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## **Creating commitments through discursive procurement practices**

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In this paper, we present an analysis of a longitudinal in-depth single case study of a small municipality’s school procurement and building project. The municipality considers procurement as a strategic area of its operations especially as it allows creating change in the organization through its partnerships in the wider network. This is pursued through creating commitments that are transient in nature, and therefore should become rooted in the discursive practices of the organizations. We study the transformation of cooperative procurement practices of the municipality organization through the lens of discursive practices: we ask *how does the purchasing organization balance the cooperative tensions in the supplier relationships, and what kind of implications does this have for the internal workings of the organization itself?* As a result, we found that both identities of the municipality organization as a purchaser and the contractor organization as a supplier are constituted through a purchase and building process of a new school. This cooperative relationship context functions in two directions: while the municipality aims to affect the supplier’s role in the process, developing from a traditional contractor into a long-term life-cycle partner with a shared responsibility of the project, the municipality also changes its own sense of self. These discourses lie in the core of strategy-making of the whole organization. As a result, we suggest that commitments can be seen related to those subjectivities that are being constructed in a discourse and through these discourses, commitment-type of subjectivities are maintained.

**Keywords:** power, subjectivity, network identity, relationship dynamics, strategy-as-practice

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## INTRODUCTION

Håkansson and Snehota (1989) claim that “no business is an island”, thus emphasizing the importance of relations within different actors in a network. The ability of building and maintaining relationships with network participants forms the core of strategy in network context (Håkansson & Ford, 2002). This is especially true for a small municipality organization that has to provide a range of services for its citizens and therefore is reliant on the expertise and capabilities of other actors, including its competitors. Due to the nature of public procurement relationships with suppliers are relatively stable during the agreement periods. In between, gaps between contracts and new rounds of biddings create periodical instability in the buyer-supplier relationships. Since developing trust and commitment in the relationship with the buyers is important for maintaining the level of cooperation and required quality, new kinds of purchase strategies have emerged, focusing on more long-term commitments and increased collaboration between the parties.

Commitments in relationships and networks have been studied through agreements (Lenney & Easton, 2009), resource complementarities (Dyer & Singh, 1998), and lately also through activities (Andersen & Medlin, 2016). In addition to these viewpoints, we wish to highlight the aspect of the emergence of those commitments that underpin network dynamics by focusing on discourses and related subjectivities through which individuals participate in those discourses. From this viewpoint, a certain discourse is being produced in the organization and relationships that people then either accept or resist, resulting in either commitment- or non-commitment-producing subjectivities. In the context of a public procurement process – in the relatively stable frames created for the business relationship – relationship dynamics still continue to exist. Commitments are meant to be used as a strategy of conflict resolution/balancing of tensions both inside the organization and in the relationship.

Here, we adopt a “positive” relational view on power in a triadic relationship between purchaser, supplier, and user, and study the renewal of purchasing practice of a small municipality throughout a school building project. We adopt ideas from different streams of literature, and with the help of subjectivity as a lens we study the different discursive practices the organizational actors draw on when aiming to exert their influence in and through the organization. In particular, we aim to find out, *how does the purchasing organization balance the cooperative tensions in the supplier relationships and what kind of implications does this have for the internal workings of the organization itself?* We assert that the subjectivities of the actors are being defined and maintained through continuous dialogue and participation, resulting in transformation in the identities of both the buyer and the supplier. As a result, we show how power can be productive and have positive and empowering outcomes in a networked environment, even if it is influenced by balancing collaborative and competitive forces.

In the following, we first discuss commitments in terms of subjectivity, and then turn to a case study that provides deeper insight on these issues. Concluding remarks highlight the most relevant findings, describe managerial implications, and provide suggestions for future research.

## SUBJECTIFICATION AND SUBJECTIVITIES OF ACTORS: CREATING COMMITMENT IN RELATIONSHIPS

As the present study is based on inductive analysis, the purpose of the literature review is not to impose concepts on the data. However, we did adopt a theoretical lens for our study in order to use it for theoretical integration of our inductive analysis, and to compare our findings with this framework. (McAllin, 2003; Urquhart et al., 2010.) We first introduce the conceptual grounding of our analysis

and after that, describe the results of the inductive analysis.

### **Power and commitment**

In their review on power in management and organization science, Fleming and Spicer (2014) map power studies with a framework that identifies four faces of power (i.e. coercion, manipulation, domination, and subjectification), and four sites of power (i.e. power enacted “in”, “through”, “over”, and “against” organizations). Power enacted in an organization takes place inside the formal boundaries whereas power through an organization emerges when the whole organization is used to influence the other party.

In industrial marketing studies, power has been implicitly present in network dynamics (see Chou & Zolkiewski, 2012), or studied in specific contexts, like in negotiations with suppliers or in supply networks (Cho & Chu, 1994; Meqdadi, et al. 2016). Moreover, studying power in more relational terms has been scarce, even though power can be seen to exist in a relationship, and buyers are able to influence suppliers as well as suppliers influence buyers (e.g., Palmer, 2005; Meehan & Wright, 2012). For example, earlier research has indicated that depending on its base, power affects inter-firm relationships in important, yet quite different (even contrasting) ways (Maloni & Benton, 2000). Different studies have shown, for example, that the use of mediated power (coercive, legal legitimate, reward-based) is negatively related to commitment and cooperation (Brown et al., 1995; Skinner et al, 1992) and that non-mediated power sources (expert, referent, legitimate) have the reverse effect (Brown et al. 1995, Hunt et al., 1987). Furthermore, inter-firm asymmetry has been found to hurt commitment in some cases (Anderson and Weitz, 1992). However, as an important point, Maloni & Benton (2000) show that (in the context of supply chains), power may be used to improve supply chain coordination and effectiveness in the presence of power asymmetry.

Power and commitment are therefore interrelated in the extant literature. However, the way they are related is dependent on the way commitment is defined – i.e., towards what it is directed. Commitment can be considered in terms of creating and maintaining stability in a relationship (Anderson & Weitz, 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). It involves mutuality: since actors in a network are interdependent (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995) Lenney and Easton (2009: 555) define ‘commitments’ as “agreements between two or more social actors to carry out future actions”. Håkansson and Snehota (1995) characterized networks in the form of ‘mutual commitments’, where firms commit reciprocally to a business relationship. Business actors are interdependent and interact for business activities with each other. Mutual commitment with specific business actors also reflects adapting resources and creating specificities in terms of how resources and activities are connected (Hallén, Johanson, & Seyed-Mohamed, 1991). Trust is of importance. As business relationships develop over time, commitment processes mature and become increasingly implicit (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987; Ford, 1980). Therefore, the network can be considered both as a consequence of adaptations that are made in past interactions, and as an agreement made for future interaction (Hallén et al., 1991).

Recently, Palmer et al. (2015) introduced power dynamics in an industrial supplier workshop setting. Institutional maintenance work of an organization was considered in preserving the power dynamics of market dominance. The institutional perspective still is dominant, focusing on more episodic forms of power (Fleming & Spicer, 2014): coercion (direct mobilization of power), or manipulation (attempts to ensure action and discussion occurs within accepted boundaries), even though the more systemic faces of power are present also on the individual and organizational levels. These faces – domination (attempts to make relations of power appear inevitable and natural, Lukes 1974) and subjectification (attempts to shape sense of self, experiences, and emotions, Foucault 1977) – have remained less studied within industrial network research.

Here, we focus on how power exists through subjectification in a buyer-seller-user triadic relationship. The site of power is in and through the seller organization as we focus on studying a

purchasing process in which the buyer organization attempts to influence not only the relationship logic of the seller, but in order to accomplish that, also to change its own purchasing practice. Therefore, we see subjectification taking place inside the organization to be intertwined with the subjectification taking place through the organization.

### **Subjectivities in a discourse**

Subjectification as a type of influence “seeks to determine an actor’s very sense of self, including their emotions and identity” (Fleming & Spicer, 2007). In strategy studies, Knights and Morgan (1991) called the identity construction and social agency of strategists as their subjectivity. The focus is on “the constitution of the very person who makes decisions” (Fleming & Spicer, 2014: 23). According to Foucault (1977), power is achieved through defining the conditions of possibility underlying how we experience ourselves as people. Power, therefore, “produces the kind of people we feel we naturally are”. (Fleming & Spicer, 2007, p. 23). The distinction from domination is the way subjectification goes deeper: While domination shapes what is considered worthy of political attention and effort and may “naturalize” an extant social order, subjectification normalizes a particular way of being in that social order.

In a pluralistic context in which the stakeholder relationships are multifaceted and complex, the process of subjectification is bound to be more complex as well. Even in a public organization setting, the network of relationships involves simultaneous cooperation and competition which means that the actors are continuously balancing their interdependence and independence. A public procurement process draws together a temporary network organization of multiple actors, and since bidding is often part of the process, competition and co-operation co-exist simultaneously. External actors may have more choice and autonomy to refuse subjectification than the employees of an organization, but at the same time, a pluralistic organization with multiple powerful stakeholders inside the organization means that even the “in” site of power does not follow the logic of a simple employer-employee relationship. Therefore, the practices might involve everything from the Foucauldian ‘self-governance’ and identity-regulation to discursive construction, active persuasion, and overt politicking (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

Goss et al. (2011) have suggested three processes of subjectification. First, the tactics of subjectification are about the micro-processes of power within the network of relationships. Second, an emotional component is involved. Third, the ongoing process of subjectification requires “institutional work” to perpetuate an identity that supports the maintained discourse.

### **Participation**

Participation – the way organizational actors are able to enact their agency and take part in organizational activities and even decision-making – is a question shared by different streams of literature, and an essential part of power-related discussion. Already Argyris (1955) discussed the challenge of participative management, the issue of allowing for employees’ agency that would be based on intrinsic motivational factors. Managerial interest towards participation is obvious since it helps to create commitment to strategies and since its absence may have a negative impact on the quality of decision-making (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000). At the same time, participation also represents an issue of power and ethics – and therefore reaches subjectification as well: (in)equality linked with organizational decision-making and managerial dominance.

Relatedly, participation has been studied as a means of organizational (or managerial) control as managerial practices allowing for participation also hold management’s motivational factors. According to Dickson (1981), participation is “a social technology whose major outcomes are individual changes in job satisfaction”. More recently, the aspect of control has been present in studies

where participation has been examined from more critical perspectives. In these studies, participation is seen as discursively constructed subjectivity (Laine & Vaara, 2015) and it is the developed discourses and practices that define the rights and responsibilities and identities of focal actors (i.e., subjectivities).

Also within these critical studies, the inclusion of power aspect has often carried a negative connotation as the focus has been on the narrowing-down effect on strategy: like how the rhetorical strategies of a city strategy document impeded the participation of city residents (Eriksson and Lehtimäki, 2001), or how strategy work was totally defined through economic discourse, forcing citizens to define all spheres of life within that discourse (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011). However, as suggested above, power is not negative or constraining by default; it can also be creative, empowering and positive (Clegg et al., 2006), depending on how managers in organizations choose to perceive it. Furthermore, it can extend beyond the organizational boundaries into the network.

In our inductive analysis we derive several acts of influence from the data and categorize them as manifestations of subjectification practices eventually producing conditions that support innovativeness both inside the organization, and in the partnership with the contractor.

## **EMPIRICAL SETTING AND METHODS**

Our case organization, a small municipality of approx. 7000 inhabitants (referred to as the “Municipality” from here on), takes part in a wider research process conducted by multi-disciplinary research team studying innovative public procurement practices. This particular case is about planning for the purchase and construction of a new school building; a process that takes several years from the need recognition and budget reservation to the finalization of construction work. Our initial aim was to study what can be characterized as an innovative hybrid purchase model developed by the Municipality, and the change the Municipality was undergoing. In line with strategy-as-practice approach, we paid attention to the logic that guides the activities of different actors rather than on individual decisions made (Chia, 1994). The Municipality allowed us relatively unlimited access to the documentation and operations not only related to the school project, but also to the Municipality’s strategy work in general.

### **Case organization**

Municipality is an autonomous unit that is governed by state law. Citizens elect the members of the municipal council every four years. The council appoints the officials and the municipal executive board, supervises their work and makes the decisions based on the motions prepared by the committees and the board, and brought to the meetings by the officials. Members of the council need to satisfy the expectations of the citizens, and the officials answer to the council. In this triadic setting, the demands of the state legislation need to be fulfilled, and subsequently within this framework, the rights and responsibilities of the officials are stated in the legislation.

Like other similar municipalities, Municipality is struggling with a constantly tightening budget. Municipalities have the right to collect taxes from the inhabitants, and they are obliged to provide the public services such as health care, education, and infrastructure that are available and free to all inhabitants. Hence, strategy in this type of organization is not about competitive advantage, positioning, or market selection, as such, but ways of controlling the budget and savings gained through innovative ways of providing the services.

At the municipality level, members of the management team led by the municipality manager are the ones responsible for the formal strategy process. Generally in municipalities, the most important rule

that the officials have to follow is to act ‘by the book’. Guided by this, the purpose of the strategy process of Municipality was originally tuned towards setting the basic principles and targets against which the activities and their outcomes were reflected. However, since a new municipality manager was chosen in the beginning of 2014, her attempt has been to renew the strategy process into a more inclusive and transparent one. The young average age of the citizens and the agricultural heritage in the industry structures and the related socio-economic factors of the municipality emphasize the role of the education. Therefore, the building of the new school has significant municipality strategy level function: it was both an investment in the educational factors and a concretization of the strategy of the municipality as a whole. The change in the strategic activity of the municipality was facilitated by recent entry of several new individuals in the key positions. The people with variety of backgrounds and enthusiasm create a particular basis for development.

### Data collection

We started the data collection with observations, interviews with the working group members, and collection of documentation simultaneously. By triangulating these data sources we mapped the key events of the process (Table 1). We entered the process at the point where the decision concerning the intended purchase model was about to be made in the Council in September, 2014. After that, we followed the process by visiting the monthly working group meetings and all significant negotiations and/or decision-making situations, like board or council meetings. The decision concerning the choice of the contractor was made by the Council in February, 2016, and the construction work began in April 2016.

There were usually two researchers present in the observations as well as in the interviews. We observed the working team meetings, council meetings, board meetings (in those cases when school project was under discussion), negotiations with the supplier candidates, and after the supplier had been chosen, planning sessions with experts from different fields (architecture, engineering, pedagogy). Field notes were written by both observers. We also talked about the observations made and compared our interpretations. The interpretations were also discussed by the municipality representative of the researcher team, which meant access to particular detail and allowed drawing deeper conclusions from the data.

The public and nonpublic documents covered memos of both those earlier working group meetings that we did not observe as well as those that we were observing ourselves, memos of the council and board meetings, school planning-related documentation provided by the school, municipality and external consultants and constructors, and newspaper articles and opinions sections whenever school-related topics were discussed.

**Table 1. Event history of the process and the data collected.**

Time	Event history and preliminary observations	Data
2012	Discussions and planning of the new school begin. Calculations for the space needed are made (May) based on the estimated growth in the number of children.	Spreadsheets: Space requirement and cost; Growth in the number of children, prognosis
	Local principals give their evaluation of the different options for the location (June).	School network plan of the Municipality
	The project raises awareness of the citizens and concerns expressed in the local newspaper’s opinion section.	Principals’ views on the location options, presentation

		Newspaper articles and Director of Education's formal reply
2013	<p>A team is established for the school project management. The constitutive meeting is held in August. After that, team meets once a month and starts to organize for the project.</p> <p>Decisions concerning school network which influences the size of the new school: hearing of the community.</p>	<p>Discussion in (social) media concerning the local school network</p> <p>Memos of the planning team meetings</p>
2014	<p>The new Municipality Director starts to work in her new position and becomes a part of the planning team. Life cycle model presented as a viable option for a purchasing method.</p> <p>Planning team visits pioneer schools for benchmarking.</p> <p>Concerns raised by a certain political party representatives about securing sufficient facilities for children in two local newspapers. Municipality gives an official reply.</p> <p>The principal begins the planning with the school personnel. A description of activities is needed for the planning process. School organizes workshops for planning. School building project is connected to strategy work, and children and their parents are heard in the process.</p> <p>Potential bidders are heard in a session organized for a market dialogue that is part of the competitive negotiation process. Municipality receives feedback of the value of their project for the bidders, and ideas of how to make it more attractive for the constructors.</p> <p>Deciding on the phases of the process and timetable as well as the used purchasing method.</p> <p>Council agrees on researching the possibility of using an applied life cycle – alliance model in the process but requires keeping the option of using the traditional method open in case that life cycle model is not viable in this case. The used purchasing method is a competitive negotiation method, and the amount of bids is restricted into three or four. Invitations for tender regarding financing are given out separately.</p>	<p>Team meeting memos</p> <p>Education committee meeting memos</p> <p>Municipality council meeting memos</p> <p>Municipality board meeting memos</p> <p>Newspaper articles and Municipality's formal reply</p> <p>Field notes</p> <p>Children's drawings and writings about the 'future school'</p> <p>Description of required school activities</p>
2015	<p>Bidding documents are prepared and given out. Two candidates indicate their interest in taking part in the negotiation process.</p> <p>Negotiations are held with the candidates (May).</p> <p>After the negotiations, the other candidate withdraws. Based on the decision made by the municipality board (June), planning proceeds in co-operation with the remaining candidate.</p> <p>The Municipality is not satisfied with the architect partnering with the supplier, and the supplier presents another candidate that satisfies the Municipality representatives (June).</p> <p>The selected architect withdraws, and the Supplier introduces another architect. The Municipality agrees with this choice. (August)</p> <p>Planning proceeds with the new architect. Drafts of the construction drawings are made and an overview held with the User. (September)</p>	<p>Memos of the planning team meetings</p> <p>Municipality council meeting memos</p> <p>Municipality board meeting memos</p> <p>Project documentation including bidding documentation, agreement drafts, plans and drawings</p> <p>Field notes: planning team meetings, municipality board meeting, negotiations with supplier candidates, architect overview, agreement negotiations between</p>

	Municipality negotiates about the contents of the agreement with the Supplier (October)	Municipality and Supplier, Council seminar
	A seminar to inform the Council about the project is held (December)	
2016	Another seminar to inform the Council about the project is held (January)	Memos of the planning team meetings
	The Municipality Board makes a decision of the method of execution (life cycle model) and financing of the building (owned by the Municipality, loan-based) (February)	Municipality council meeting memos
	The Municipality Council makes a decision based on the Board's suggestion and agrees with the suggested model (February)	Municipality board meeting memos
	The co-operative teams governing the life-cycle partnership are established.	Field notes from meeting observations

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### Data analysis

For data analysis, the logic introduced in Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) was utilized. At the first stage, we conducted open coding of the data without relying on any particular scientific discussion or background information from the extant literature. Municipality utilized procurement with the aim to produce innovations in their school building project. In this process, they were dealing with two types of challenges: first, changing the existing procurement practice and convincing people of the need to do so; and second, changing the way life-cycle model is applied, and convincing the contractors of the benefits of doing so. First, we discuss the processes of subjectification taking place in the organization, and then those processes emerging in relationship with the contractors. Following the procedures outlined in Gioia et al. (2013), we started to build our theory through identification of different level constructs and concepts.

*1<sup>st</sup> order concepts: Acts of influence.* At the level closest to the raw data, we started from the change of procurement practice by categorizing the data according to the acts that marked an attempt to affect people's involvement in the school building process. As we did not take a stand at this point regarding what those acts were about theoretically, we labeled them as general 'acts of influence'. These acts formed our first-order concepts in the analysis.

*2<sup>nd</sup> order themes: Practices of power.* Next, we created wider themes based on the acts of influence identified from the data. All the acts concerned the way people took different subject positions within certain organizational discourses. After creating the second-order themes, we turned more strongly to the literature and concentrated on research on power in general and subjectification in particular.

*Aggregate dimensions: Strategies of Subjectification.* We distilled the 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes into the discourses they were intertwined with, and the power effects they were expected to have (and also had, at least partially). With the help of these concepts, we assembled terms, themes, and dimensions into a "data structure" (Gioia et al., 2013) showing the mechanism of producing the wanted power effects.

Finally, we searched for the relationships between the 2<sup>nd</sup> order concepts in the data structure and found connections between the practices of power taking place inside the organization and in the relationships. We then transformed the static data structure into a dynamic grounded theory model and compared the model with the literature in order to relate the concepts to the extant literature. The results of the analysis are explained in the next section.

## RESULTS

The way a municipality organization is structured resembles a network organization in which people work for a period of time and are then replaced. Even though a strong leader with a clear vision would be in charge for a while, unless this vision becomes somehow rooted in the organizational practices, it will not last beyond his/her work period. Hence, long-term control lies within the system, not in the personal relationships. The same applies to relationship with the Contractor: in the life-cycle model, the companionship lasts more than twenty years, and the key persons are likely to change during the process. Below, we first discuss the processes of subjectification taking place in the organization, and then address those processes emerging in relationship with the contractors.

### **Subjectification in the organization**

***Practice of Inclusion.*** The process for planning for the new school started already in 2012, and the planning team was established in 2013. Already at that time different options in the procurement were discussed, and when the recruiting process for the new municipality manager was going on, it was known that the current municipality managers had previous experience of innovative procurement practices, and life-cycle model in particular. Due to this earlier experience of introducing a life cycle model in a municipality she used to work for, the new municipality manager was aware that even the most radical types of reactions are possible. She already knew that the only way to change something is openness.

*“We introduced that to the Council and half of the councilmen walked out [of the room]. It became strongly a political question. At the time when we [just] asked a permission to find out [which method would be the most suitable].” (Management team member)*

*“... and that is why it is extremely important that our decision-makers know, that we have agreed together that this kind of discussion goes on. So that there will not be a situation [where they would be wondering] that what those people are doing there [by themselves].” (Project team member)*

After the new municipality manager was chosen in the beginning of 2014, her attempt has been to renew strategy making. The strategy process was executed in 2014 with inclusive methods: through a series of workshops, different stakeholders were included in strategy work. The aim of the manager was to bring people together to share insights into the things that matter to the municipality and also gain a common view of what would the future of the municipality be like. Themes of discussion were given and written down on spreadsheets, and people were asked to write down their own ideas concerning the strategic objectives written down in the formal strategy such as ‘future of education’ or ‘safe and inspiring environment’.

***Practice of Framing.*** The school building process was connected to the strategy work. Also children were involved, and they drew and wrote about their vision of the future schools. In the later phases of the project, the building manager was still carrying those presentations with her in the planning meetings. During the process, the principal arranged workshops with teachers, and the building manager provided the frame for planning: the teachers were to think about and describe the activities they wished to *do* at school; not to focus on the material arrangements. The idea was to free people from thinking of the current solutions and settings. The idea was to build an open learning environment for a future school. By involving everybody in the planning it was possible to share the mindset needed when people were required to put that immediately into practice in the form of the project plan and description of activities.

*“We had that kind of opening [session] where I was too and told, in a way, guided them in the right thinking. We went through each subject until the teacher understood, was thinking about the activity. So that it is the activity that is described, not how many school tables there are.” (Project team member)*

Municipality did not see strategy-making as limited to the formal strategy process. On the contrary, strategic change was pursued also through renewal of other practices that are considered strategic. Procurement forms a substantial part of the municipal officials' tasks as the organization has to purchase everything that is needed in the different fields of duties. The way procurement is done affects not only the financial state of the municipality but also the quality of different functions. Hence, the new management team of the municipality considered procurement as a strategic area of operations and saw potential in innovations within this field. They considered procurement as a way of creating change in the organization, aiming at influencing the behavior of different actors.

*“Perhaps [Name] of them all understood the best this whole thing and the way we can [through procurement] change the management of the organization, and people’s behavior, ability to take risk and tolerate new things....” (Management team member)*

What the management team aims to accomplish with this type of wider inclusion/participation is the same as with the strategy process. The objectives laid down during the strategy process become implemented when the same people are involved also in other strategic practices than the formal strategy process.

*“And when the director of welfare and health division was involved in the bidding process, she said that for once she can say that she is able to control the contract. Since she knows what has been the purpose and vision behind the bidding, why there are certain criteria involved. So I believe this is [an example of] that kind of realization that will eventually develop our own activities. Through which we can use the tools.” (Management team member)*

**Communitary discourse: “Our Municipality”.** The role of the municipality is not only the one of a service provider, but also a care-taker and educator. Management team wishes that the citizens would consider the municipality as a joint effort, not only as an administrative unit. Through the participation in strategy work, it is hoped for that people would feel more responsible of the community and their own health and wellbeing. Municipality recently received a reward for advancing health through these participative practices, and the justifications read as:

*“The grounds for the reward lie in inviting and including citizens of different age and different associations in the wellbeing work of the municipality in a new way – so that [Municipality] would look more like its citizens and be a place where they want to live, grow, and act, and that through participation and engagement, not only communitary but also people’s responsibility of their own health would increase.” (Reward committee’s letter)*

The justifications above highlight the process of subjectification resulting in self-governance of individuals. Municipality aims at influencing the forming of identities, both organizations and individuals, and the way people perceive themselves as community members. By internalizing the values the municipality aims to promote – e.g., related to health and wellbeing – and taking them as part of their lives and identities people enact the strategic objectives of the municipality. In this case, power exists through subjectification and it is inherently positive, creating sense of belonging and behavioral patterns that help people to live a more satisfying life.

People of Municipality have a high esteem towards the public image of their home town, and architectural and other esthetic factors, for instance, are important values when considering the competitive biddings of construction work. When people participate in the strategy process and these values become as part of the written strategy, there is a more concrete connection between the municipality administrative work and the identity of the citizens.

Hence, participative methods are aimed at decreasing strategic ambiguity and creating a shared vision so that the actions taken would lead towards the desired ends. The purpose of the intended strategy and objectives included is to provide broad guidelines towards which the team aims to proceed. The

‘real’ guidance takes place at the level of everyday work during which strategic issues are negotiated and renegotiated on a regular basis. These processes of subjectification define the individual as an active and responsible subject, who does not only live of work in the community but who belongs to the community; the community becomes part of how the individual sees him/herself.

*“And I think it is the role of the chairman of the council in a way ... that one must be active in the strategy work as well. And on the other hand encourage others to be active as well. It makes no sense that some chairman does everything by herself or decides everything by herself. One must not do so and it cannot be so. Everybody needs to be involved in the work.”*  
(Council representative)

**Deference to expertise.** In the heart of the change process was including people as widely as possible, but not only because of the collective sense making and shared mindset, but also because of the knowledge different people have. The people constituting the school and its everyday life are the best experts on the school-related topics. Regarding those areas of expertise that Municipality did not have in-house, the leading thought was that renewal of the procurement practices represents also a possibility for learning. In many cases, municipalities do recognize the lack of needed expertise and experience in implementing innovative methods in procurement; however, the solution often used is to outsource the procurement to a consulting agency specialized in managing these kinds of processes. On the contrary, Municipality was convinced that they need to absorb the know-how inside the organization in order to repeat and improve the process also in other cases and contexts. Therefore, instead of hiring a consultant to run the project *for* them, they hired consultants to run the project *with* them; offering expertise in those specific areas and in a very hands-on manner where they saw they did not have the knowledge required.

*“I think it is also about getting people committed and more brainpower to think about things. And not bring in everything ready, like take it or leave it. ... In smaller organizations, when there are only one or two [people] running the project and there comes a temptation to by professional services, professionsl to take care of the whole system for you. And then I believe they will lose a lot. They will lose the chance of getting the buyer’s will taken into consideration genuinely, getting it described, and getting really involved. If they are in the same kind of case later on, they still cannot do it by themselves.”* (Management team member)

**Innovation discourse: “Experimentation is allowed”.** The citation above also describes the core of the ‘innovation discourse’ through which the change in the procurement practices is framed. When people are encouraged to come together and take their expertise into use, it is possible to create new ways of thinking and solving problems. The challenge that the public organizations face with innovations is the rules and procedures guiding the actions. The officials are under a constant surveillance of the system; each action needs to be justified in the light of rules and regulations, and the most important thing is avoid mistakes. This also means risk-avoidance. The mistake is always done by an individual, and that individual carries the risk by him/herself. Trying out something for the first time is a risk that not many individual officials are ready to take.

*“...it had to be said aloud, first at the management team level and then also to the decision-makers, that this means that if we want something new and done differently, part of these things will succeed and part of them will fail. That is not very typical here in the public sector, and especially not in the municipality sector. There are no motivational factors that would encourage you, not the salary or these kinds of things. An official will do his/her best when (s)he does not do anything differently, [that way] (s)he will not make mistakes and get fired. ...it has to be said aloud so that it will not happen, like it usually does in these kinds of exercises, that if something goes wrong, it is the one single official that is to blame.”* (Management team member)

When the actions of individuals are framed within the innovation discourse, risk-taking becomes not only possible but also something that is required in order to produce something new. Deference to expertise of different stakeholders and keeping the strings to Municipality's own hands, with the agenda to learn, denotes it as a joint effort and therefore hopefully takes the pressure off from an individual actor. Through the innovation discourse, the identity of Municipality (and the individuals who constitute Municipality) is construed as an independent, active and intelligent actor with its own opinions and a vision of what the schools should be like. Municipality and its representatives are hoped to gain ownership in the process and stop playing only an intermediary role. This denotes a change from the passive, risk-avoiding role in which the most important thing is to ensure that no mistakes are made.

***Valuing criticism and multiple perspectives.*** The challenge in Municipality's strategizing and organizing activities is to cope with the pluralistic context it operates in and which is strongly present in the triadic governance and decision-making structure. The divergent goals and interests of different groups inside and outside the organization need to be taken into consideration. Reaching consensus at least on a sufficient level is a must in order to get anything done, and therefore ensuring the smoothness of everyday decision-making is one of the key functions. The culture needs to support the ideal of having a bird's eye view on each topic and searching for information in order to form an informed opinion. Also changing one's view must be acceptable after gaining more information on the topic. This requires accepting and embracing, and even actively searching for different points of views, and open discussion on the differing opinions.

*“The starting point in everything we do is that it is as inclusive and open as possible. In my own work, I feel that it is the greatest cure for conflicts. Since often it is the lack of openness that makes people feel like there would be something to hide, or there is sometime negative for them. When all the aspects are brought on the table, both positive and negative things, they can be openly discussed and analyzed whether they are so significant that the project should not be brought forward, or that it should be significantly changed. (Management team member)*

Accepting periodical and sometimes even radical change in the working pace is also inevitable. Every four years new councilmen are chosen, and even though some things would have been sorted out during the previous season, the new set of councilmen might have a totally different view on the topic.

*“...it is often the fourth year when the things start to roll. And then, we just have to start all over again. ... In the committee work, the people are changing even more often, and that can be even more challenging. At least sometimes some officials have said that ‘wow, now it was a really new set of people.’ Like, the spirit is totally different. They had reached a good working pace and then everything is different again, these people want to drive totally different things than the previous ones. There are challenges, but this is the system. We go with this one.” (Council representative)*

Each of the groups of actors, including different political parties, has their own set of agendas that they wish to forward. The management team has also their own, and part of the task is to understand the different viewpoints as widely as possible and find those things that can be changed, and accept those things that cannot be changed. After all, balancing the situation and ensuring smooth decision-making is the responsibility of all the parties – both the municipality officials and the persons elected to the position of trust. Using a ‘view point gun’ in both ways is the usual practice – bringing all the evidence on the table and trying to get the other parties to see the alternative viewpoints; and also trying to get oneself to see the others' viewpoints. This way, reaching consensus becomes possible.

*“At some point, compromises have to be made and in the decision-making, one should also try to sense the atmosphere that what is worth doing and what is not. And also to talk about things in a way that one takes into consideration people's different background and attitudes*

*and such. So that the [discussion] would stay as neutral as possible, and in different cases, to bring in as much information as possible. ... And we aimed [to act in a way] that we weren't pushing our explanation on it but first [asked] that 'how did you see this thing?'"*  
(Management team representative)

**Rationality discourse: “A good decision-making culture”.** The power effects of listening carefully to different viewpoints and concerns and valuing criticism relate to the rationality discourse that is maintained in the way people speak about their community and decision-making culture. For a pluralistic organization to function efficiently it is of key importance to find a balance between different viewpoints: councilmen as decision-makers and supervisors; municipality officials as those who take care of organizing the work; and citizens for whom the services are purchased.

*“Many of these innovations do not require a lot of money but courage and partners. And in [Municipality], I must say that there is a good atmosphere to do these things, we have good employees and good decision-makers so that trust is mutual and it is always easier to develop things in that kind of atmosphere. We do not have that kind of brakemen. Of course always when we talk about new things, we think about the risks aloud and say directly what we think about them, and ask experts' views and listen to them carefully. It does not remove processing of things and criticism. But it is easy to do when it stays in the topic, and is done in good spirit. Everybody knows and each one of us has the good end result as a goal.”*(Municipality representative)

The identity of the Municipality (and the different individuals) is the one of ‘a good decision-maker’. The decisions are based on reason rather than emotion, and people are committed to work together for a common goal.

### **Subjectification through the organization**

In addition to exercising continuous influence on the organization’s own sense of self, the purchasing organization aims to influence also contractors’ sense of self and establish a new basis for interaction. The challenges in purchasing of multitude of different services relate to the required process competence as well as knowledge of the specific area the services or goods are purchased for. Especially in larger projects, Municipality has to rely on the expertise of the supplier(s).

*“When you buy [the service] from somewhere else, there is always the problem of how you are going to make the other party to commit to the job in a way that it is done as well as it would be if it was done for him/herself.”* (Municipality representative)

*“...turning our management practices innovative is nothing more than a statement. But when we start to think it through the procurement lens, how we are looking for effectiveness and options how to make things. Because if we are able to get someone else [supplier] to do our job, and (s)he does not have those public sector lenses or [does not know] any other boundaries between administrative parties, but looks at the [problem] from his/her own perspective...”* (Municipality representative)

Working with professional organizations offers many possibilities for genuine innovations – if they only have the motivation and guidance to do so. The challenge of the Future School project was twofold: first, Municipality needed to get the big contractors interested in the project that, even though is the biggest one yet for Municipality, is not big enough to be very tempting for the contractors. And second, to get them to accept the intended combination of a life cycle model and alliance model, since it combines close co-operation and co-creation of solutions, and a competitive bidding process – a solution not easily adapted by the contractors with streamlined processes in either-or types of purchases. The competing service providers were expected to take part in the negotiation phase in which the parties share their views of the project and aim to produce innovative solutions together so

that the final call for bids would represent the wanted outcome. The chosen contractor is expected to work in close co-operation with Municipality not only during the design and construction phase but also during the maintenance period of up to 25 years.

**Framing.** When the intended purchase model began to shape, Municipality representatives arranged an event for potential bidders for market dialogue. The idea of the dialogue was to hear whether the project would be interesting for the big contractors and on which terms. What the Municipality found out was that the timing must be right so that the contractors are in between larger projects; and there has to be potential for business or other benefits. The process cannot be too heavy and resource-consuming for the contractors but on the other hand, the point of the hybrid model was to provide innovations, new kinds of solutions for building. Since the relationship will last for the next twenty years, the requirements have to be satisfactory for the Municipality as well.

*“In many cases, we are looking for, some kind of, so-called balance of terror. So that it fits for both parties.” (Project team member)*

One of the unique aspects of the purchasing process was also the model with which the purchasing was intended to go through. The project team had earlier experience of a life-cycle model and had a vision of a hybrid model in which more alliance-type of features would be involved. The problem was that they did not know how the markets would react into this kind of model, and whether executing it would be possible. After consulting public procurement professionals they gained an understanding how the model could be feasible, and decided to proceed with the hybrid model. After the initial invitations to tender, those contractors that had responded were invited to take part in the first-round negotiations. One of the purposes of the negotiations was to explain the method and the process to the contractors:

*“We have invited also professional service providers to tender for the project. However, we also have a lot of expertise inside our team so we wish to keep the strings in our own hands quite strongly. [We will use] experts in certain areas where we need additional insight. But we wish to be strongly involved ourselves since that is the way we will learn a lot and will be able to bring those [practices] to other places as well.” (Project team member)*

The contractors had established ways of handling life cycle purchases but their negotiation strategies differed radically. Contractor A approached the situation by being a ‘good listener’: they didn’t have plans or sketches prepared, but were willing to hear how the purchaser wished to proceed with the process and what their vision was concerning the contents of the purchase. They were prepared to invest their planning resources in the final phases of the process. Contractor B, on the other hand, marched down pedagogical specialists introducing their view on open learning environments and references of what had been done earlier. They had preliminary floor plans as a basis for discussion and wanted to hear comments on how that plan should be modified.

Contractor B’s process is streamlined in a way that they are competitive in life-cycle purchases that are “packaged”: the purchase is outsourced to a consulting firm who executes the process with a certain concept. Therefore it is possible for Contractor B prepare ready-made plans already in the beginning since they can be sure that the specifications will not change towards the end. The negotiations in the final phases are just about working with details. Now, for them, this negotiation was just about finding out whether it would be possible to take part in the bidding with their strategy. The starting line from their manager was that *“I am sorry but I do not understand...we have used to a different kind of system. ...[the plans] have been ready at the point when the bids are in. And the final details are fixed during the construction. Our idea is that the developmental input is given now, so that it will be included in the call for bids so widely that it is possible to make an exact offer. So that you will be able to receive offers that are clearly comparable.” (Contractor B representative).*

Therefore Contractor B aimed directly and openly influence the way Municipality approached the project and their (and, subsequently, the contractor’s) role in it:

*“This [Contractor B’s presentation] is the starting point, this is from where we move on. We need exact decisions on how we are going to proceed from here. And we need the feedback in an instant, so that we can move on. Do you need the principal’s office or not. ... The problem is that this [the project] is like an ameba, we just cannot get a hold of it. If there are just new ideas all the time. Moving our design process forward requires certain borderlines and between them you can move around as you wish.” (Contractor B representative)*

As a consequence, Municipality representatives had to make instant re-framing of the situation to check whether their requirements were justified and valid, and briefly discussed the topic within their own team. The competitive aspect helped to frame the situation as Contractor A had chosen a very different approach, leaving room for Municipality to reconsider their position.

*“[The party from] yesterday requires yes-answers, which ones of the options we want, and to these [contractor B] we give no-answers, what we rule out. It is the difference in the negotiation technique.” (Project team representative)*

*“I sent her [another Municipality representative, during the negotiations] a message that we are being given directions again, and she answered that we will follow our own.” (Project team representative)*

When it turned out that Purchaser will follow a model of their own – an alliance model tied to the life-cycle model – Contractor B was unable to conduct the process in a way it wanted to and therefore decided to pull out from the competition. In the formal announcement, they stated that the project involves too many uncertainty factors and listed five reasons for withdrawal. They felt that the set objectives and the budget did not match; that it was not possible to plan and execute the project within the schedule based on the current situation and the information available; that it was not certain that the project will be carried out as a life-cycle model and therefore the risks are too high; the hybrid purchase model suggested by the purchaser did not match with their expectations of how a competitive negotiation method should be executed (which might be the most important reason for withdrawal); and they did not have enough resources at that moment to proceed with the project.

**Partnership discourse: “Discussive and open-minded companion”.** Already during the market dialogue phase, the idea was to build a basis for open discussion and free exchange of thoughts and ideas. The life-cycle model is about companionship that lasts more than two decades and therefore it is important that communication works between the parties. This was something that the Municipality representatives highlighted at every occasion; they expressed what they want out of the purchase, and also their willingness to hear the other party’s wishes and expectations. The power effects were shown in the way both the parties emphasized the partnership aspect of the relationship, how the project is a joint effort and requires mutual commitment and seamless co-operation.

*“Contractor A: This is not something totally strange to us.*

*Municipality representative: I understand his question of whether we should set a minimum or maximum. But we would wish to leave this open at this point of negotiations.*

*Contractor A: But when we are competing with price...*

*Municipality representative: If it is going to look like this kind of risk would realize, then we can give out [the minimums or maximums].*

*Contractor A: What we would wish for is abundant interaction in the course of which these things will be cleared out.”*

Even though the heavy negotiation process represented a risk to both the contractors, their way of approaching the problem was very different. Contractor A was able to adopt the promoted idea of partnership as part of their sense of self as a contractor whereas Contractor B was struggling with the kind of subjectivity Municipality was fitting for them.

*“Municipality representative: ‘I just say it directly to [Contractor representative], since we know each other, that I want that wood is visible there.’*

*Contractor representative: ‘Even though we are builders, we do understand a little the way the buyer thinks’ (laugh)” (Excerpt from field notes)*

**Knowledge sharing and co-creation.** The purpose of the several rounds of negotiations was, through dialogue, to find out what kind of solutions might be possible and what the contractors as experts in the field of construction, and the experts of different fields in their partner network, would have to offer in the form of innovations. The underlying idea of this hybrid purchasing model was to combine the competitive bidding - and therefore allowing the tight budget - with the alliance model in which the parties join in a creative co-operative process to create something new. The agenda of the negotiations was to go through the different aspects of the project and exchange views on the different topics of the project plan.

*“We outlined in the strategy that we are looking for alternative forms of energy and energy efficiency so that the carbon footprint could be minimized. But why we are throwing the ball around and keeping the issue quite open in this negotiation is that, since you have seen many solutions, that you would bring them to the table, not in a way that there is our narrow understanding, and then we would narrow that down even further. If you get the point.” (Project team representative)*

As mentioned before, the contractors took a different stand in terms of how willing they were in exchanging views. For Contractor B, it was not so much about not willing to share knowledge; but rather they considering it as a waste of time. They did answer direct questions but were more frustrated about the lack of direct requirements. If Municipality had given straightforward frames in which to make the order, the result might not have been the kind they were hoping for:

*“[The risk is that] the other one will make a too efficient solution and wins the competition with that. ... But the idea is to find the solutions without the limitations given in beforehand.” (Project team member)*

**Innovation discourse: “Showing professionalism”.** Contractor B was buying neither the partnership discourse nor the innovation discourse. To them, the most important thing is to be able to proceed efficiently, and therefore they were aiming to initiate a discourse of their own to gain control and maintain identity of their own. The framing inside Municipality was needed since the (economic) rationality discourse promoted by the contractor proclaimed that the purchaser should be reasonable with their requirements since they have to understand that companies cannot take impossible risks. The project team pondered the situation, but managed to maintain a balance with what kind of actor they wish to be and what is reasonable to expect from a contractor at this point of the process.

*“Municipality representative 1: ‘If we had agreed on fixed borderlines, it would be traditional planning. And we would miss out many innovations. When there are this remained unfixed, [the contractors] need to challenge themselves for one more round.’*

*Municipality representative 2: “It is a good thing that you reminded us that this is the first negotiation, one cannot have anything fixed yet at this point.”*

In the case of Contractor B, the discursive practices did not have the wanted power effects. In the case of Contractor A, the discourse was more aligned with the identity they wished to maintain as a professional partner with innovative abilities and willingness to think outside the box.

**Building credibility.** The challenge with this new kind of approach to purchasing was also to convince the other party that the buyer knows what they are doing. Municipality chose a very open and honest approach, clearly stating what they want and what need help with. Part of the actors already knew themselves so both parties knew a bit what to expect from the process. The project team started the negotiations by honestly reflecting what they are thinking of the process and how it is going to unfold:

*“We have tried get our heads around it, what we want to include from the life cycle model, and what we want to include from the alliance model. It might not be wise to go with that kind of heavy model in a project of this size. And honestly, we also want to maintain the competitive element in the process, so that the price will be right. The range will be twenty years or so, but there are options here.”(Project team member)*

**Trust discourse: “Playing with open cards”.** This was a discourse that all the parties were willing to relate to as it was in line with the identities of all of them as professional actors. In addition to talking very directly and stating things the way the parties saw them, they also maintained a discourse that highlighted the importance of transparency and ability to trust the other party. The nature of the life cycle model forces the parties to think about the relationship and its elements, not only about project details. The negotiations resemble dating resulting into an engagement and a marriage of twenty years.

*“If we are trying to write down this kind of thing too precisely and some lawyer reads it letter by letter, and not many of us will there reading it when the contract ends. Hopefully, we are retired, but even that cannot be said for sure. The contract does not need to be loose but... this kind of contract is really long-term, the longest one that is made with anybody in any other field. In principle, marriage is a contract of a longer duration, but even that is easier one to get rid of.” (Contractor A representative)*

As a result, the representatives built the identity of a loyal, trustworthy partner that is capable of solving potential conflicts through open discussion and showing transparency in all activities.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

We started out with the aim of finding out *how the purchasing organization balances the cooperative tensions in the supplier relationships and what kind of implications this has for the internal workings of the organization itself*. Our analysis shows that the purchasing organization aims to balance the tensions through discursive practices so that co-operative and competitive aspect of the process would be possible to co-exist. The actors assume, and the discourse allocates, different subjectivities to those participating in the discourse; and these either build commitment (accepting the discourse) or not (resisting the discourse). The relationship dynamics in the purchasing process influence also organization’s internal identity construction. The subjectification taking place inside the organization functions as a buffer against subjectification as part of relationship dynamics taking place in relationships. The co-existing competitive and co-operative nature of the purchase requires the Municipality to develop different kinds of working practices with the contractors than what would be the case if using a pure alliance model with a single contractor.

The change required to manage this kind of process begins from inside, and in order to change the way purchase is done with the contractors, the Municipality needs to change the way the organization itself thinks about purchasing. While acknowledging such challenges, our paper exhibits a positive and productive aspect of power. In particular, similar kinds of practices and discourses are drawn both in the organization and in the relationship, with slightly differing power effects. What is notable is that these power effects are ‘positive’ by nature; allowing organizational change and development; enabling the everyday organizing; and allowing people the sense of purpose and engagement in the community work.

Our study further shows that commitments and power go hand in hand. As Johnsen & Lacoste (in press) mention, previous research often focuses on the positive sides of relationships, such as building trust and developing commitment. In their own study, Johnsen & Lacoste (in press) highlight the “dark side” of relationship development by focusing on power together with conflict and dependence. Our study therefore brings up yet another view. In particular, we acknowledge that no organization

exists without power: “Power is to organization as oxygen is to breathing” (Clegg et al., 2006: 3). As Clegg et al. (2006) point out, power is not necessarily negative or constraining, but can also be a source for creativity and empowerment. The meaning that power receives depends on choices made and actions taken by organizations. “The organizational media that form, condense, and distribute social relations shape power and they can shape it *either way*” (Clegg et al., 2006, p. 2).

Our analysis shows how individuals taking part in the purchasing process form their agency within specific discourses such as communality, innovation, and rationality. This is in line with the findings of Fleming (2013) who argues that governing of subjectivity operates differently from discipline since the attempt is not to constrain individuals, and it operates through individuals’ internal volitions. Organizational actors start to control themselves as part these specific organizational discourses (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This kind of control through ‘governmentality’ (Foucault 1977; 1980) is not solely repressive, since it is not something anybody can possess.

The change comes through by “reconstituting the identities of other actors, using the focal organization to do so” and persuading “other institutional actors to adopt a subject position that may significantly different to the one they currently occupy” (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). This resonates well with the idea of transient commitments as well (Andersen & Medlin, 2016). In other words, Municipality aims to change the way it sees itself as a purchaser; and to change the way the suppliers see themselves, as suppliers, in relation to the Municipality. The change comes through framing (through inclusion); deference to expertise; and valuing criticism and multiple perspectives. In the relationship context, the same practices take the form of framing (through dialogue); knowledge sharing and co-creation; and transparency. By accepting these discourses and the subjectivities they aim to allocate to the actors, suppliers are to be seen, and to see themselves, as committed, creative, and reliable partners and that accepting these positions will have also benefits and reference for own and partner’s business and future development.

What these ‘strategies of subjectification’ highlight is the productive aspect of power. The primary focus in these strategies is to introduce the strategic role of purchasing and the innovations that are possible; and to change the conditions to support the joint innovation creation. The discourses these practices are related are communality, innovation, and rationality; and in the relationship context: partnership, innovation, and trust (see Table 2 below).

**Table 2. Strategies of subjectification in and through the organization.**

<i>Site of power</i>	<i>Process of subjectification (everyday activities underlying the maintenance of identities)</i>	<i>Discourse (in which the subject position is taken)</i>	<i>Subjectivity</i>	<i>“Power effects”</i>
<i>In the organization</i>	Framing (through inclusion)	Communality	Good citizen vs. Individual	“Our Municipality”: Individual as an active and responsible actor in a team Feeling of belonging to a community
	Deference to expertise	Innovation	Creative man vs. Habitual man	“Experimentation is allowed”: Innovative and professional individual, taking advantage of personal competences and knowledge to bring in working solutions together

	Valuing criticism and multiple perspectives	Rationality	Rational man vs. Traditional man	Risk-taking is allowed and necessary: accepting it in the behavior of one's own and others Trusting others' professionalism and acting as sparring partner to each other "A good decision-making culture": Individual as a rational, flexible decision-maker Things are pondered from many different angles, appreciating opposing views Decision-making is guided by reason, not emotions Ability to compromise
<i>Through the organization</i>	Framing (through dialogue)	Partnership	Committed partner vs. Company representative	"Discussive and open-minded companion": Feeling ownership in the project Good listener and negotiation partner, easy to work with Open to new ideas and possibilities
	Knowledge sharing and co-creation	Innovation	Creative partner vs. Efficient representative	"Showing professionalism": Knowledgeable individual as a member of a qualified team Proudness of own work and expertise Professional organization with an opportunity to show the competence in the form of innovations Benefits and reference for own and partner's business and future development
	Building credibility	Trust	Reliable partner vs. Securing representative	"Playing with open cards": Feeling able to trust the buyer to keep confidential parts confidential (due to the cooperative context in the process) Trustworthy partner, keeping promises

The theoretical discussion on power as the guideline, we examined the general assumptions and patterns emerging in previous literature, especially with regard power and subjectification. Contributing to existing literature that addresses institutional, rather than organizational or individual level aspects of these constructs (Meehan and Wright, 2012; Blois and Hopkinson 2013), we develop a relationship view on subjectification taking place both inside and through the organizations. The 'internal' realm of the organization is not separate from the relationship realm, but the practices drawn are the same and are produced and reproduced in the interactions taking place inside and outside the formal boundaries.

The purchasing practices therefore cover also the interaction with the partnering organizations. The official documents can cover only a small fraction of what needs to be said or agreed on continuously. Moreover, the discourses in which the subject positions are taken needs to be maintained on a continuous basis. This is done through the practices of openness: participation and dialogue.

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