ENVIRONMENTAL NGO–BUSINESS COLLABORATION AND STRATEGIC BRIDGING: A CASE ANALYSIS OF THE GREENPEACE–FORON ALLIANCE

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Environmental NGO–business collaborative partnerships, commonly called green alliances, are encouraging corporate enviropreneurship, entrepreneurial innovations that address environmental problems and result in operational efficiencies, new technologies and marketable ‘green’ products. Aside from offering environmental, scientific and legal expertise, environmental NGOs can provide linkages to other societal stakeholders, referred to as strategic bridges, to support enviropreneurial initiatives. This article focuses on the linkage capabilities of environmental NGOs by developing an extended strategic bridging framework that articulates necessary process contingencies and engagement strategies for building effective bridges with environmental stakeholders. Propositions are advanced and tested in an analysis of the alliance between Greenpeace and Foron Household Appliances in Germany during 1992–93 for the marketing of an environmentally responsible refrigerator. Stakeholder characteristics and partnership outcomes reveal managerial implications and conceptual extensions of strategic bridging in green alliances, and future research directions are discussed.

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Environmental non-government organizations (NGOs) are increasingly favouring cooperation over traditional protest and confrontation to encourage environmentally sensitive corporate practices (Lober, 1997; Murphy and Bendell, 1997). Likewise, firms are experiencing heightened social, legal and global market pressures to operate more sustainably, and many are recognizing that cooperative environmental NGOs can be allies for launching credible environmental initiatives through green alliances, defined as collaborative partnerships between environmental NGOs and businesses that pursue mutually beneficial ecological goals (Stafford and Hartman, 1996). Green alliances seek the ‘common ground’
among ecological, social and commercial interests, encouraging *enviropreneurship* – entrepreneurial innovations and technological approaches to address environmental problems that simultaneously accommodate or capitalize on other societal entities’ needs and meet corporate economic objectives (Menon and Menon, 1997). Enviropreneurial outcomes can lead to operational efficiencies through resource reductions and competitive advantages through green technologies and products (cf. Porter and van der Linde, 1995; Hart, 1997).

While not all environmental initiatives lead to competitive gains (see Walley and Whitehead, 1994; Esty and Porter, 1998), a confluence of ecological, social and market objectives is possible from green alliances because they facilitate opportunities for stakeholders (defined as ‘any group or individual who can affect or is affected by’ an organization (Freeman, 1984, p 46)) to specify problems, discuss needs, establish common ground and implement environmental programs that address the multiple needs of affected parties (Gray, 1989). Table 1 summarizes several recent green alliances and their enviropreneurial objectives.

Environmental NGOs can assist corporate enviropreneurial initiatives in two ways. One, environmental NGOs can provide corporations with ecological, scientific and legal expertise (see Milne et al., 1996; Hartman and Stafford, 1997). Two, environmental NGOs can leverage and broker corporate linkages with other diverse stakeholders, whose support may be necessary to sustain the firm’s enviropreneurial activities (Polonsky, 1996). The ability to negotiate and build such social networks is called strategic bridging, where one party links diverse constituencies to address some problem domain (Brown, 1991; Westley and Vredenburg, 1991). Drawing from its social credibility, established relationships and other resources, an environmental NGO can procure corporate support from other stakeholders, such as consumers and the media, who traditionally may be skeptical, critical, or ambivalent toward businesses and their environmental efforts.

While much of the emerging literature on environmental NGO–business collaboration has emphasized advantages (e.g., Hemphill, 1994; Lober, 1997), such partnerships are fraught with paradoxes and complexities that cause the relationships to be unstable and strategically precarious (Hartman and Stafford, 1996). For example, close corporate ties can threaten public trust of the environmental NGO’s social advocacy role (Dowie, 1995). Further, green alliances can bring corporate enviropreneurial programs into the public spotlight for intensive stakeholder scrutiny and criticism. Thus, green alliances and strategic bridging offer advantages to both partners while simultaneously placing both into strategic risk.

The Greening of Industry Network’s (GIN’s) proposed research agenda for sustainability has called for examining the ‘dynamics of emerging new partnerships’ (Schot et al., 1997, p 157), and the theme of GIN’s Seventh International Conference held in Rome in November 1998 centred on ‘building alliances for a sustainable future’. In partial response to this charge, this article focuses on the strategic bridging capabilities of environmental NGOs in green alliances by analysing the linkages Greenpeace forged to assist Foron Household Appliances in the marketing of an environmentally sensitive, hydrocarbon refrigerator in Germany during 1992–93. A strategic bridging framework with propositions articulating necessary process contingencies and stakeholder engagement strategies is advanced to analyse the case, developed from publicly available data. Although the case represents the first time Greenpeace backed a commercial product, it is instructive because of Greenpeace’s proactive strategic bridging efforts, employing both grassroots and coercive activism to engage pivotal stakeholders. Moreover, the green alliance’s outcomes were not equally beneficial to the partners, illustrating some significant managerial implications of strategic bridging. The article concludes with a discussion of directions for future research.
Table 1. Examples of environmental NGO-business collaboration and their enviropreneurial initiatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Key participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Principal time frame</th>
<th>Enviropreneurial initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McDonald’s Sweden Environmental Program</td>
<td>The Natural Step, McDonald’s Sweden</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1995–96</td>
<td>Employee/management training and consultation in environmentally sensitive packaging, waste management, energy conservation, and alternative construction materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper Task Force</td>
<td>Environmental Defense Fund, Duke University, Johnson &amp; Johnson, McDonald’s, Prudential Insurance, Time, Inc.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1993–95</td>
<td>Environmentally sensitive paper buying/use recommendations to facilitate operational efficiencies and technological advances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnership for Regulatory Innovation and Sustainable Manufacturing (PRISM)</td>
<td>Environmental Defense Fund, General Motors, Environmental Protection Agency, Dayton Power &amp; Light, various community groups</td>
<td>Primarily USA</td>
<td>1996–99</td>
<td>Promotion of innovative environmental management and regulatory systems in vehicle manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricelands Habitat Partnership (RHP)</td>
<td>The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, California Waterfowl Association, California Rice Industry Association, Sacramento Valley Rice Farmers</td>
<td>Sacramento Valley of California, USA</td>
<td>1990–present</td>
<td>Port-harvest winter field flooding program to create temporary waterfowl habitat and facilitate rice stubble decomposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waste Reduction Task Force</td>
<td>Environmental Defense Fund, McDonald’s</td>
<td>Primarily USA</td>
<td>1990–91</td>
<td>42-step waste reduction program for McDonald’s to facilitate operational efficiencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STRATEGIC BRIDGING: PROCESS CONTINGENCIES AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Westley and Vredenburg (1991) first proposed strategic bridging in the context of environmental NGO–business collaboration. We elaborate on their work by describing conditions that are necessary for a bridger to negotiate a network of stakeholders with enduring linkages to sustain enviropreneurial initiatives. Strategic bridging is defined as being

... characterised by the presence of a third party as a stakeholder, which is separate and distinct in terms of resources and personnel from the ‘island’ organisations it serves to link... Unlike mediators, bridgers enter collaborative negotiations to further their own ends as well as to serve as links among domain stakeholders (Sharma et al., 1994, p 461).

A strategic bridger cultivates a ‘vision’ toward solving problems in contexts characterized by high stakeholder interdependence and turbulence and identifies bridging opportunities that may advance that vision (Brown, 1991). Strategic bridging provides a viable environmental solution when diverse stakeholders are unable to negotiate or cooperate freely due to mistrust, tradition, logistical problems, or when there is need for a third party to restore a balance of power, resources and expertise (Sharma et al., 1994).

In green alliances, the firm’s enviropreneurial initiatives (e.g., green products, closed-loop technologies, waste-reduction programmes) are part of the environmental NGO’s agenda for addressing some environmental problem, and the environmental NGO will exercise its social credibility and advocacy influence to span and link the network of relevant stakeholders to support its corporate partner’s initiatives. Because strategic bridgers retain their independence, they can negotiate bilaterally with a diverse range of stakeholders. This freedom allows them the flexibility and opportunity to develop familiarity that may eventually break down social and institutional barriers that typically separate diverse stakeholders, especially in environmental problem domains. Brown (1991, p 812) observes

As a central actor among diverse constituencies, the bridging organisation potentially has great influence over events. It can be a conduit for ideas and innovations, a source of information, a broker of resources, a negotiator of deals, a conceptualiser of strategies, a mediator of conflicts.

An environmental NGO with established influential relationships with other social entities, such as government, scientific institutions, the media and consumers, may wield extraordinary leverage to advance the alliance’s enviropreneurial initiatives (cf. Rowley, 1997). Strategic bridging parallels Roome’s (1997) concept of a ‘network champion’ in an ‘action–learning network’. Roome proposes that an organization is embedded within a broader network of internal and external stakeholders with whom the organization interacts and obtains knowledge to shape organizational, social and technological responses to environmental sustainability issues. A network champion catalyses organizational learning by brokering stakeholder relationships, providing guidance and accessing resources from stakeholders within the network. While a strategic bridger performs similar tasks in a green alliance, it promotes a specific enviropreneurial agenda, negotiating and exerting influence to cultivate shared values, norms of interactions and mapping of the problem domain to procure stakeholder support.

Despite its potential ability to effect change, however, a strategic bridger faces significant challenges and risks. It is highly visible and vulnerable to constituents and other social entities holding potentially conflicting interests in the problem domain (Brown, 1991). For an organization to adopt a bridging role, its members and constituents must be aware of the diverse political, social and economic interests of the varied stakeholders that the organization may be attempting to bridge. Flexibility and tolerance for compromise may
be necessary, but difficult to achieve among internal constituents. Further, a strategic bridger must recognize and cope with external social and political stakeholders who may challenge its agenda. Lastly, a bridger needs to sustain support from its internal and external stakeholders long enough to accomplish its objectives. Failure to accomplish these tasks can seriously weaken an organization’s strategic bridging capacity and, even more importantly, its reputation. Westley and Vredenburg (1991, p 69) observe ‘Given the inherent fragility of the bridging role, it is interesting that organisations [voluntarily] accept it’.

In their study, Westley and Vredenburg (1991) examined a failed green alliance between Pollution Probe and a Canadian grocery retailer, Loblaws. Pollution Probe attempted to act as a strategic bridge to consumers by endorsing Loblaws’ private-label ‘green’ product line. The partnership failed largely because of a public challenge of the endorsement by Greenpeace and internal conflict among Pollution Probe’s own staff regarding the legitimacy of the corporate relationship. Pollution Probe could neither defend its agenda from Greenpeace’s threat nor build ‘back home’ support among its staff, which resulted in negative publicity and consumer skepticism; in essence, Pollution Probe failed to bridge the retailer to the relevant environmental constituents. Past research suggests that a bridger must achieve several contingencies to effect mutually beneficial outcomes for green alliance partners, summarized in the following proposition.

**Proposition 1.** To be an effective bridge between the firm and other relevant environmental stakeholders, an environmental NGO must administer successfully the following:

(i) a vision, agenda for addressing the problem domain;
(ii) internal support, commitment among staff, organizational members and constituents;
(iii) vision articulation, advancement of agenda among external stakeholders;
(iv) a balance of self- and stakeholder interests, flexibility and tolerance to compromise its agenda to accommodate diverse stakeholder needs;
(v) coping with threats, addressing challenges by sociopolitical interests and
(vi) linkage endurance, maintaining stakeholder linkages to achieve agenda.

The ability to build stakeholder support as well as cope with external threats is contingent on the bridger’s strategies to engage stakeholders. The stakeholder literature advances a variety of generic strategies for dealing with stakeholders based on their capacity to cooperate with or threaten organizational activities (e.g., Freeman, 1984; Savage et al., 1991; Polonsky, 1996). We extend the concept of strategic bridging by articulating specific stakeholder engagement strategies and outlining conditions under which they might be used to influence or cope with environmental stakeholders, extended from Oliver’s (1991) framework of organizational response to institutional and resource dependency pressures. Oliver proposes a continuum of stakeholder engagement strategies, ranging from passive compliance with stakeholders (institutional theory) to aggressive situation defiance and stakeholder manipulation (resource dependency theory). In short, organizations are likely to acquiesce and conform to stakeholder pressures if (i) stakeholder interests are perceived to be highly socially or economically desirable, (ii) the organization is highly dependent on the stakeholder, (iii) stakeholder interests are compatible with organizational goals, (iv) stakeholder interests are legally necessary, (v) the organization faces a high level of uncertainty in the operating environment or (vi) external stakeholders share common sentiment and are highly cohesive. By contrast, organizations are likely to engage in proactive resistance to stakeholder demands if (i) stakeholder interests are socially or economically threatening, (ii) multiparty stakeholder interests are diverse and conflicting, (iii) stakeholder interests threaten or constrain organizational resources, marketing choices or autonomy or (iv) stakeholder demands are socially or politically noncompulsory (see Oliver, 1991).
Strategic bridge disorders are confronted with similar stakeholder pressures. For example, bridge disorders may acquiesce, defined as complying with stakeholder interests, if it is socially or legally compulsory, and/or it will advance the bridge’s agenda. Bridges may compromise, denoted as balancing or negotiating with stakeholder interests, when subjected to many conflicting or fragmented constituencies and bridge disorders hold some leverage over the stakeholder (Brown, 1991). Bridge disorders may use persuasion, defined as an active attempt to change attitudes through logic or emotion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981), when the bridge’s agenda is compatible with the stakeholder’s interests and offers mutually beneficial outcomes. Bridge disorders may use avoidance, averting conformance with stakeholder interests by concealing motives, reducing communications, or altering goals, activities, or domain, when the stakeholder’s interests conflict with the bridge’s agenda and/or the bridge can establish independence from the stakeholder (Oliver, 1991). Bridges may use defiance, defined as dismissing, challenging or attacking a stakeholder’s position to shape or neutralize the stakeholder’s influence. Defiance is likely when the stakeholder’s demands cannot be enforced and/or are perceived as potentially discrediting; thus, defiance may be used against one stakeholder to garner the support of others (Savage et al., 1991). Likewise, bridge disorders may use coercion, exertion of power to nullify the stakeholder’s interest and will, if the bridge holds sufficient leverage over the stakeholder (e.g., by redefining social norms or manipulating resource allocation to stakeholders). Coercion is a more aggressive response than persuasion or defiance because the bridge’s objective is to manipulate and dominate rather than merely shape or neutralize the other stakeholder’s interests (cf. Oliver, 1991). In sum, the engagement strategy a bridge disorders uses to procure the support or minimize the threat of a particular stakeholder is contingent on certain situational factors suggested in the following proposition.

**Proposition 2.** To procure the support/resources or minimize the threat of a stakeholder, bridge disorders are likely to use the following:

1. **acquiesce** when the stakeholder possesses desirable resources and/or the bridge does not hold significant leverage over the stakeholder;
2. **compromise** when the stakeholder possesses desirable resources and/or the bridge holds some leverage over the stakeholder;
3. **persuasion** when the stakeholder and bridge disorder have compatible interests and would mutually benefit from the bridge’s agenda;
4. **avoidance** when the stakeholder is a threat and/or the bridge can manoeuvre to gain independence from the stakeholder;
5. **defiance** when the stakeholder is a threat and/or the stakeholder cannot enforce its agenda onto the bridge and
6. **coercion** when the stakeholder is a threat and/or the bridge holds significant leverage over the stakeholder.

Next, we test our propositions in the context of the Greenpeace–Foron alliance’s entrepreneurial marketing of an ozone-safe refrigerator. Using pattern matching (Yin, 1994), predicted processes described in our propositions are compared with actual patterns from the case to further understanding of strategic bridging, when different strategies might be used and potential outcomes.

**CASE OVERVIEW: GREENPEACE–FORON ALLIANCE**

In 1992, Wolfgang Lohbeck, Head of the Atmosphere Campaign of Greenpeace Germany, championed ‘Greenfreeze’ refrigeration technology, an environmentally friendly hydrocarbon, as a substitute for Freon, a leading chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) damaging to the ozone (Beste, 1994; Kalke, 1994). The 1987 Montreal Protocol on ‘Substances that deplete the ozone layer’ mandated the elimination of most forms of CFCs by the end of the 1990s, and Greenpeace adopted this directive as part of its own mission. Scientists from the Hygiene Institute, Dortmund, developed the hydrocarbon technology as an energy-efficient and economically viable alternative, and
Greenpeace believed the technology could be used to bring the German refrigeration industry into compliance with the Montreal Protocol (Beste, 1994). Although the technology had been around since the 1930s, it had not been considered by appliance makers because of its potential flammability. While modern refrigeration advances had eliminated this risk, major German appliance manufacturers were not interested in an old-fashioned, widely available technology that could not be patented (Vidal, 1992). The industry’s favoured alternative was hydrofluorocarbon-134a (HFC-134a); while it did not destroy the ozone, it did contribute to global warming (Kalke, 1994). Greenpeace’s Greenfreeze technology neither added to the warming dilemma nor destroyed stratospheric ozone. Nevertheless, most western companies were heavily invested in HFC-134a, and until their investments had been amortized there was little incentive to use alternatives (Beste, 1994).

Only the former East German manufacturer DKK Scharfenstein, later renamed Foron Household Appliances, was willing to experiment with the hydrocarbon technology. Foron was already using a CFC-free insulation of pentane-propelled polystyrol in its refrigerators, but was relying on distant ex-USSR sources for HFC-134a. Like many former East German firms after reunification, Foron verged on bankruptcy due to state-run obsolescence, western competition and the currency union. The plant came under the control of the powerful German privatization agent, the Treuhand, which was the holding company charged by the reunited German government with the task of privatizing the 8000 enterprises controlled by the former East German state (Fisher, 1991). As a trustee, or ‘Treuhand’, the agent controlled eastern Germany’s economic base, and it was motivated to sell or liquidate these assets in an expedient manner. It was the Treuhand’s evaluation that if investors could not be secured, Foron would be dissolved. With Foron’s engineers eager to protect their jobs, Greenpeace persuaded Foron to work with the technology as a last resort to save the plant (Walsh, 1995). Lohbeck convinced Foron engineers that incorporation of Greenfreeze technology into their appliances would give Foron a market advantage and advance Greenpeace’s goal to eliminate the use of CFCs and HFCs (Beste, 1994).

After extensive talks in July 1992, Greenpeace granted Foron 27000 Deutschmarks to produce ten prototype hydrocarbon refrigerators. By 13 July, however, the Treuhand announced that Foron was to be dissolved after an acquisition offer from Bosch–Siemens was withdrawn (Beste, 1994). Greenpeace and Foron hastily organized a press conference for 16 July at which the first model of the new refrigerator, produced virtually overnight, was to have its debut (Beste, 1994; Kalke, 1994). When the Treuhand learned of the partners’ intention, it informed Foron that a press conference and any publicity about the Greenfreeze refrigerator were forbidden. In defiance, the partners proceeded with their plans, and Greenpeace also launched a grassroots advertising campaign to persuade consumers (Kalke, 1994). Greenpeace gambled that publicity about the eco-refrigerator would build initial public interest and support to change the Treuhand’s intention. More than 200 people from the media attended the forbidden press conference, including the Treuhand representatives, and after some hours of debate before the press, the Treuhand conferred its support for the Greenfreeze project (Beste, 1994). Siegfried Schlottig, head of public relations at Foron, remarked at the time that Foron would not have existed without Greenpeace: ‘Their energy helped us checkmate the Treuhand’ (Kalke, 1994, p 22). The Treuhand eventually gave Foron substantial financial assistance and support in securing private investors. In March 1993, Foron’s ‘Clean Cooler’, using Greenfreeze technology, made its market debut (Walsh, 1995).

Alarmed western German chemical and refrigerator makers, however, launched a disinformation press campaign, warning retailers that Foron’s Clean Cooler was ‘an unacceptable danger in the home’ and ‘a potential bomb in the kitchen’ and that Greenfreeze was ‘energy inefficient’ (Vidal, 1992). Letters were sent to manufacturers and retailers claiming that the technology was unproven and needed to be assessed over a long period. Greenpeace was charged as being irresponsible and obstructing
constructive efforts to find feasible environmental solutions (Air Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration News, 1993). Admittedly, the hastily developed Clean Cooler prototype featured at the press conference appeared to be energy inefficient, but the problem was quickly rectified. Further, Greenpeace’s grassroots publicity and product endorsement generated over 70000 orders within the first three months of the campaign (Greenpeace Press Release, 1992). Eventually, the negative charges were reduced or dropped as Greenpeace’s advocacy persuaded the government and scientific stakeholders to test for product safety, and they eventually aligned with Foron against the chemical companies’ lobby. Later, Foron’s Clean Cooler won the German Environment Ministry’s prestigious ‘Blue Angel’ award, in addition to other awards and certifications.

By 1994, all German refrigerator manufacturers had either switched to Greenfreeze technology or were planning to convert, fulfilling Greenpeace’s goal of eliminating refrigeration CFCs and HFCs (Kalke, 1994). Greenpeace further promoted the hydrocarbon technology in China, India and other developing countries, literally giving it to willing enviropreneurs, convinced that, if readily available, Greenfreeze would be adopted widely in the developing world before other environmentally damaging technologies became established (Beste, 1994). For Foron, however, the German industry’s adoption of Greenfreeze meant it was no longer the exclusive marketer of eco-responsible refrigerators. Despite some modest energy-efficiency innovations, Foron lost market share as more sophisticated, rival hydrocarbon refrigerators appeared on the market (Kalke, 1994). Greenpeace abandoned the company to concentrate on its global Greenfreeze campaign, and Foron lacked the financial resources and marketing know-how to establish itself independently. After failed attempts by Samsung (Handelsblatt, 1995) and Koc of Turkey (Handelsblatt, 1996a) to acquire the company, Foron declared bankruptcy in March 1996 (Die Welt, 1996), before its refrigerator division was ultimately purchased by Dutch ATAG Kitchen Group (Handelsblatt, 1996b).

**CASE ANALYSIS**

The case illustrates a number of important bridging outcomes, including how Greenpeace (i) assisted the ailing Foron technology, (ii) defended Foron from government and competitive threats, (iii) marketed Foron’s Clean Coolers, (iv) assembled a coalition of supportive stakeholders to coerce industry adoption of Greenfreeze and (v) abandoned Foron. Figure 1 presents the dynamic stakeholder environment facing the Greenpeace–Foron alliance, illustrating the primary stakeholder relationships, their influences and strategic bridges enacted by Greenpeace. Our pattern-matching analysis centres on comparing Greenpeace’s actions to the predictions specified in our strategic bridging propositions (cf. Yin, 1994).

* A vision

Greenpeace Germany adopted Montreal Protocol’s directive, setting a ‘vision’ to eliminate CFCs and HFCs from the German refrigeration industry. When Germany’s dominant appliance manufacturers refused to consider the proposed alternative technology, however, Greenpeace focused on Foron to make enviropreneurial in-roads to demonstrate Greenfreeze’s viability and build a coalition of stakeholder supporters. ‘For the first time, Greenpeace attained its goals through technological discussion’, noted Wolfgang Lohbeck, who spearheaded the campaign, ‘... we didn’t limit ourselves to just saying no or to pointing out weaknesses’ (Beste, 1994, p 26). In the end, however, Lohbeck admitted...

...it wasn’t all planned the way it turned out. It was a piece of luck that this firm was there, that it was up to its neck in troubles, that Germany reunified, that the Treuhand had such a ridiculous policy, that DKK Scharfenstein still had its own compressor production and could develop the propane/butane prototype on its own. It was a piece of luck that we could win one company over to our way of thinking and that this firm could turn facts quickly
into marketable realities (Beste, 1994, p 29).

The case suggests that strategic bridging may be a more emergent than deliberate process because a bridger may need to alter the problem domain's initial circumstances and stakeholder relationships to build leverage over resistant or threatening social entities (Savage et al., 1991). How this change is enacted, however, may not be readily apparent, requiring the bridger to be persistent and entrepreneurial in seizing bridging opportunities to establish support (Gray, 1989). In retrospect, Lohbeck believed Greenpeace's plan for replacing CFCs and HFCs with a feasible alternative technology gave the NGO greater credibility among stakeholders than had it

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1. Key stakeholder relationships, influences and strategic bridges.
engaged in protest alone. Greenpeace’s credible ‘vision’ contributed to its bridging effectiveness, supporting proposition 1(i).

**Internal support**

Considering Greenpeace’s traditional anti-business, protest orientation, Greenpeace’s work on behalf of a business was politically risky. Greenpeace leaders issued numerous statements to ‘educate’ the public, the environmental community and presumably its own membership about its new corporate strategy. International Director Paul Guilding described the group’s actions as advancing environmentalism by ‘interfering in markets’ (Levene, 1994). Greenpeace announced it would ‘create new alliances with sectors such as business and industries’ (*Business and the Environment*, 1994), advocating technological solutions to environmental problems. To clarify its new political stance, spokesperson Richard Titchen declared

> We won’t stop the actions that get much attention in the press and that have made Greenpeace famous, but now that people and companies have become more conscious of environmental problems, we consider it more effective to demonstrate solutions that are actually viable to industry (*Business and the Environment*, 1994).

Hartman and Stafford (1997) note that many environmental NGOs engage in both cooperative and adversarial tactics with businesses simultaneously to ‘encourage’ corporate compliance to environmental initiatives and to preserve credibility among their members and the public. In the Greenfreeze campaign, Greenpeace promoted the environmental refrigerator initially to its own members, persuading them to make over 70,000 pre-production orders within the first three months of the campaign (*Greenpeace Press Release*, 1992). Engaging members and supporters was appropriate given the compatibility of their interests with Greenpeace’s mission, supporting proposition 2(iii). Greenpeace’s internal support for its activities with Foron contributed to its bridging effectiveness, supporting proposition 1(ii).

**Vision articulation**

Although Greenpeace did not convince Germany’s dominant appliance manufacturers of Greenfreeze’s viability at first, it was successful in articulating its agenda for replacing CFCs and HFCs among three other key stakeholders, the scientific community, media and the general public, through persuasion, supporting proposition 2(iii). This strategy proved effective because Greenpeace was able to convince them of the mutual benefits of Greenfreeze. In turn, a chain reaction among other stakeholders followed. As shown in Figure 1, consumer interest in Clean Coolers stimulated demand among appliance dealers for the refrigerators, and the media attention persuaded the scientific community to critically examine and align with Foron’s technology. The scientific community’s approval led the German Environmental Ministry to bestow its prestigious ‘Blue Angel’ award to Foron’s product. Thus, Greenpeace’s successful articulation of its vision among pivotal stakeholders contributed to its bridging effectiveness, supporting proposition 1(iii). Savage et al. (1991) note that the building of stakeholder coalitions in support of an initiative can coerce compliance from more resistant stakeholders. Greenpeace’s assemblage of a coalition of supportive stakeholders altered the sphere of sociopolitical and market pressures, coercing other appliance manufacturers to adopt Greenfreeze. The use of coercion was appropriate, given that persuasion initially failed, and this stakeholder group’s resistance threatened Greenpeace’s agenda. Ultimately, Greenpeace was able to build significant leverage to force compliance, supporting proposition 2(vi).

**Balance of self- and stakeholder interests**

Proposition 1(iv) proposes compromise is necessary in strategic bridging, particularly when a bridger must link multiple, divergent stakeholder interests (cf. Westley and Vredenburg, 1991). In this case, however, Greenpeace did not face fragmented stakeholder interests, reducing its need to engage in significant compromise of its agenda to build stakeholder
linkages. Domain stakeholders divided rather swiftly into two camps, supporters of Greenfreeze (e.g., scientific community, media and consumers) and non-supporters (e.g., the Treuhand, Foron’s western competitors and chemical manufacturers). Sociopolitical and market pressures, however, ultimately forced the Treuhand and industry to adopt Greenfreeze. Conceivably, if other environmentally friendly refrigeration technologies had been available, Greenpeace might have needed to bridge a more fragmented set of domain stakeholders holding various preferences and scientific opinions; multiple alternative solutions representing different environmental trade-offs would have complicated the problem domain, and bridger compromise might have been necessary to consolidate stakeholder support for Greenfreeze. The absence of other viable alternatives to Greenfreeze, therefore, appeared to have contributed to Greenpeace’s ability to resist compromise.

Prior to the Foron alliance, Greenpeace was offered an opportunity to compromise, but refused. Claiming Greenfreeze was at that point infeasible, Mike Harris, a public relations manager for ICI Fluorochemicals, wrote to Greenpeace supporters:

Things will happen eventually... Can we all go back to the laboratory and spend the next ten years working on Greenpeace’s ideas to see if they can be made to work in practice? (Vidal, 1992, p 2).

Greenpeace could have viewed this entreaty as a concession and compromised its desire to see ICI convert to Greenfreeze immediately. Greenpeace, however, interpreted ICI’s communiqué as disingenuous and dismissed the proposal convinced that once proven, Greenfreeze’s superiority could win broad market support. ‘We had something to offer’, noted Lohbeck, ‘a specific environmentally friendly product which was technically superior to boot, and that was what made us invincible’ (Beste, 1994, p 29). In line with proposition 2(v), Lohbeck’s conviction to defy proved appropriate in that although ICI’s proposal threatened Greenpeace’s agenda, ICI could not mandate compliance by Greenpeace and the industry, and Greenpeace would ultimately prove Greenfreeze’s viability through Foron. In sum, the case suggests that three contingencies may decrease the likelihood of the use of a compromise strategy: (i) the absence of other viable alternatives or positions within a problem domain that would fragment stakeholders; (ii) lack of trust in the stakeholder and (iii) the bridger’s ability to discredit the targeted stakeholder’s position among other constituencies (cf. Oliver, 1991).

Coping with threats

Aside from chemical manufacturers and Foron’s competitors, Greenpeace faced another powerful external threat, the German privatization agent, the Treuhand. Greenpeace’s manipulation of the Treuhand through activism is perhaps the most pivotal bridging outcome of the case. Without it, Greenfreeze might never have been introduced into the market. Racing against a liquidation time-table, Greenpeace and Foron fought a war of nerves with the Treuhand who tried to block the project. In defiance, Greenpeace launched an advertising campaign for the eco-refrigerator and instigated a press conference/product demonstration, both forbidden by the government agent (Kalke, 1994). Before the assembled press, Greenpeace was able to discredit the Treuhand’s intention to liquidate Foron, which ultimately coerced the Treuhand into allowing the Greenpeace–Foron project to proceed. In line with propositions 2(v) and (vi), defiance and coercion strategies against the Treuhand were appropriate for Greenpeace as the privatization agency’s intentions imminently threatened Greenpeace’s opportunity to market Greenfreeze. Further, Greenpeace’s expertise in activism gave the group significant sociopolitical power; Greenpeace was beyond the sphere of the Treuhand’s legitimate regulatory authority, and the agent could not enforce its decision on the environmental NGO. More importantly, Greenpeace was able to stage a public attack on the Treuhand’s position, generating awareness of its Greenfreeze agenda. Greenpeace made its defiance a virtue, garnering support from others, and the
threat of social disapproval for the Treuhand forced the agent to acquiesce. Greenpeace’s effective coping with this key external threat contributed to its bridging effectiveness, supporting proposition 1(v).

Linkage endurance

Greenpeace was able to build and sustain a supportive coalition to achieve its own objective (industry adoption of Greenfreeze), but not that of its partner (market and financial stability). Foron’s inability to leverage Greenpeace’s influence among private investors before industry-wide acceptance of Greenfreeze ultimately led to the appliance manufacturer’s bankruptcy. When Greenpeace exited the partnership after the industry adopted Greenfreeze, Foron lost its competitive advantage. Once a bridge’s objectives are met or change, bridges may become less willing to broker and negotiate linkages between firms and other domain stakeholders (Westley and Vredenburg, 1991). Thus, if a corporate partner has not achieved its primary objectives before its environmental partner has reached its own, discontinuation of the relationship can place the firm’s stakeholder linkages at risk. As shown in Figure 1, the Treuhand attempted to bridge private investors for Foron, but proved ineffectual. Though speculative, it is conceivable that Greenpeace would have assisted Foron in bridging necessary investors directly had market acceptance for Clean Coolers taken longer or had other industry competitors delayed their adoption of Greenfreeze; either scenario would have required Greenpeace to continue helping its cash-strapped partner. Perhaps Foron’s products were too successful in that immediate consumer demand signalled Greenfreeze’s market potential to competitors and constrained the time Foron needed to leverage Greenpeace’s bridging capabilities to investors and remain competitive. Proposition 1(vi) explains that Greenpeace’s failure to bridge investors directly and maintain broad stakeholder linkages contributed to Foron’s bankruptcy. Exclusively helping Foron after the industry-wide conversion to Greenfreeze, however, was no longer in Greenpeace’s vision.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Corporate strategists need to monitor their own versus their environmental partner’s progress toward goal fulfilment in enviropreneurial initiatives. Relying on a bridge’s ability to establish a market advantage may be strategically myopic if competitors can easily ‘copy’ or improve upon the corporate partner’s differential advantage (as in the case of Greenfreeze technology). Further, as demonstrated in the case, environmental NGOs are interested in sharing the results of their green alliances to enact industry-wide change (Stafford and Hartman, 1996). Thus, corporate strategists should view green alliances as avenues for ‘early-mover’ advantages whereby the firm can capitalize on an enviropreneurial opportunity before it is shared with or adopted by competitors (Porter and van der Linde, 1995). Enviropreneurial initiatives that lead to complex eco-efficiencies, patented technologies and products that are difficult for competitors to imitate could provide firms more sustainable competitive advantages compared to simple eco-processes or unpatentable products (cf. Barney, 1991; Hart, 1997). Such outcomes, however, would not meet environmental interests.

EXTENSIONS TO STRATEGIC BRIDGING AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The outcome of the Greenpeace–Foron alliance was a victory for the environment, but not for the struggling firm. Compared to the analysis by Westley and Vredenburg (1991) of the Pollution Probe–Loblaws alliance, a partnership that suffered from internal dissonance and external attacks on its legitimacy, our study illustrates the challenges that strategic bridging poses with regard to the timing of individual goal achievement between partners. Case events largely support our strategic bridging framework, though not all of the engagement strategies specified in proposition 2 were represented in the case, and future research needs to examine the circumstances when such strategies may be feasible.
The case uncovers three important extensions to strategic bridging that warrant further exploration. One, contrary to our framework, Greenpeace did not engage in significant compromises of its agenda to bridge problem domain stakeholders, and future research should examine whether the situational contingencies giving Greenpeace the ability to resist compromise are evident in other similar cases. Two, Greenpeace built a coalition of supportive stakeholders to garner leverage over threatening stakeholders. In confronting the Treuhand, for instance, Greenpeace staged a press conference to embarrass the Treuhand publicly and ignite immediate social disapproval of the Treuhand’s intentions to liquidate Foron. With regard to Foron’s competitors, ultimately Greenpeace enacted a more emergent process of procuring consumer, media and scientific community support to convince western appliance manufacturers of Greenfreeze’s marketability. Research needs to examine further the sequence of how bridgers assemble coalitions to reshape sociopolitical and/or market pressures to leverage overt or subtle coercion (Savage et al., 1991). Three, research needs to examine bridger motivations and agendas. In this case, Greenpeace internalized the goals and values of the Montreal Protocol voluntarily. Thus, on its own initiative, Greenpeace bridged the Protocol to the German refrigeration industry implicitly through what might be termed an enactment strategy, defined as a bridger’s voluntarily acceptance and advocacy of another stakeholder’s agenda. Research needs to explore further the bridging role NGOs play in implementing international environmental agreements and the conditions encouraging bridging through enactment. Although strategic bridging has typically been ascribed to social-change organizations, such as environmental NGOs (Brown, 1991; Westley and Vredenburg, 1991), Sharma et al. (1994) note that businesses can be bridgers, and research needs to examine the potential bridges firms might provide for environmental progress. Aside from strategic bridging, a variety of other partnership issues warrant consideration including collaborative forms, contingencies facilitating partnership building, changes in production and consumption and collaborative learning processes (see Schot et al., 1997). Because environmental NGO–business collaborations involve complex stakeholder, relationship and social processes, case research may be most appropriate for initial investigations of these issues (cf. Lober, 1997; Yin, 1994). Researchers need to engage in comprehensive examination of green alliances if their sustainability, economic and social advantages are to be maximized.

REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHY

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