steve, Industrial partner)
	Just because you are part of the collaboration, does not mean you have a right to be in every project. (Margaret)

**Table A4.** Illustrative quotes case D

	Illustrative quotes
Background Unease and potential conflicts among partners due to uncertainty of their contribution	<p>I was totally lost in the beginning. It seemed as if the others had clear tasks and deliverables for example a bus stop or a charging pole...we were there to contribute with our brand or some sort of credibility, I understood this after a while. (Julia, Academic organization)</p> <p>we delivered what was demanded, we built the bus stops, and we were good at this in the collaboration, but we didn't have the ability to consider what R&amp;D needs we have that we could realize and test in the living lab. ... A lot of the possibilities that was developed in the collaboration we did not have a channel for utilizing not even close... we had to have this to make the living lab a reality test bed for us. (Mary, The Municipality)</p> <p>a quiet indoor bus stop is that really most important for the city when we are working with electric busses? It should be the noise reduction in the city, the system [the new bus line with new bus stops and charging poles], and the work opportunities that this generates. (Mary, The Municipality)</p> <p>Maybe it's not useful to define everything 100 per cent, because I think one part of the success in [the living lab] has been that we have everyone sitting around the table and everyone has felt that it's their project, you know. Even though everyone knows that that guy hasn't actually contributed very much. (Nick, The Chairman of the steering group and representing an automotive company)</p> <p>We work with different time spans. We need time to make e.g., noise studies, but the results are needed now. (Mary, The City)</p> <p>Sometimes e.g., when working with the indoor bus stop a lot of people in the collaboration had ideas of how it should look like and function, but the landowner and the estate where it was supposed to be built was not even invited to the discussions. (Mary, The Municipality)</p> <p>It has taken almost all my time to have meetings internally with the various parts of the city to inform them on what is going on and try to find out their interest and need. (Carl, The Municipality)</p> <p>it didn't make sense as there was so much that was confusing...it is so complex...it still doesn't make sense...it's just a bus'. (Julia, Academic organization)</p> <p>we have heard so many times 'this is the way you should do it', but we are collaborating [in the living lab]...we should be able to say what we can and want to develop. (Mary, The Municipality)</p> <p>this collaboration is true collaboration since we do not have the buyer-supplier roles...we can talk about other things that we normally do not talk about... it is not a negotiation... but of course in the long run we want to sell busses. (Sandy, Automotive company)</p>
Political behavior <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting the agenda</li> <li>• informal one-to-one pre-meetings</li> <li>• script other's remarks</li> <li>• cast partners for different roles</li> </ul>	<p>the tough discussions happen outside of groups. (Louise, coordinator)</p> <p>I sent him [the chairman] an e-mail with a list of what he needed to say at what point (Louise, coordinator)</p> <p>We push...What we do is that when things stall, or when we see that things need to be done...So, there's a situation that needs to be dealt with, then we talk to the people involved. We play, we encourage, we give tips, we flatter, and we bring in other people with mandates, and sometimes, like Louise said, we take the escalation route, even though we are not allowed. And we make it known that whatever it is in't going very well. (Francis, coordinator)</p> <p>Notes from a short meeting between the coordinators:</p> <p>I talked to Steven about prioritizing to come to the steering group meetings and spoke to Andrew about what he needs to say. (Alex, coordinator)</p> <p>I had an exchange about the results report with Pierre. (Francis, coordinator)</p> <p>the director of partner X looked uncomfortable in the meeting, again they want to that take on projects, but they don't carry them through...but the two partners X and Y have to stay in for political reasons. The region has given them so much money. (Alex, coordinator)</p> <p>Alex and I had prepared that meeting [with partners about expanding the scope] with what needed to be done when because we wanted to monitor the meeting...then Alex and I came up on our own with the idea to have a reconciliation meeting with the steering group which we called impact assessment to have a material for the upcoming [regular] steering group meeting. (Francis, coordinator)</p> <p>and we used this to call the coordinators from the partners to a set of meetings... (Alex, coordinator)</p> <p>we talked to Ann so she would be prepared to talk to the communication group. Already from the beginning decided to break out the issue on the brand and communication from the partner meeting and said they are not going to deal with this it will be the communication group. There reason is that this question is too hard to discuss among the people being coordinators for partners, this group would load the question about brand and communication with more than it needs to include making it hard... (Alex, coordinator)</p> <p>Specifically partner Z would make us drown...the others we probably could handle. (Francis, coordinator)</p>