An Examination of Relationship Ending Theory in the context of Cross Sector Partnering

Abstract

Purpose of the paper and literature addressed: Cross sector arrangements between private, public and civil society are emerging in importance. Drivers for this include a) the intractable nature of social and environment problems calls for sectors to work more closely and b) increasing pressure for corporations to respond to their social and environmental responsibilities. While research in this area continues to progress, very little attention has been given to the ending of such arrangements. The study of relationship ending is important within cross-sector partnership research. Firstly, the differences between parties means that they will be perhaps more susceptible to failure. Second, such relationships come in different forms therefore will experience different kinds of endings. Thirdly, the nature of these relationships means that they have a high capacity for rich social interaction. For example the causes or issues addressed in the partnership can revolve around quite sensitive social, moral or environmental issues. This means there is a potential for what Ryan and Blois, (2010) term Relationship Identification. This suggests that boundary spanners can become emotionally and socially attached to such arrangements, which can have an effect during relationship ending. The aim of this paper is to extend and refine existing theory in relationship ending, particularly the models proposed by Halinen and Tähtinen (2002) and Tähtinen (2002) in the context of cross sector partnering arrangements. In doing so we hope to expand current knowledge on cross sector partnership development and ending. Moreover, we aim to extend existing theory on relationship ending by confronting it with any deviations found in this context and adapting accordingly.

Research method: The paper uses a case study methodology to extend and refine Halinen and Tähtinen's (2002) and Tähtinen (2002) relationship ending process models. Data from a longitudinal case study between an arts organisation and a multinational organisation is analysed using these models, taking a largely deductive approach. Subsequently the analysis uses a more inductive approach to explore the causal mechanisms for deviations found from the source models. This then allows us to move beyond the specifics of the case to contribute to knowledge on business relationships and cross sector partnerships in particular.

Research findings & Main contribution: In confronting the theory with a) a rich empirical case and b) a new empirical setting, we have advanced our understanding of relationship ending, shedding light on new areas heretofore obscured. In particular we have identified the concept of *contemporaneous sense making*, where boundary spanners, exposed to enough information and detail, can forecast relationship ending and thereby effect how their organisation responds. Moreover, we have advanced our understanding of the social and emotional dimensions of relationship ending (thus advancing the work of Ryan and Blois, (2010)) to consider a) *transition management strategies* and b) the role of *communitas* in both relationship development and ending.

Keywords: relationship development and ending, cross-sector partnering, transition management, communitas

An Examination of Relationship Ending Theory in the context of Cross Sector Partnering

INTRODUCTION

Cross sector arrangements between private, public and civil society are emerging in importance. Drivers for this include the intractable nature of social and environment problems calls for sectors to work more closely (Parker and Selsky 2004) and increasing pressure for corporate to respond to their social and environmental responsibilities (Seitanidi and Crane 2009). This is occurring in parallel to a more general trend towards the marketisation of the civil sector with the transference of government roles to private and civil sectors (Austin 2000; Heap 1997) where private and civil sector organisation compete for government contracts (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004).

Business interaction with the non-profit sector can take many forms. From what are considered more one-way approaches (such as philanthropy and donations) to transaction-based approaches (such as cause related marketing, sponsorship) to more integrative approaches (such as those akin to joint ventures) (Austin, 2000). Such partnering can provide for private sector firms an important mechanism to deliver on their social and environmental responsibilities (Seitanidi and Crane, 2009) as well as valuable market based opportunities and for civil sector organisations a major source of funding and skills for their organisational stability required to carry out their mission (Googins and Rochlin 2000). However, while the opportunities afforded to these arrangements are being realised, they are also as being recognised as fraught with challenges as two sectors heretofore considered enemies come to work jointly together (Rondinelli and London 2003). Differences between sectors, which include goals, strategy and mission, identity and language, market/social values, management complexity and stakeholder relations, nature of employee contacts, and resources (Parker and Selsky, 2004), create tensions.

While partnership dynamics (Selsky and Parker, 2004) and specifically partnership formation (Seitanidi, 2010b) have been addressed in the cross sector partnership literature, the issue of partnership ending has not received attention. This is an important omission that this paper wishes to address. The study of partnership ending is important area of concern for both theory and practice. First, the differences between parties outlined above means that they will be perhaps more susceptible to relationship failure (Parker and Selski, 2004). Developing relationship ending capabilities will therefore be an important skill for managers in this context. Moreover, such partnerships can fail at a more societal level by serving primarily the needs of one or other of the partners to the detriment of wider stakeholder concerns (Hamann and Acutt 2003). In such situations it would become necessary for such partnerships to end, and possibly reform, in order to maintain their social legitimacy. Second, the nature of these relationships means that they have a high capacity for rich social interaction where the causes or issues addressed in the partnership can revolve around quite sensitive social, more or environmental issues. Hence there is a potential for what Ryan and Blois (2010) term Relationship Identification. This suggests that boundary spanners can become emotionally and socially attached to such arrangements, which can have an effect during relationship ending. This paper therefore further addresses a recent call in the literature to examine the" intensity and consequences of social interactions in value creating processes" (Seitanidi, 2010a). Third, in developing our understanding of how to manage the ending of such

partnerships, we can also learn more about the nature of such relationships and their development more generally (Alajoutsijarvi et al. 2000; Olkkonen and Tuominen 2003).

Much work has already been undertaken within the field of business relationships concerning relationship ending and although initially conceptualised as simply the conclusion of the relationship, relationship ending is now more appropriately recognised as a process in its own right (Halinen and Tähtinen 2002; Halinen and Tähtinen 1999; Tähtinen 2002). Indeed, because a number of residual relationship states are possible, and because different outcomes can be influenced by exit communication strategies (Alajoutsijarvi et al. 2000), this process is now conceptualised as dissolution. In considering the existing research in this field, the focus of this paper revolves around the following question "are there specific dimensions/characteristics of cross sector partnerships that would render it necessary to extend or refine existing theory on relationship ending?" We address this question by applying one particular process model of relationship ending to the study of a cross sector partnership. This is an important task as it allows us to consider the analytical purchase of existing theory in this new context, and to consider possible refinements. Moreover, by confronting the existing theory with deviations from this context, gives us the opportunity to develop knowledge in the field more generally.

The paper is outlined as follows: Having outlined the core theoretical ideas shaping the research we will next discuss the methodological approach taken in this research. From this we will outline in detail the specifics of the case, including an outline of the ending phases. This will be followed by a discussion where we attempt to move beyond the specifics of this case and contribute more generally to relationship ending research, as well as research in cross sector partnerships. The paper will end with a conclusion as to the main contribution of the work and exploration of areas for future research.

THE PROCESS OF RELATIONSHIP ENDING

Tähtinen and Halinen-Kaila (1997) define a dissolved relationship as "a relationship is dissolved when all activity links are broken and no resource ties and actor bonds exist between the companies". Halinen and Tähtinen (2002) further offer a typology of factors that impact on relationship dissolution that includes predisposing elements, precipitating elements and attenuating elements. Predisposing factors suggest inherent flaws in the relationship, such as incompatibility or a dislike of one party, where it may be circumstantial that the two parties came together in the first place. Precipitating events are changes that influence the relationship, happening in the actors, their dyad or the external environment. Attenuating factors and events include those that would facilitate both parties in the relationship to weather predisposing and precipitating elements and elongate the relationship. Therefore, the received view is that relationships end because of some inherent flaw or internal or external causes (or all of them), where attenuation elements aid to weather such storms.

Halinen and Tähtinen (2002, p. 171) define business relationship dissolution process as one that "disconnects the former partner companies from each other by cutting the activity links, the resource ties and the actor bonds that have kept them together.". They also suggest a conceptual process model of relationship ending[1], which is empirically grounded in Tähtinen

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[1] We use the terms 'ending' and 'dissolution' interchangeably.

(2002). The grounded model pictured in Figure 1 separates six stages or sub-processes and four actor levels that are all potentially involved in the sub-processes.
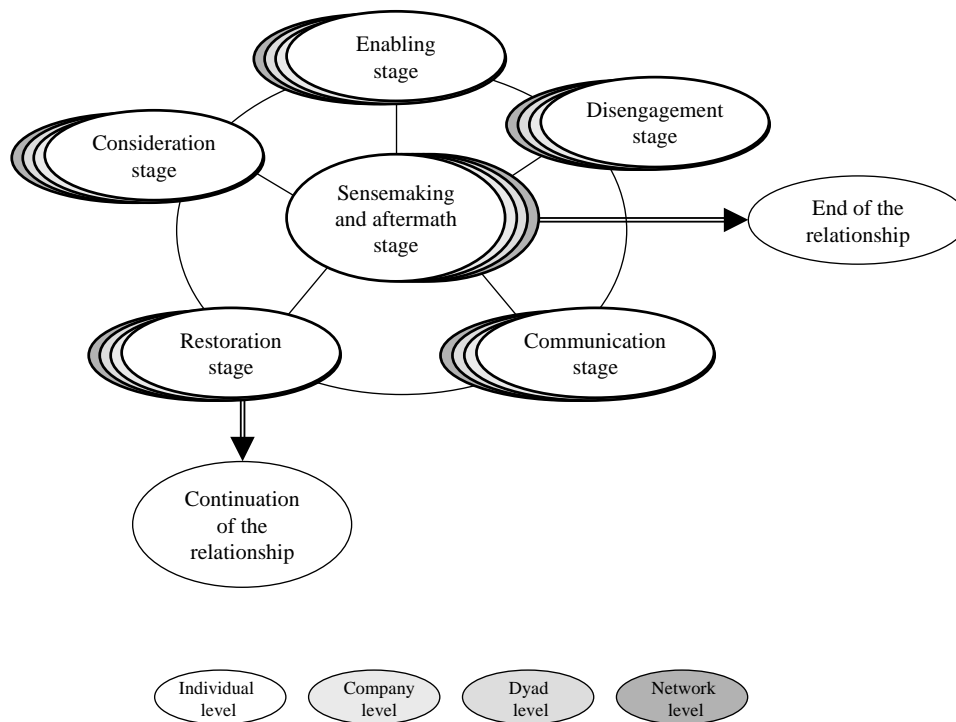

Figure 1. An empirically grounded process model of business relationship ending (Tähtinen 2002, 335).

The consideration stage consists of the actors' information seeking, uncertainty reduction and decision-making behaviour concerning the future of the relationship. During the enabling stage, the influence of attenuating factors that hinder the relationship ending is reduced, so that the ending process can continue. If this does not happen, the relationship may be restored, at any stage in the ending process. The future of the relationship is communicated within the companies, as well as to (and by) network actors that the ending affects. The actual disengagement of the resource ties, actor bonds and activity links also may involve network actors. Finally, the actors try to understand what is going on and mentally secure themselves already during the other stages but also later on. Thus, the sensemaking and aftermath stage concludes the process, and it may last for a long period, probably depending on how strong emotions the process involved.

METHODOLOGY

The overall approach of this study is to enable theory extension with a case study. In this context, Stuart et al (2002, 431) argue that "Case studies should not be seen as a methodology appropriate only for understanding and the preliminary stages of theory development. Because of their observational richness they also provide a means of refutation of, or extensions to, existing concepts". Indeed Araujo and Dubois (2007) argue that case studies are particularly well suited to the adaptation, extension and refinement of existing theories.

The focal relationship under discussion is between a multinational telecommunications organisation with a subsidiary facility in Galway, Ireland (hereafter to be called TELCO) and

a local arts organisation (hereafter to be called ARTORG). TELCO initially sponsored the ARTORG as an isolated event, but, consistent with conceptualisations of relationship evolution as developmental and deepening, this relationship moved beyond a bounded sponsor/sponsee relationship to a multi-dimensional relationship. This emergent relationship incorporated the formal sponsorship arrangement, a more embedded and extensive interorganisational relationship and also encapsulated important interpersonal relationships. This case is part of a wider study on business-art relations in a sponsorship context. It was chosen for this study as the researcher had the opportunity to observe the ending of this relationship as occurred.

In recognition of the important dyadic nature of the exchange, ten interviews were conducted with participants in both organisations (see Anderson and Narus 1984). These included interviews with the Financial Controller and the Marketing Manager at TELCO as well as the General Manager and Artistic Director of the ARTORG. Interviews were in-depth and lasted between one and two hours. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed in full. A further round of interviews was conducted two years later. These interviews were particularly insightful as they coincided with the ending of the formal relationship and therefore provide important access to relationship dissolution as it occurred. Further to this detailed documentary evidence was also collected from large volume of correspondence (over 150 individual items) and documentation of the sponsorship from its 10 past years. This included annual sponsorship proposals from ARTORG to TELCO, annual joint submission to the Business2Art's (B2A)[2] Business Sponsors of the Year Award, numerous press cuttings, internal correspondence between the two organisations, and a number of internal memos.

The analytical frame used to interrogate data in the case was processual in nature, which involved searching for "multiple intersecting conditions which link features of context and process to certain outcomes" (Pettigrew, 1997 p.342). Key events were examined from the documentary evidence as well as from interview material in a process of triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). For example, correspondences between the organisations before and after the submission of the annual sponsorship proposal were analysed, and the sequence and nature of correspondence relating to specific issues in the relationship (for example the management of the steward program) were recorded and interrogated. As part of the case analysis a 20,000-word case history was written by the lead researcher3. At the end of the empirical data collection phase, the case was shared with interviewees from both organisations and acknowledged to be a fair and recognisable account of events.

THE CASE

TELCO, established in 1973, is a subsidiary firm of the TELCO Corporation, a multinational operating in the telecommunications sector. The nature of telecoms makes it one of the most fast changing industries, where over its life time, TELCO Corporation moved from offering basic telephony to web-hosting, broadband, multimedia communication servers, optical and wireless networks. TELCO too has seen many changes, where traditionally it focused on manufacturing; from 1990 onwards it moved more into customised solutions and R&D (Corcoran 1999). TELCO Corporation emphasises both employee well being, and strong community relationships from which it draws its workforce.

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[2] B2A are the Irish Business Council for the Arts (B2A)
3 A copy of this is available from the corresponding author on request.

ARTORG is a non-profit organisation, partly funded by the Arts Council of Ireland, who manage and co-ordinate an international multi-disciplinary arts festival, established in 1977. With its origins in theatre, ARTORG moved to becoming a multi-disciplinary festival in 1993/4, with its current list of art forms including street art, spectacle, comedy, literature, music and theatre.

The relationship has a long history, but a critical point of departure was the formalisation of a sponsorship arrangement in 1991. From the outset however, the nature of the sponsorship arrangement went beyond the mere purchase of associated benefits, as would be normal in this context. Staff involvement was from an early stage seen as important, where TECLO's Financial Controller envisioned the importance of getting as many interested staff involved in the festival, as stewards of event, as well as in a more consultative role in supporting the festival in its management and operations. What is evident from the case is that new objectives emerged over time, which were triggered by events within the relationships as well as from external contingencies (see Table 1). For example, at two particular crises faced by the festival, particular skills and resources were identified and enacted by both parties in an effort to resolve the issues faced. Following each crisis it is possible to see that both organisations were changed not as much by the crises themselves but in how they both responded to the situations.

Insert table 1 about here

However, the focus of our more detailed discussion will be a period during which the ending of the formal sponsorship took place. At the same time, the level of interaction and exchange peaked. These quite contradictory processes share a key causal factor, that is, the crisis faced by TELCO Corporation at the time. Retrospectively, it becomes possible to describe the initiation of a corporate partnership deal as the beginning of the ending process. It forms, what will be discussed in more detail below, a sense making stage on the part of both actors as they strove to cope with the difficult times faced by the TELCO Corporation at this time.

For reasons of clarification, this section will begin with a detailed discussion of the context and processes of the corporate partnership deal as well as a description of the nature of the relationship during this period. A more detailed discussion of the 'ending' process of the formal sponsorship follows this, applying Tähtinen's (2002) six-stage model of relationship ending.

PRECIPITATING FACTORS PRIOR TO THE RELATIONSHIP ENDING

In 2001, TELCO became Corporate Partners of the entire festival, where prior to this they were only involved in the International Theatre Programme, a change that marked a 300 % increase in TELCO's 1991 investment. The reasons for this, highly visible, increased involvement at this time are multi-faceted in nature. Firstly, 2001 was to be the tenth anniversary of the sponsorship, where traditionally anniversaries in TELCO-ARTORG relationship have meant an increase in activity to mark the occasion. Secondly, the ongoing pressure from TELCO Corporation meant that this particular arrangement became more important as the company wished to express their ongoing commitment to the locality. During 2000 and the early part of 2001 TELCO were facing increasing pressure in their external environment, concurrent with a downturn in the telecommunications sector (Cheng

et al. 2003). In response to this TELCO began to rationalise their operations and initiate staff redundancies in order to align their costs and retain a sustainable level of competitiveness. However, while increasing their involvement was to prove very beneficial, it was not an automatic decision for the company, and as we shall see, was only agreed upon after lengthy discussions. Three central features of the sponsorship became vital then in taking this progressional step, that is, the interpersonal relationships between key personnel, the history of the two organisations, and finally the reputation of the festival, as the following serve to illustrate.

> *"The relationship side between [financial controller at TELCO] Liam and [festival director at ARTORG] Fergal was absolutely key in terms of keeping it going. If it had been anyone else, especially if it was a new relationship, it certainly wouldn't have the history and we wouldn't be able to look at the benefits of what 10 years have given TELCO and the community" (PR manager, TELCO).*

> *"Because of the reputation of the arts festival we have managed to increase the sponsorship for the year 2001 but each year is a challenge in itself" (Financial Controller, TELCO).*

The development of the Corporate Partnership deal involved a lengthy and formal negotiation process between TELCO and ARTORG, which took seven months to complete, that is, from first mention of the new partnership in October of 2000 to May 2001 when it was officially launched. This process can be demarked into three interconnected stages, that is, a) ARTORG approached TELCO with a Corporate Partnership (CP) discussion document, 2) TELCO held internal discussions as to the value of the partnership and, 3) both organisations began formal negotiations in developing the CP deal.

However, the problems facing TELCO intensified in the spring of 2001, with TELCO Corporation experiencing ongoing and increasing pressure in the telecommunications market; resulting in TELCO being forced to drastically downsize their operations. Therefore, while the success of the launch meant an immediate return on investment by TELCO, the level of visibility of the sponsorship meant that it also raised an important dilemma for them, at a time when the company was coming under increasing pressure to perform in a changeable telecommunication market.

> *"We had to curtail some of the high profile activities we had to promote the event and the association. It did restrict its promotion this year because of the sensitivities involved in the environment, redundancies, staff lay offs [etc]. It was a difficult summer for TELCO and difficult for us as well. We are now fearful for the implications it might have for the future in the IT sector... New York[4] [etc], If that further causes their sector to nose-dive we could all be under serious pressure." (Festival Director, ARTORG).*

Due the problems faced by TELCO, which intensified after the launch of the CP, the role of the sponsorship changed. During this phase therefore, TELCO began to see, more and more, the importance of staff morale in a company that was being forced to lay-off large numbers of staff. At this juncture, it became important for TELCO to breed a level of confidence in the local community, that TELCO had the ability to weather this particular storm, and that they were indeed a secure and stable employer.

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[4] This is a reference to 9/11

> *"That's why it has become doubly important for us, to give the community a sense that we are a secure and stable workforce, and I think for our employees' morale and to feel good about themselves….The time will come again soon, technology is so cyclical. In 3 months time things could turn around, and you will "need to raise the profile", the danger would be to stop everything in a down time, need to continue and keep the morale going as well" (Financial Controller, TELCO).*

Importantly here is the concept of seeing employees as part of a community, where TELCO wished the community to feel that they would remain an important part of local life, and in time would begin to recruit again,

> *"The arts festival for us is the catalyst; it's the link with the community and allows us to build on our reputation with the employees. And that is important on many levels, the employees have a family outside of TELCO, and [this city] is a small place, and reputation and word of mouth is very important [for the city], but also for new recruits, when we get back into recruiting mode, again it's the perception of TELCO" (Financial Controller, TELCO).*

The difficult times facing TELCO Corporation also meant that they came under increased pressure to justify their involvement in such a high profile sponsorship, while they at the same time had to make divestments in terms of their operations in TELCO. An important indication of this comes in the preparation of a special Strategic Media Press Release, where both organisations wished to particularly reinforce the notion that their relationship had been developing for over ten years, and that it was very much a partnership where all concerned benefited, particularly the TELCO staff themselves. There is a marked sensitivity on TELCO's part therefore to communicate the relational aspects of the sponsorship arrangement, rather than focusing on the financial investment, which they felt was all too often the only aspect of sponsorship considered:

> *"Today people talk about sponsorship in terms of 'we gave 200 grand for that and about 500 grand for that, and we got our name in x amount of press articles'. Everything is based on the quantity and measuring it and I understand that, however, from the employee perspective is immeasurable"…People will always ask us how much money we are spending on the arts festival, we can't tell them exactly, counting the time and everything, I mean it's a lot of money. When someone asks me how much cash we give ARTORG, it's a question I refuse to answer, because all of a sudden it becomes 'TELCO give £X' and that's the story, we don't want that to be the bottom line, its everything else, it's the technology, the employees. We want people to be asking us the type of questions you are doing now…" (TELCO PR manager).*

However, the data suggests that the continuation and development of the sponsorship by TELCO at this time, was not merely part of an explicit crisis management strategy but went deeper than that. The sentiment expressed here exemplifies the level of depth that the relationship between the TELCO staff and the festival had reached, with the use of such language as nourishment, enrichment, bloodline being used to show the affect not only of the festival acting as an important point of continuity in a changing world, but also the aesthetic and human connection between staff and the art itself.

> *"Now more than ever with the high techs going through turmoil, you need nourishment and you alternative views and you need to be able to see out of the box and something like the connection with the Arts Festival provides that because you can get locked into your work. People have said to me (who have actually left Telco)*

that the biggest mistake that they ever made was having all their whole activity and their work, everything was in the Company so that when they actually left, their whole support mechanism was gone. So I believe strongly, not just in relation to arts, but in relation to community that you have to keep an outward look as well as an inward look for your own survival and for the better[ment] of the Company. Because you bring back things that you learn from outside. It was a kind of an enrichment or a bloodline really I felt to the organisation. It was a lot easier to do when things were going well but even now the high tech are experiencing bad things, that they [TELCO] stuck with it again this year to an even greater extent than previously and I think it is needed more than ever in times of trouble. People need things like art and sport to get their minds off some of the real problems that they are faced with." (Financial Controller, TELCO).

This was the final year of the sponsorship between Telco and Artorg continued. The corporate partnership therefore lasted only one year. In the following year it became clear that the precipitating factors in the external economy were too strong, and Telco faced a period of harsh downsizing. We can say therefore that the formal sponsorship ended, marked by a ceasing of financial exchange and activity links such as departmental interaction and the volunteer programme. However, a legacy of the relationship remained for aprox two/three years after this point. This involved personal level interaction between the financial controller and the director of the festival.

> *"I would have met Liam, still, more that I have met any other sponsor... he's very keen to keep up the contact and his advice is very good as well, and he has contacts. There's no sense of 'I am fighting for my life here, go away'. I mean he phones me to meet for lunch saying 'have you thought about this, have you thought about that'."(ARTORG director).*

ENDING PROCESS STAGES

We will now apply Tähtinen's (2002) framework to the case. The six stages include: a consideration and restoration stage, the enabling stage, the communication stage, the disengagement stage, and the sensemaking and aftermath stage. The analysis will illustrate the different phases experienced in this case, and will subsequently attempt to expose the causal mechanisms leading to any deviations found. The phases identified as being appropriate to explain the nature of the ending of the formal sponsorship arrangement between TELCO and ARTORG: a consideration and restoration stage, a sense-making stage, a communication and disengaging stage and an aftermath stage. Table two below establishes the key events taking place in both organisations during the ending of the sponsorship. It also marks these events in relation to the times the researcher was in the field. The numbers 1-9 establish the order events took place.

CONSIDERATION AND RESTORATION STAGE

The period of the relationship between TELCO and ARTORG from the latter part of 2000 to the Corporate Partnership deal, including the ending of the formal relationship following this, was a particularly turbulent one, for the relationship itself, as well as both parties involved. This time can be seen as an intense microcosm of the overall relationship, marked as it was by open communication, high level of interaction, sharing of expertise, and an enactment of the social and resource ties that have characterised the relationship from the outset. The

highly intense change process experienced by TELCO particularly marked this period. What is evident, however, is the degree to which the sponsorship relationship between these two organisations had evolved, to the point where a nonprofit festival, could come to the aid of a multinational corporation in such a human way. The nature of the crisis facing TELCO and the relationship, coupled with the degree of empathy that had evolved between the two organisations, due in part to the activity links, resource ties and social bonds developed, explains the way that ARTORG responded: "rather than lie down and die we came back in with a major innovation where we would bring them to a higher level." (ARTORG General Manager – pre 2001).

While the development of the Corporate Partnership deal emerged for a number of reasons, it was its role in communicating to the local community that TELCO could weather the particular storm faced that became central. There is evidence to suggest therefore that ARTORG went to TELCO with the idea of the CP, with the expressed idea of leveraging it to help communicate a sense of stability (ARTORG General Manager). There is a recognition evident on ARTORG's part therefore, that the sustainability of the formal sponsorship relationship was indeed in jeopardy, where they engaged with TELCO in the manner in which they did, in a sense to play their part in helping to ensure that TELCO could weather this particular storm. There is further evidence that the festival, or at least the general manager was aware that the sponsorship may not continue, where in May 2001, before the 2001 Corporate Partnership itself, he is reflecting on the possible impact of TELCO's leaving:

> *"More likely, due to international pressures, they will be precluded involving themselves, or god forbid, they will downsize or withdraw...I hope it doesn't, and especially not in my time. So in the event of one of those things happening, we will have to have a plan B. I honestly don't know if there is another one out there [i.e. similar sponsor to replace TELCO]. To lose TELCO for us would be damaging, very damaging, and I obviously would not like to think that it would undermine it, but it would be damaging" (Festival General Manager, ARTORG) [Interview held in May 2001].*

The level of awareness of ARTORG regarding the problems TELCO were facing, as well as the degree of empathy shown to them by ARTORG meant that the festival wanted to 'give something back' to TELCO at this time. Furthermore, TELCO, particularly the financial controller, continued to offer practical help to the festival in terms of storage space etc. Indeed, the strong relationship between the Financial Controller at TELCO and the General Manager at ARTORG remained a lifeline between the two organisations. It is this level of awareness, which was witnessed by the researcher in the interviews that were held, both before and after the Corporate Partnership that evidences a degree of both contemporaneous and joint sense-making on the part of those involved.
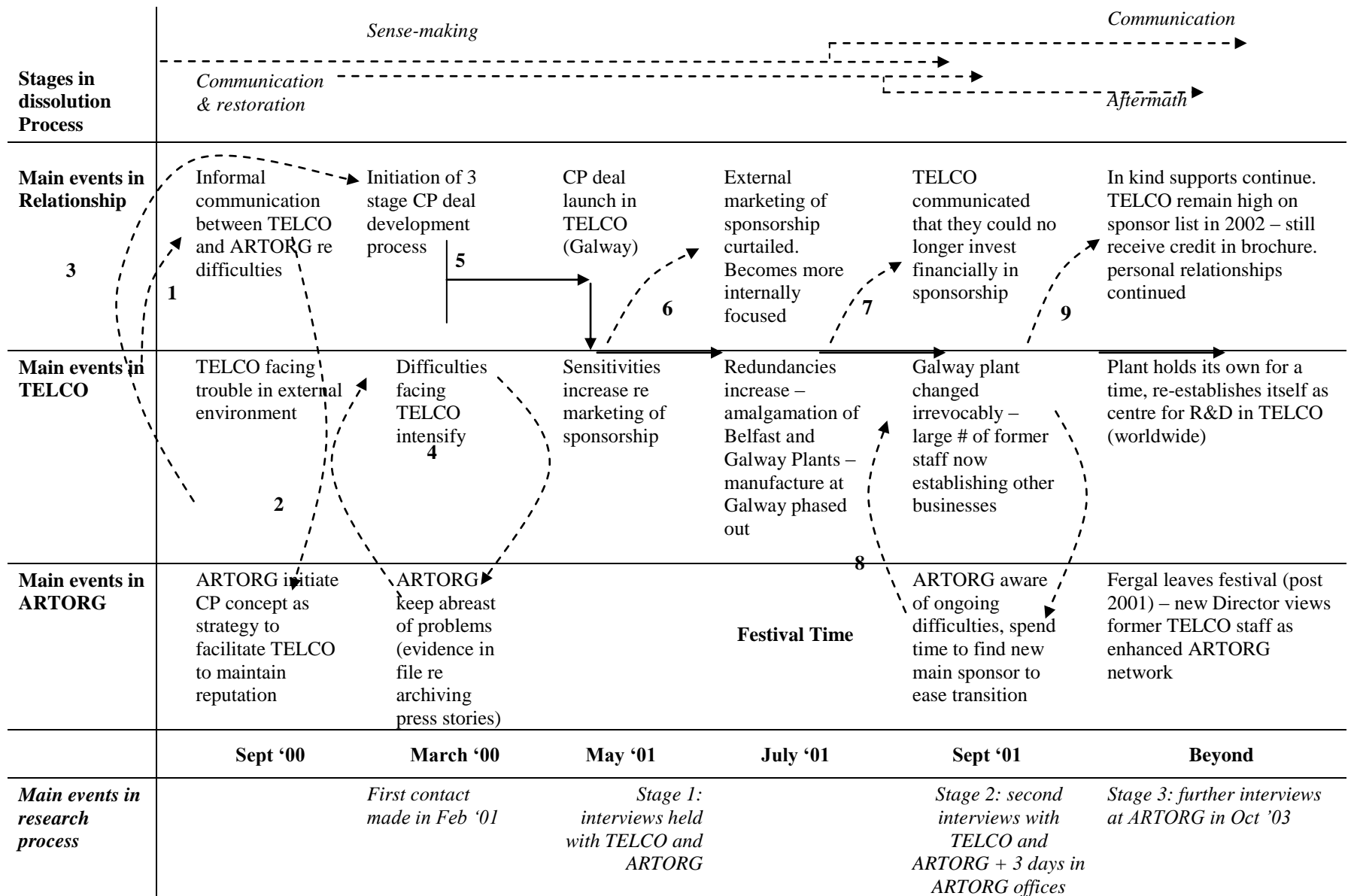
		Sense-making			**Communication**	
Stages in dissolution Process		*Communication & restoration*				*Aftermath*
Main events in Relationship **3**	Informal communication between TELCO and ARTORG re difficulties **1**	Initiation of 3 stage CP deal development process **5**	CP deal launch in TELCO (Galway)	External marketing of sponsorship curtailed. Becomes more internally focused **6**	TELCO communicated that they could no longer invest financially in sponsorship **7**	In kind supports continue. TELCO remain high on sponsor list in 2002 – still receive credit in brochure. personal relationships continued **9**
Main events in TELCO	TELCO facing trouble in external environment **2**	Difficulties facing TELCO intensify **4**	Sensitivities increase re marketing of sponsorship	Redundancies increase – amalgamation of Belfast and Galway Plants – manufacture at Galway phased out	Galway plant changed irrevocably – large # of former staff now establishing other businesses **8**	Plant holds its own for a time, re-establishes itself as centre for R&D in TELCO (worldwide)
Main events in ARTORG	ARTORG initiate CP concept as strategy to facilitate TELCO to maintain reputation	ARTORG keep abreast of problems (evidence in file re archiving press stories)		**Festival Time**	ARTORG aware of ongoing difficulties, spend time to find new main sponsor to ease transition	Fergal leaves festival (post 2001) – new Director views former TELCO staff as enhanced ARTORG network
	Sept '00	**March '00**	**May '01**	**July '01**	**Sept '01**	**Beyond**
Main events in research process		*First contact made in Feb '01*	*Stage 1: interviews held with TELCO and ARTORG*		*Stage 2: second interviews with TELCO and ARTORG + 3 days in ARTORG offices*	*Stage 3: further interviews at ARTORG in Oct '03*

Table 2: Detailed outline of the Ending phase of the relationship

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While the formal ending of the sponsorship arrangement was not made explicit by TELCO at this stage, it is important to reflect on the comments made by informants, before, during and after the 2001 CP period, in response to questions posed by the researcher relating to the future of the relationship. The following quote evidences a form of 'sense-making' on his part by reflecting on: the reasons why the sponsorship may end; what ARTORG would lose if this was to occur; the role of TELCO in the development of the festival; and the impact that this long-standing sponsorship has had in making ARTORG attractive to other sponsors. Furthermore, this quote suggests that when a level of trust has been established between both parties, difficulties in the relationship are seen to be outside of the partners' control and to be the cause of some external environmental reasons, something which has been highlighted in the literature (Anderson and Narus 1990; Kumar 1996):

> *"So if they pulled [out] in the morning we would be damaged, and the biggest loss would be not the cash but the non-cash support… the relationship would have a legacy, we have [had] a good 10/15 years, they would have set the example for a lot of others in [the city]. They would have allowed us to achieve the scale that make us interesting to other people [i.e. sponsors]…they might have made us so attractive that someone else might want to parachute in and rob us. That would be one possibility. That would be ironic that if they were to pull [out], they would have done the work for someone else." (Festival General Manager, ARTORG)*

COMMUNICATION AND DISENGAGING PHASE

What is clear from the analysis of the relationship between TELCO and ARTORG at this time is that there is no clear demarcation between a period before and after the initiation of the ending process; with the two periods overlapping and co-existing. For example, as was discussed earlier, the initiation of the CP arrangement was partly related to facilitating TELCO to leverage the goodwill in the community generated in part by the relationship with the festival; that is, by using the increased involvement to communicate to the local community that the problems faced were temporary in nature. However, what was soon realised was that the problems were not temporary, and TELCO was to be irrevocably changed during the period of rationalisation. It was the intensification of the problems that led to the level of marketing of the CP to be curtailed. Therefore by the time TELCO officially communicated with the festival that they would not be able to continue their involvement for the 2002 festival, there was no surprise, only disappointment, not only from a resource perspective, but more importantly from a human one.

> *"There was a mutual, very positive mutual relationship, and like that even, when things were going wrong with them, it wasn't so sad because we were losing their investment in the festival, but because we knew people who were losing their jobs, but I mean it was an extraordinary relationship like that. There are very few other sponsors that you have that kind of relationship with." (Festival Artistic Director, ARTORG).*

While it came to the point that TELCO could simply no longer afford to sponsor the arts festival, the reasons why they increased their involvement for the 2001 festival continued. TELCO were indeed in a difficult situation, for while they wanted to maintain their

reputation within the local community, the degree of job losses were such that any non-essential press communication seemed inappropriate.

> *"Well they didn't pull out, I mean they were losing staff all over the place, they couldn't be putting money into the likes of us, and literally lose staff at the same time" (Festival Artistic Director, ARTORG).*

Indeed, the interrelationships between ARTORG and TELCO staff had reached such a level, that ARTORG felt that they were losing their own staff.

> *It's terrible because we knew them all really well, we had become friends with the staff over the time, 'coz [sig] they did volunteer work with the festival as well. It was awful sad to see it, people losing their jobs." (Festival Artistic Director, ARTORG).*

There was no formal 'disengaging' or phasing out of the sponsorship, there was no press conference or release; in effect the relationship was allowed to in fact 'fade away'. Indeed, it is possible to suggest that the festival facilitated this 'fading' of the relationship, where Fergal spent much time, even during the 2001 festival, cultivating a new sponsor, in order to ensure a smooth transition between TELCO and the next main sponsor. This can be categorised as an ***enabling action***, reducing mental or emotional (personal) exit barriers, in an attempt to secure a beautiful exit (Alajoutsijarvi, et a; 2000). This will be discussed further below.

AFTERMATH PHASE

The financial investment made by TELCO in relation to the Corporate Partnership in 2001 was to be the last year that the sponsored the festival in this way. However, what is interesting to note, that while the financial investment ended, other aspects of the relationship remained, not only in terms of the social bonds, which were critical, but also the many other activity links, which had characterised the relationship over its life time. For example, TELCO continued to be credited in the festival brochure, well after the 2001 Corporate Partnership, where in 2002 there were billed as a sponsor, and by 2004 they continued to be acknowledged as a supporting sponsor.

> *"It's not like the relationship was ever severed, it's still ongoing, in whatever form it can be at a given time, but we were always, we are still assuming, as you say things are cyclical, that TELCO will come back at some point the way they were" (Festival Artistic Director, ARTORG).*

The reason for this continued billing of TELCO as a sponsor can be explained by the ongoing personal relationship between the financial controller and the festival director, and the financial controller's interest in the festival more generally. .

Furthermore, because of adaptations made during the course of the relationship both parties are irreducible to their previous states. For example, ARTORG developed its management capabilities, becoming more financially sustainable, and had cultivated a healthy range of sponsors. Therefore when the formal financial aspect of the relationship ended its impact was not devastating to the festival. Furthermore, as TELCO employees dissipated, becoming part of other companies or forming their own, they now formed part

of ARTORG's network of potential sponsors and supporters. Moreover, since 2004 an ex-TELCO staff member has also joined the festival as their financial controller.

> *"I am meeting people now who are in other businesses who worked in TELCO…they have a certain mentality…they seem to leave all those kinds of nitty gritty aspects of human nature that we all have…at the door and they will give you time, they're positive about what your doing. They are the easiest people to talk to. They have an influence beyond money…they are loyal as well, they'll give you time. They're very real as well, you know they're not fools, they will tell you straight if they can help you or not. All of them that I have encountered are very positive about the festival. And if they can't do anything directly, like Liam, they will try and do it indirectly and if they can't give you cash they'll give you time,"* (ARTORG General Manager post 2001).

DISCUSSION

Due to the nature of sponsorship, the nature of the crisis faced by TELCO (i.e. scale of problem, and public nature of events), as well as the history of the relationship up to this point (i.e. degree of social bonds developed between the organisations), the nature of ending within the TELCO-ARTORG relationship deviates from the model as presented by (Tähtinen and Halinen, (2002). Most prominent of this is the evidence of a sense-making phase prior to a formal ending phase itself. This supports Tähtinen's (2002) addition to the Tähtinen and Halinen model, which suggests that sense making is something that is done subsequent to the ending of the relationship. The researcher directly observed this sense making when ending of the relationship coincided temporally with the research process itself. The link between the research process and the ending phases is illustrated in Table 2 above. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that these phases were experienced by both organisations, albeit to different degrees. In the next section we will explore the interplay between stages experiences at the organisational level and activities engaged in at the level of the individual. In this we will explore the specific role and practices of boundary spanners in the ending of business relationships. Before this we examine more closely the nature of social interaction and bonds developed between employees from both organisations and the effect this had on the relationship itself.

A Special form of social bond: Communitas

Havila and Wilkinson (2002) propose that "once a social bond has been built up between individuals it is impossible to 'destroy' because the individuals are, even after they have stopped trading, aware of each other as possible counterparts for the future" (Havila and Wilkinson 2002 p192). Indeed, it has been suggested that social bonds generated within a relationship can remain important, albeit conceptualised as being residual in nature. However, evidence from the case demonstrates that considering social bonds as residual does not capture their creative role, not only in the relationship, but in the relationship ending itself. We will now explore in more detail the specific nature of the social bonds generated in this cross sector partnership, and the role of the cause/issue (in this case the arts) has in this regard.

Within the extant literature on inter-organisational relationships is it widely acknowledge that the social relationship between interactants is a key enabler to successful relationship development (e.g. Håkansson 1982; Harris et al. 2003; Hutt and Stafford 2000; Möller and Wilson 1995). As has been discussed the relationship between TELCO and ARTORG was marked by a high degree of staff interaction at differing levels. We can now categorise this level of personal interaction on two levels, that is, sponsorship specific interaction, and non-sponsorship specific interaction. The former relates to those interactions, which were specifically about development and management of the sponsorship itself. However, what is clear from the case is that personnel from both organisations enjoyed a high level of interaction outside this more formal management context, namely, with TELCO staff going to the events managed by the festival, and festival members of staff engaging in TELCO staff development programmes.

The emerging importance of the concept of social capital throughout the social sciences is also giving greater credence to the mediating role of social interaction and bonds developed within structures. Many of the advantages of social capital have been identified, including: facilitation of coordination and communication; amplifying reputations, and the facilitation of dilemmas of collective action to be resolved (Cohen and Prusak 2001; Gonzalez et al. 2004; Starkey et al. 2001). However, while being important in its own right, this somewhat narrow perspective on social capital does not capture the nature of the bonds developed between people from both TELCO and ARTORG within the context of their sponsorship relationship. A central driver in the success of the TELCO-ARTORG relationship was the central focus given to the art events themselves, and the degree of involvement of TELCO staff in these experiences. These experiences, i.e. staff experiencing festival events, as stewards, and audience more generally, became part of the fabric of the relationship itself. Interactions between both parties occurred at both an artistic and organisational level, allowing for a greater degree of empathy to be developed. This empathy or communitas, as defined below, can therefore account for a range of subsequent organisational level behaviours.

> "Communitas is a sense of community that transcends typical social norms and convention…when individuals from various walks of life share a common bond of experience. The spirit of communitas emerges from 'shared ritual experience' that transcends the mundane of everyday life" (Celsi et al. 1993 p12)

The concept of communitas has emerged from anthropology, primarily from the work of Turner (1969). It was developed initially as a way to describe the experience of initiands during both the initiation process itself and its effects thereafter. It has since moved onto more abstract concepts such as the interplay between anti-structure (communitas) and structure in explaining society and its development. While the context in which this concept was developed is, at one level, far removed from the study of organisations and their relationships, it has already found fruitful ground within marketing research. Most prominent of this is the work of Celsi et al (1993), with their study of consumption practices within the snowboarding community. Here the concept was used to describe the extra-ordinary space created within the snowboarding experience itself, where class, gender and other social structuring devices fade into the background. Communitas, in this context is seen as a sense of community that allows what may be seen as a disparate group,

find a sense of coherence. An important element of this is the 'out of every day lived experience' aspect, which allows us to consider such experiences as more sacred than secular. Within the context of a sponsorship relationship, the term communitas is being linked to the aesthetic experiences of actors in the relationship. Central to this is the involvement of TELCO staff as stewards and audience of events. While the stewarding of 'gigs' in a festival may not seem at first consideration to be highly artistic one, when those same stewards are conceptualised as audience, then the frame to understand the effect of these events moves away from business/organisational sphere, to that of aesthetics. Turner himself, views the experience of theatrical drama as a contemporary example of a ritual process, bringing the audience out of the everyday into a world characterised by symbolic action, myth and experience (Turner 1974).

Key dimensions of the concept of communitas that are important for this study therefore include; an experience outside everyday lived experience; a sense of equality where "secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenised" (Turner 1969:95); and most importantly, a shared experience that can impact on relations between those who share the experience beyond the event itself; where the "immediacy of communitas gives way to the mediacy of structure, while in rites of passage, men are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalised by their experience of communitas (Turner 1969: 129). According to O'Suillivan (2005: 2) "the members of a performing arts audience cross a very visible threshold, and enter into a very specific way of being together (with each other and with the performers) as they enter the auditorium and the lights go down". This communitas then becomes the overarching context in which the relationship developed. This context allowed both parties to both weather storms triggered from within their respective sectors, as well as those that manifested at an intra and inter-organisational level. Moreover, a high level of interaction outside the everyday management of the relationship led to a degree of understanding about each other's ways of working.

CONTEMPORANEOUS AND JOINT SENSE MAKING

Evidence from the case suggests that boundary spanners who have played a central role in the relationship can have the capacity to 'see the writing on the wall' so to speak, and understand, before any formal communication, that a relationship is in jeopardy. This has important implications. Firstly it indicates that the relationship ending can be experienced at both organisational and individual levels, and differently in each case. Secondly, sense making can be undertaken by individuals in both parties to the relationship, not just the one that may initiate the ending itself. This insight therefore contributes to the model proposed by Tähtinen (2002). From a managerial perspective this is also important. For example, if information regarding the potential ending of a relationship reaches decision makers, this can influence the way in which the organisation responds to their partner's initiation of the ending. It can also lead to different transition management strategies, which we will now discuss in more detail.

Not all activities triggered by a relationship ending deal specifically with the ending itself. For example, evidence from the case demonstrates that boundary spanners/decision makers can engage in activities to enable them and or their organisation to make the transition from the relationship to a state where the relationship no longer exists. We have seen in this case that this can occur at both 'business' and emotional level. The former involved the general manager at ARTORG using the ending phase as a transition phase more generally, whereupon he took the opportunity to cultivate new sponsorship arrangements so that his organisation would continue to have the funds necessary to operate. These new sponsors, as we saw, could not act as a direct replacement, given the nature of their relationship with TELCO, but at least offered some financial stability.

In terms of individual level transition strategies, we can interpret some of the behaviour of TELCO's financial controller as a method for him to cope with the stress of the ending of the relationship. For example, how he continued to stay in touch with the festival, continue to offer help, and often ring in just to see how they were doing. This suggests an attempt to maintain a level of interaction that was more characteristic of interaction during the relationship itself. We can see therefore that the ending of a relationship can involve a level of 'work' or labour (Hochschild 1983) to emotionally cope with the stress being experienced. This has important implications for relationship ending theory. Firstly it highlights the emotional dimension of ending, and secondly the coping or transition strategies that may be employed by interactants. This furthers the contribution of Ryan and Blois (2010) who suggest that boundary spanners will not only act in a rational way or as their organisation intends, but also engage in activities or practices that are more about their own method of coping with the stress of relationship ending.

CONCLUSION

Cross Sector relationships are fast becoming a central feature in the business, civil and political landscape. As our understanding of these entities progresses we see room to explore further areas of interest. The aim of this paper was to consider whether existing theory on relationship ending held analytical purchase in this context and whether or not refinements would be necessary. Findings suggest that Tähtinen's (2002) can be fruitfully applied in this setting. Specifically the framework allows us to consider in more detail the ending of cross sector partnerships from a process perspective, shedding light on this heretofore obscured area of interest in this field. In this paper we have considered a consideration and restoration stage, a sense-making stage, a communication and disengaging stage and an aftermath stage. Moreover, in confronting the theory with a) a rich empirical case and b) a new empirical setting, we have advanced our understanding of relationship ending more generally. In particular we have identified the concept of contemporaneous sense making, where boundary spanners, exposed to enough information and detail, can forecast relationship ending and thereby effect how their organisation responds. Moreover, we have advanced our understanding of the social and emotional dimensions of relationship ending (thus advancing the work of Ryan and Blois, (2010) to consider a) transition management strategies and b) the role of communitas in both

relationship development and ending. Further research in these areas in both business and cross sector partnership contexts would be welcomed.

In answering the question as to whether cross sector partnerships are significantly different as to warrant new theory development we posit that such partnerships give scope for the development of communitas, which would not be possible in business-to-business interaction. In this case we have demonstrated that employee participation in the arts events enabled the development of communitas, a strong form of social bond. This communitas had an effect not only on the interpersonal interaction and friendship formation, but also in the role relationships between boundary spanners in the governance of the partnership. The concept of communitas has important implications for business relationships and cross sector partnerships in particular. With the latter we can say that the nature of cross sector partnering means that organisations involve themselves in issues that can be considered highly social or even moral in nature (i.e. working closely with a charity as part of company's CSR activities, or working with an environmental NGO in developing new technology to enable more sustainable living practices). These social or even moral dimensions potentially deepen the scope of interaction between organisations. The potential for communitas can be seen both as a creative driver in the relationship, but also as a source of stress when such relationships end, prematurely (Ryan and Blois, 2010).

The consideration of relationship ending is important for partnership practitioners, including partnership designers, strategic managers and those in boundary spanning roles. Developing an understanding of the processes, activities and phases of relationship ending is a necessary step in the development of relationship ending competences as each phase will require particular skills, and in some cases different personnel from different departments. Adapting Havila and Salmi's (2009) definition we define relationship ending competences as "the ability and skills of each partner organisation and its employees to terminate the relationship so that internal and external partnership stakeholders and company relations incur as little harm as possible".

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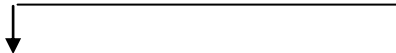
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Objectives and Impact of Sponsorship – TelCo

Timing	Objectives	How objectives were met	"Backstage" impact	"Front of house" impact
Initial objective	**Development of brand name**	Media exposure Positive word of mouth	Positive "employer" image Staff Recruitment & retention	Enhanced value chain relationships Community image
Developed in year 1	**Staff involvement**	Staff as stewards Festival committee Fin mgt, MIS and logistics support Events on site Free ticket allocation	"Thinking outside the box" (ref TELCO Financial Controller) Creativity at work Development of arts policy Staff moral, recruitment and retention	Community related image Positive word of mouth (corporate, business and community level)
Developed from yea r 2	**Corporate entertainment**	ARTORG organised corporate events Free ticket allocation	Staff morale (staff involvement in events)	Development of buyer/seller relationships Enhanced community image
year 10	**Technology Testing**	Technology share ARTORG as key "informant" customers Innovative use of technology by ARTORG	Product development and testing with core "customer"	Discussion of proprietary technology in media
year 10	**'Life-line'**	While formal sponsorship ended, interpersonal and inter-organisational relationship sustained	Support for staff as they faced this difficult time	Maintenance of TELCO(Galway) reputation in the local community

Objectives and Impact of Sponsorship –ArtOrg

Timing	Objectives	How objectives were met	"Backstage" impact	"Front of house" impact
Initial objective	**Financial investment**	Cash support annually from TELCO	Facilitated meeting of artistic (core) company objectives. Increase in security and confidence Success of spon attracted other cash sponsorships	Impacted on overall growth and development of festival Enhanced local and national profile
Ongoing (internal) objective	**Audience development**	Management and Marketing related expertise share Financial investment from TELCO Access to TELCO staff as audience, development of artistic appreciation within the plant Access to extended "family" of TELCO staff as potential audience	Development of IT related marketing infrastructure Development of management and marketing expertise Increase finances available for marketing effort	Continued increase in audience numbers Increased level of market intelligence gathered
On going internal objective	**Management Development**	Ongoing Financial management expertise share and support Logistics expertise and support D&T Audit	Development of integrated approach to management Increased professionalism and confidence impacting on other management related functions such as finance, personnel, and sponsorship and alliance acquisition	
year 7- ongoing	**Expansion of ArtOrg's sponsorship network**	TELCO introducing ARTORG to third parties, and potential supporters. Following dissipation of TELCO, exTELCO staff become sponsors of festival	Further support of ARTORG's operations, either though in-kind, financial or moral support	Impacted on overall growth and development of festival

Table1 Summary of sponsorship objectives and impact