

**PARTNERSHIP IN CIVIL SOCIETY:**  
A Case of Building Trust between Non-Profit Associations and  
International NGOs in Lao PDR

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this Master's thesis is to develop a context-specific substantive theory of trust building based on the experiences of development workers in Laos, as well as the methods they identify as keys to a better partnership. The research material is based on eleven interviews with civil society development workers in Vientiane, Laos. The study context is partnerships between in-country International Non-Governmental Organizations and local Non-Profit Associations. Grounded theory methods were used to collect, code and analyze the data. From the data categories emerged and were generated into a substantive process model describing how partnership trust is built over time through relationship building. The substantive process model shows three sub-categories of trust-building which are building relationships, maintaining relationships and moving forward together. These sub-categories entail both parties to approach one another with an openness to differences and adaptation to change, flexibility, investing in the relationships, being vulnerable and forming good structural frameworks with good communication and cooperation. This study indicates that social relationships, between organization workers, increases trust which is essential for an effective partnership.

*Key Words:* Lao PDR (Laos), partnership, trust, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGO), Non-Profit Associations (NPA), and Grounded theory  
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## Abbreviations

Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	Non-Profit Associations
CSO	Civil Society Organization

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will present the motivation, aim, objective, focus and research problem of the present study. I will also briefly discuss concepts and the approach of my study. The purpose of this thesis is to explore what development workers in Laos perceive to be important in having a successful partnership.

The aim of this master's thesis is to understand how development workers in Laos, both foreign and local, conceptualize a preferable environment of partnership between different development organizations. My purpose is to bring a voice to these development workers as they try to convey what can contribute for better partnership practices. The objective of this research is to contribute to a discussion on what processes contribute to a more positive partnership experience, and what recommendations development workers in the Lao context have to offer based on their experiences.

The focus of this research is on the perceptions of development workers concerning the interactions of International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs) and Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) as they partner with one another.

My personal motivation for this research comes from my background of living in Laos for ten of my developmental years. My introduction to Laos was in 1995 when my family moved to Savannakhet Province to work in rural development. We lived in the provincial capital which was a peaceful city next to the great Mekong River. My brother and I were some of the only foreign children in the city at that time. The people of Laos are very hospitable and we were welcomed warmly. After spending the most significant years of my childhood in Laos, the bond is still strong enough to call it one of my homes.

While I lived there I was exposed to the development sector and came to understand some aspects of intercultural interactions. With studies in sociology, and women's and gender-studies I have become more sensitive to wanting to hear the voice of the “other” (see Beauvoir 1997) and giving the subaltern a voice (see Kapoor 2004)

In this research I want to bring a perspective of the perceptions between the Lao and foreign development workers to bring an understanding of what issues emerge when

talking about partnership in this particular intercultural interaction. Gender has not been relevant to this research. The purpose was to find a general consensus of a model for building more successful partnerships. The focus was not to compare the perceptions of individual people or gender differences in perceptions. Other studies discussing cross cultural management and work conflicts with similar dynamics to the present study found that gender had no effect on the results (Morris, et al. 1998; Boonsathorn 2007, 210).

### Research Question:

What is the process of partnership building in International Non-Governmental Organizations and Lao Non-Profit Associations?

To understand the context of this study I will later explain more about the background of partnership and development sector organizations. Here, I will define the terms that will be used in this thesis.

*An International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO)* refers to organizations which are a part of the global civil society. They are often autonomous organizations that are not a part of a government nor does it have income distribution to the owners (Ronalds 2010, 4).

*Non-Profit Associations (NPAs)* refer to civil society organizations that have legal registration in Lao PDR. NPAs are small with very few full-time staff. These associations are founded and operated by local nationals. (Belloni 2014, 359; Kepa 2012,1)

*Partnership* refers to a relationship that is formed between two or more organizations. It is typically assumed to be based on trust, common goals for the purpose of mutual benefit. (Ronalds 2010, 127) The partnerships in this thesis will be referring specifically to partnerships between INGOs and NPAs which have joined forces for the purpose of more effective and sustainable development (Bäckstrand 2006, 295).

*Trust* is “the extent to which one is willing to ascribe good intentions to and have confidence in the words and actions of other people” (Cook and Wall 1980, 39). Trust is essential to and the foundation of social interaction. Trust is the belief that the other will

act in a way that you expect. (Sztompka 1999, 14) This research is looking at trust between individuals within organizations to achieve organizational level trust for the partnership.

## **2. BACKGROUND OF CONTEXT**

In this chapter I will discuss the cultural and historical background of the context of the study. The research location is specific to the country of Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic. It is important for this study to set up the historical and cultural context. I will first discuss the historical context of Laos and how it got to the political state it is today. I will then briefly discuss the history of aid to Laos which shows the relation with international organizations, and how they have had an instrumental role in the promotion of the growth of Lao Civil Society. This growth, starting at the decree of associations which allowed associations to legally register and form relationships with international organizations for the purpose of strengthening the existing associations in their capacities and resources, is a part of a global trend to empower the grassroots organizations and promote more efficient development.

I will also explain what civil society is and how it emerged in Laos. I will also explain the structure of Lao civil society associations: what rights and regulations they have in order to operate and what measures they have to take to become a registered association that is recognized by the government. I will also explain the role expectations the government has towards the associations and how the associations see their own role as non-profit associations.

### **2.1 Overview and Historical Context of Laos**

Laos is an ethnically diverse country with nearly seven million people, many living in remote parts of the still undeveloped country. With mountains and still vast forests, it holds many indigenous species of flora and fauna. Lao people are mostly observers of Buddhism and Animistic religions. It is a land locked country bordering Thailand, Myanmar, China, Vietnam and Cambodia. It has significant natural resources such as minerals and metals. Due to its difficult history, it has remained very poor with high mortality rates and low level of educational. With a conservative socialist government they are cautious in adopting western capitalistic approaches to economic growth.

Historically, Laos was the Buddhist kingdom of Lan Xang (the kingdom of a thousand elephants). The kingdom has a colorful history of being divided into different territories

and at times ruled by different princes and kings while at the same time having conflicts and territorial power shifts between the Siamese (later to become Thailand) and Vietnamese rulers. Pholsena Vatthana and Ruth Banomyong argue that Laos has through its history been a buffer state for the neighboring countries of Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia and China that often were in conflict with one another. When the French colonial powers took over Indochina (in areas of modern day Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and parts of China), they settled with Siam in 1893 that French colonial powers would rule east of the Mekong river thus for the most part defining the border that still exists today between Laos and Thailand. This border was agreed upon despite the original kingdom boundaries and ethnic distribution. (Vatthana and Banomyong 2006, 5-6)

Laos was seen by the French mostly as an extension of Vietnam, and they promoted Vietnamese immigration, bringing labor and plantation workers to Laos. Under the French rule, the Lao kingdom (located in Luang Prabang) and the rest of Lao territories were not united as a nation. In 1945 Laos declared themselves independent, and united Laos as a separate entity from Indochina. At first there was the Lao Issara (Free Lao) group which was made up of all Lao ethnic groups and led by the elite trying to unify the country. They were a conservative and anti-revolutionary group that believed that the French were a good solution for post-war stability building. This helped the support and mobilization of the multi-ethnic Lao communist movement. During the Cold War when the US was helping South Vietnam in the struggle against the communist North Vietnam, Laos became a big part of the battlefield. Much of eastern Laos was heavily bombed in attempts to stop the communist from recruiting and traveling along the Ho Chi Minh trails. At the end of the war the communist party had the power and with the support of other socialist countries, in particular Vietnam, Laos started to rebuild itself. Weakened by war, it needed help for both political stability and development of the country. This solidified the Lao-Vietnamese relationship, and the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in 1977. (Vatthana and Banomyong 2006, 6–22)

After the war Laos tried to build a balanced foreign policy with its neighbors, but conflict between its neighboring countries pulled it, out of necessity, into alliances that in turn caused tension with other neighbors (Vatthana and Banomyong 2006,19–22).

## 2.2 Civil Society

Civil society is a contested concept that has been discussed especially in Western countries for many centuries (Van Til 2000; Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001; Billis 2010; Keane 2006). Civil society as a concept has a strong historical heritage starting with philosophers such as John Locke, Georg W. Hegel, Karl Marx and Thomas Hobbes, who attempted to define civil society in either positive or negative terms with ideas of liberty, rights and individuality (Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001, 3). The discussion of the development of civil society is complex and exceeds the purpose of this thesis. Thus, this thesis will only focus on the modern concepts that have affected the development of civil society globally, focusing mainly on how civil society is defined, and the purpose of civil society as it is in Lao PDR.

In the West, civil society is sometimes referred to as the 'third sector'. This indicates a social sphere that is outside of political and market life. The spheres are categorized as the first being the government or state, the second as market, the third as nonprofit or voluntary, and the fourth as the private or informal sector. (Van Til 2000; xi–xiv) The concept of civil society creates confusion to many. Sometimes it acts as a bridging sector for other sectors. Some of the confusion stems from the difficulty to pin the characteristics as it may often mimic other sectors. For this reason it appears to take on different roles. It takes on philanthropic service provision in the eyes of volunteers. In the eyes of officials or board members, the sector seems to have political motives. And lastly, to keep the organizations funded and well-functioning, sometimes the organization's staff find the importance of operating similarly as businesses. (Van Til 2000, 24-25)

David Billis (2010; 10) sees the third sector organizations as: providing services and care, mobilizing communities, identifying and solving new needs, campaigning for social change, focusing on needs of service users, tackling complex needs and difficult social issues. Billis talks about the hybrid organizations as double sided. On the one hand, they are positively flexible, joining up services, earning user's trust, promoting volunteerism, mentoring, building and connecting communities, and helping transform public services. On the other hand, the dark side of these hybrid organizations is that the civil societies, while gaining more resources, are much under influence from other sectors, and lose

independence (Billis 2010, 9–11). Van Til describes this in terms of becoming dependent on the private sector's funding (Van Til 2000, 96–97).

Krishna Kumar reflects on civil society in the following terms:

“Civil society in this sense is an arena in which modern man legitimately gratifies his self-interest and develops his individuality, but also learns the value of group action, social solidarity and the dependence of his welfare on others, which educate him for citizenship and prepare him for participation in the political arena of the state.” (Kumar 1993, 379)

Discussions on civil society in today often revolve around the role of civil society in the global South. First, there is the role that civil society had in organizing society in the post-communist societies where communist states had overextended power and legal jurisdiction over almost all spheres of social life, leaving no room for civil society which is seen as a sphere of expression as stated above by Kumar. The second way of thinking is focused on new social movements. Today, it is promoted as the idea of the later twentieth century. Civil society is the meeting place of formally opposing parties. Civil society still has different meanings in different parts of the world: the West sees it as a means for rejuvenation of public life; the East sees it mostly as protecting the rights of private property and market; in the South it has come to encompass a new and complex social organism. This last idea has quickly been adopted by international agencies and leaders as the way to accelerate and increase the efficiency of development tasks. Involving the civil society creates a path to by-pass the central state and direct assistance to all different groups considered a part of the civil society (private enterprises and organizations, religious organizations, associations, self-employed workers' co-operatives and unions and the field of NGOs). (Kumar 1993; 10–15)

With small variations in definitions I have chosen to use Martin Sturat-Fox's definition of civil society to describe the generally accepted meaning of civil society as

“the combined activities of all those organizations, associations and groups that are constituted by their members in accordance with defined legal procedures. They may be registered by the state, but they do not depend upon it and are autonomous from it. Essentially their purpose is to promote the interests of their members. These interests may be in support of or opposed to the policies of government or any political party. The organizations and associations constituting civil society are free to publicize their interests and programs, argue for them, and lobby government in support of them” (Stuart-Fox 2005, 28)

According to this, Laos has not had a formal civil society until recently. With the collaboration of NGOs and the government, a Decree on Associations which was signed in 2009 allowed the registration and legal operation of such organizations in Laos (Belloni 2014, 355).

Robust civil society was seen as synonymous with axiological consensus and developed emotional community bound by the tight network of interpersonal loyalties, commitments and solidarity. Such a civil society is marked by mature public opinion, rich public life, the identification of citizens with public institutions, concern with the common good and respect for laws. Jeffery Alexander “civil society is the arena for social solidarity” (Sztompka 1999, 7).

### **2.3 Civil Society in Laos**

Because civil society in Lao PDR is so young, the understanding of the roles, functions, responsibilities and abilities are still confusing to the government, the society and the emerging civil society itself. The government is afraid of the civil society causing division or criticism of the state which results in the limiting of civil society associations. Civil society associations are seen by the international community as a vessel to bring development into Laos. Many international governments want to push development goals and also push civil societies to move beyond just the development sector. With these intentions and all the confusion it brings, it is very difficult to define the role of associations in Laos.

Two major roles that INGOs have had in the emerging Lao civil society have firstly been to closely work with the Lao authorities to draft and adopt the law that regulates the civil society sector. This is important, as without the law, the civil society was not officially legal, which hindered their ability to affect and implement their work. Secondly, the INGOs have a role in supporting existing and new local civil society organizations as their level of capacity and resources is not sufficient to operate and implement their projects properly. This has resulted in a trend of INGOs collaborating and partnering with local grassroots organizations. (Belloni 2014, 356–357)

Four major concerns that Belloni lists about the registration process involve the level of difficulty for associations to be registered. First, the decree demands a long and complex application process which he deems as unnecessary burdens for both the government and the organizations. Second, the decree requires a detailed background check of the committee members of the potential association. Third, it requires examination and opinions on the applicants by the government, which takes a lot of time and can be confusing. Last, the requirements for minimum membership are at times too high. These hindrances result in a low number of applications and renewed applications as well as a high number of rejected applications. (Belloni 2014, 360–362).

### **2.3.1 Decree on Associations**

In May of 2009 the government of Lao PDR approved a Decree on Associations. This decree allows the legal registration of non-profit associations. With this decree the government has set “rules and regulations governing the establishment, operation and management of associations registered as legal entities in Lao PDR”. (Decree on Associations 2009, 1)

The objective of the decree is to promote Lao people's organization of associations for the purpose of national protection and development. Through the decree people can be provided with references to set up and operate within lawful conduct.

What the decree defines as an association is “a non-profit civil organization set up on a voluntary basis and operating on a permanent basis to protect the rights and legitimate interest of the association, its members or communities”. (Decree on Associations 2009, 1) According to article 3 in the decree, the term association is used to refer to “associative federations, federations, councils, clubs or bodies however designated that are civil society organizations with members”. (Decree on Associations 2009, 2)

In order to be recognized by the government, the association has to be registered or have the status of un-incorporated association. The registration process can be bureaucratic which makes it more difficult to start new associations. There are three levels of registration: national, provincial, and district or village level. Approval for each level allows operating rights in those areas. Once registered as a legal entity it must have a

registered office with an official stamp and bank account, and comply with the laws and regulations of the country as well as those listed in the decree. Some of the associations include economic, professional technical and creative, social welfare, and other associations (Decree on Associations 2009, 1–16; Oxfam International 2014).

The un-incorporated associations are similar associations that have not yet received registration status due to not fulfilling application requirements. They are, however, recognized and promoted by the government and are required to follow the laws and regulations. All associations are required to follow the objectives of the constitution, laws, and the national, local and ethnic traditions. They need to be non-threatening to the national stability, bring social order and promote individual rights of freedom. This implies that the associations operate under the government's policies and regulations. To do this they need to widely publicize their objectives of protecting the rights and interests of the communities and members of their associations. With updated, trained and skilled workers they may provide advice and recommendations on their reports about equality issues in their working fields as long as it is in line with the laws. They are allowed to cooperate with foreign parties and international organizations under the permitting scope of licensing agencies. All of this can be done as they exercise their rights to perform their duties as an association. (Decree on Associations 2009, 1–16; Oxfam International 2014)

The restrictions placed on associations are to not abuse the rights given and to avoid threatening any security, order, rights of freedom or traditions. Associations are to not undermine any groups, collectives and solidarity (Decree on Associations 2009, 1–16; Oxfam International 2014). There is a new draft of the Decree on Associations being processed which may come out soon, and there is discussion about the possible changes and restrictions that it may have, based on the draft that is available at LaoFAB document repository, accessed 5.10.2014 (LaoFAB 2015).

INGOs and CSOs in Laos are focused on development programs in different sectors such as agriculture, rural development, education, environment, gender, health, finding explosive remnants of war and managing natural resources. Other activities for which the INGO community is pushing, is to influence the development of policy together with development partners. The idea of civil society is still very new to the Lao government and the Lao people. Therefore, there is still much need for socialization of CSOs: what they

can do, and what their role in society is. The role of INGOs in Laos is confusing. The government sees them both as associations that need to follow the regulations and are under surveillance, and at the same time as foreign donors. This is why funding issues with INGOs can be difficult to understand. (ACB) Another confusion that arises about the role of associations is trying to differentiate the roles of non-profit associations from mass organizations. As both have been working on developing the welfare of the people, yet NPAs, unlike the mass organizations, are not directly under the party. For this reason the NPAs are seen as a threat to the government as the government fears NPAs may criticize the government. In other words, the still young civil society in Laos brings much confusion to what it is and what roles and rights it should have. The government does not want it to develop into something uncontrollable, while the international community wants to foster it to promote democracy. (Civil Society an Overview 2011;Kepa 2012)

In 2009 when the first Decree on Associations was made to promote associational growth, the Learning House for Development (LHD) was established by the Lao NPA network. This is a physical location where NPAs can come together, learn better practices and communicate with one another. At this place associations can learn capacity development activities, gain training, hold workshops and study tours. They also are able to coordinate and share information through publications, newsletters and announcements. In addition they have many services to help associations network and share knowledge. This location makes networking and knowledge sharing easier. This is a step toward learning about the abilities and roles of civil society (Learning House for Development 2015; Kepa 2012).

### **2.3.2 Context for Partnership between INGOs and NPAs**

Civil societies are believed to more efficiently provide services than state. They are more democratic, and there has been a rise in funding and support to them after the cold war. NGOs are taking a role of civil society and aid. They deliver to weaker and failed states. CSOs is an overarching terminology that includes NGOs and NPAs and many other actors. In Laos, the main civil society organizations are INGOs and NPAs. NGOs have acted in Laos for a long time, with a slow growth in number. NPAs gained recognition by the government in 2009 with the signing of the decree.

The international development community has seen since the cold war, an increased funding of NGOs as a more effective and more democratic process of providing services rather than the state which due to some failed states has not been able to provide the basic needs of people. There is a shift in increased funding for development through NGOs and other CSOs. The pressure that comes with the responsibility of taking on services pushes for increased work efficiency. (Ebrahim 2003a, 816)

More recent research and critics of development have pushed for more participatory and grassroots level involvement in the development process. This has pushed more and more grassroots CSOs to be seen as viable partners to INGOs to implement more sustainable development. Many donors encourage these types of partnerships and may even require it for larger funding. (Ronalds 2010, 84–85)

The organizations are not equal in power, resources or technical expertise, which has led to an increase in funding for CSO building (Ronalds 2010, 129). This trend is reflected in Laos as an encouragement for INGOs to partner with smaller NPAs, and help them with strengthening of the organizational activities. In this research the partnerships have both fieldwork partnership and organizational strengthening or capacity building partnerships. The idea is to build the NPA up to become self-sufficient and be a sustainable organization that can continue the work even after the INGO leaves the country. (Fieldnote 09.2014)

Paul Ronalds believes INGOs have a fundamental part to play in helping solve many of the transnational problems we face in the globalized world. Organizations that hold a high value in committing to learning new techniques, flexibility, rethinking their strategies and structures will according to Ronalds see success. (Ronalds 2010, 192)

The trend currently in Laos is for INGOs to partner with a local NPA to allow more exchange of resources and develop the Lao Civil Society (Belloni 2014; Kepa 2015). Often donors highly recommend partnership with local associations. Civil Society is extremely young in Laos and the capacity of these NPAs is extremely low. During my research I also learned that people who have started many of the organizations were former INGO project workers. Even so, they don't always have enough education to bring the associations up to international standards. Commonly there is a lack of a good system for financial

management, human resources management and often a clear mission and objectives of the associations.

There are different forms of cooperation between INGOs and NPAs. Some are signed formal agreements while others are just informal cooperation agreements doing capacity building and other projects together. Some INGOs task the NPA to implement the project and the NPA gives them reports. Others will work together in the implementing process and decision making.

Funding for INGOs may come from big donors. Often there is a big state fund that is financing their work. NPAs, on the other hand, do not get any local state funding, so they are also dependent on their own fund raising. Often they receive funds from outside the country. This is either directly from donors or through INGOs. Some INGOs specialize in giving out grants for NPAs. In other cases, the INGO and the NPA together through a partnership receive a larger fund. NPAs currently have a hard time getting large direct funding as they don't have the capacity to receive them. From one interview I found that only two NPAs qualified to receive funds from the EU. Sadly, very few applications are sent, out of which few are acceptable, as many may not be up to standard. The reality is that NPAs are not able to receive large funding and therefore need a known and respectable INGO partner. There are smaller grants from Embassies but those grants (5000 to 30 000 USD) come with strict instructions on what the money can be spent. Most of these kinds of funds are allocated to activities and not to administrative costs. The NPAs are not able to operate and implement activities without administrative costs.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

My research process started with an interest in intercultural partnerships in the development aid sector in Lao PDR. What is happening in the working relations between the Lao nationals and foreign “expats” within partnerships between International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) and Non-profit Associations (NPAs)? I set out to answer the question of how to build “good” partnerships. Being aware that “good” is an abstract value concept that cannot be fully answered, I used it as a direction for the participants to describe positive methods to create a more successful partnership. My main research question – What processes are described by development workers in Laos, both local and foreign, to be important in building working partnerships in Lao development cooperation partnerships between International Non-Governmental Organizations and Lao Non-Profit Associations? – led me to use qualitative research methods. The aim of this research was not to test or prove an existing theory but to go and find a process model that could explain the phenomenon of building more successful partnerships in Laos. To fulfill this I have employed grounded theory methods for conducting the research. A methodology explains why certain methods in a research are used (Birks and Mills 2011, 4–5). I will therefore explain why I used grounded theory methods and how I have applied these methods in my research.

In my research interests there are two voices I am interested to hear from, the Lao and the foreign development workers. However, the foreign (often a westerner) perspective is more researched which is why I find it especially important to bring out the voice of the Lao nationals. I wanted to hear what the Lao development workers had to say about their relationships with foreign workers. I was also interested to hear what foreign workers were saying about these same relationships. This led me to investigate partnerships between INGOs and Lao NPAs. Grounded theory allows the freedom to look at a little studied context and to make connections of the social phenomena that is not bound by previous theoretical ideas. The importance of this is to remain faithful to the cultural and social context of Laos without (as much as is possible within the context of this research) interpreting the social interactions through already set theoretical lenses. Instead, grounded theory allows the data to speak for itself and by analyzing the social processes. The emerging processes bring about new insight about what is happening in the context. A methodology that takes a qualitative and inductive approach was best fit for this research.

### 3.1 Grounded Theory

“The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, 24)

Grounded theory has its roots in Glaser and Strauss's book titled *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). In this book grounded theory is used as a set of systematic procedures also known as methods as explained in the above quote. Later grounded theory grew to have different methodological and philosophical approaches to doing grounded theory as a methodology. (Charmaz 2006; Birks and Mills 2011)

Grounded theory has divided into two major methodological approaches. The first takes on a positivistic philosophy of theory generation and strives to show objectivity through carefully following the methods designed by Glaser and Straus (see 1967) (Charmaz 2006, 125–132). Later, researchers such as Kathy Charmaz influenced by the post-positivistic philosophy, which sees all research as interpretive, developed constructivist grounded theory. (Charmaz 2006, 126 – 131). The constructivist grounded theory holds importance in recognizing the researcher's personal beliefs, views, world view, assumptions to guide their interpretive research and thus, the researcher should place themselves in relation to the research and the research subject. Reflecting on the research process brings sensitivity to their own bias and the reason for methodological choices made. (Charmaz 2006, 126–131; Birks and Mills 2011, 6)

Objectivist grounded theory sees data separate from the researcher. In contrast the constructivist grounded theory sees the data as produced by the interaction of the researcher with the participants or material. In objectivist grounded theory a core category easily emerges and is related to everything in the research. The goal is to find a generalization. In constructivist grounded theory the core category is not as important as:

“the constructivist view assumes an obdurate, yet ever-changing world but recognizes diverse local worlds and multiple realities, and addresses how people's actions affect their local and larger worlds.”(Charmaz 2006, 132)

The constructivist goal is to show complex phenomenon and what people in them assume to be their reality. (Charmaz 2006, 125–132)

My epistemological views tend to follow more of a constructivist grounded theory approach. From the beginning of the research I have held importance in reflective processes of the research, placing oneself in the research and tend to view scientific inquiry as interpretive. In this research I have tried to follow the methods that Glaser and Strauss designed for a substantive theory generation and embrace the constructivist methodological approaches of including reflexivity. The generated theory is located in a specific context and the dynamic of my research affects the data I was able to collect. My theory is focused on a process of a phenomena derived from the perceptions of participants. I discuss reflexivity in the discussion chapter and theoretical sensitivity later in this chapter to include these perspectives of mirroring the research process. For the remainder of this chapter I will describe the grounded theory methods used and my research process.

Grounded theory is interested in explaining an observed phenomenon. This is in contrast to descriptive or exploratory research. Grounded theory uses inductive or abductive reasoning. Starting from an observation and building to a theory. Grounded theory is a research approach of generating theory that is grounded in the data. (Birks and Mills 2011, 9–13)

Glaser and Strauss use comparative analysis as a way to generate theory systematically from the data, which includes both verification and accurate descriptions to help the generation of theory. This is why Glaser and Strauss stress the importance of understanding the theory as a process (1967, 32). When seeing theory as a process, it has attributes of being continually developed and not as a perfected product. This gives potential for the theory to become rich, complex, and dense. “Comparative analysis can be used to generate two basic kinds of theory: substantive and formal.” (1967, 32). Substantive theory is used to formulate a theory in a certain empirical area. Formal theory, on the other hand, is used to mean a theory that can be used by other fields of study. It is a higher level of theoretical conceptualization and abstraction. Often multiple substantive theories can be used to formulate a formal theory. Both, however, do have a degree of generality to allow application for a different range of minor working hypotheses or grander theories. (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 31–35). In this research I will be generating a substantive theory. Within a substantive research area a theory can be generated by using comparative analysis between or within the group inside the substantive area. In this research the substantive area will be the Lao civil society organizations, and the data will be collected from members of these organizations. A comparative analysis of the perceptions of the members

will emerge into a substantive theory showing a process model of the social interaction between organizations and within organizational partnership.

The substantive theory is presented using conceptual categories and their properties (Glaser and Strauss 1967:31). Grounded theory is not linear where each step of the way is consecutive to the next (Birks and Mills 2011, 109). This means that the process of the generating theory is a cyclical one and the researcher may be working on all phases simultaneously, going back and forth. Grounded theory gives guidelines for the entire research process by giving guidelines to starting, staying involved, sparking ideas and refining analytical skills. Grounded theory can bring new ways of seeing data and exploring it to find things that may have not been noticed with other methods. While being able to tell a narrative, grounded theory also can ensure reliable data. (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006; Birks and Mills 2011, 146–148).

“Grounded theory methods foster seeing your data in fresh ways and exploring your ideas about the data through early analytic writing. By adopting grounded theory methods you can direct, manage and streamline you data collection and moreover, construct an original analysis of your data. [...] Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves” (Charmaz 2006, 2).

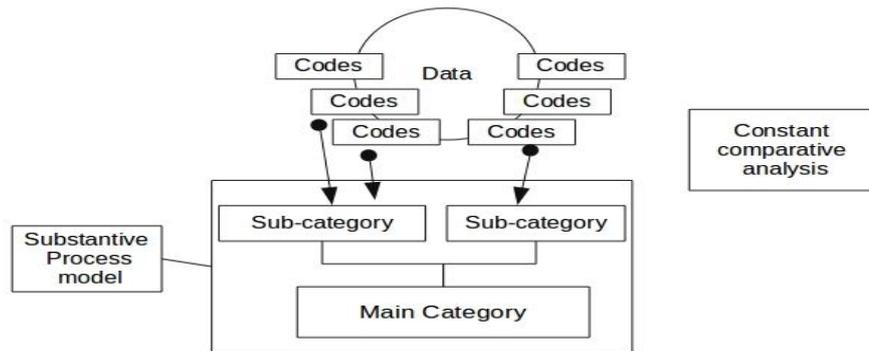
Grounded theory provides tools to work instead of being a 'recipe' of how to conduct research. The theoretical analytical process starts from the beginning of the project. A research context allows explanation of statements and actions, which allows the researcher to make sense of them. This is why observation, interaction and the materials that can be collected about the topic or setting can all be used as empirical data of the events and experience. (Charmaz 2006, 11–41)

Grounded theory methods start with planning the interviews and continuing to be analytically engaged with the data even in the collection process. This first step involves initial coding and categorization of the data once the interviews are collected. Coding is the process of naming the data for analytical use. Open coding is used to identify important words or groups of words. These are labeled either as words directly from the data or as groups of related codes or categories. (Charmaz 2006,47– 49; Birks and Mills 2011, 90–99) In this research, open coding was done in several rounds before categories started to emerge.

Memo writing is an important aspect of keeping track of the intellectual journey of the researcher. All ideas are recorded with dates, so that the researcher can look back at analytical thought through the research process, and these notes will develop the grounded theory findings over time (Charmaz 2006, 72 – 74; Birks and Mills 2011, 10). Memo writing is used to record explanations for codes, thoughts and questions of the research process. Memo writing is crucial for the development of theoretical and analytical thinking of the researcher. These memos will develop into the core of the theory. At every step of the way there is reflection of the analytic process. How you collect data affects which phenomena you will see: how, where and why you will view them, and what sense you will make of them, and the process. (Charmaz 2006, 72 – 83)

Constant comparative analysis requires using inductive and abductive logic. Constant comparative analysis is a process of comparing the data to find connections, differences and similarities. The comparison is between all elements of data, from incident to incident, incident to codes, from codes to codes, codes to categories and lastly categories to categories. The comparison within the data allows the researcher to integrate the grounded theory. In doing constant comparative analysis, one is essentially doing abductive reasoning. This is done by examining the data closely, and making mental leaps to satisfy all possible explanation for the observations to bring together things that may have not been associated with one another. This can be called a cognitive logic of discovery (Briks and Mills 2011, 11; Charmaz 2006, 54).

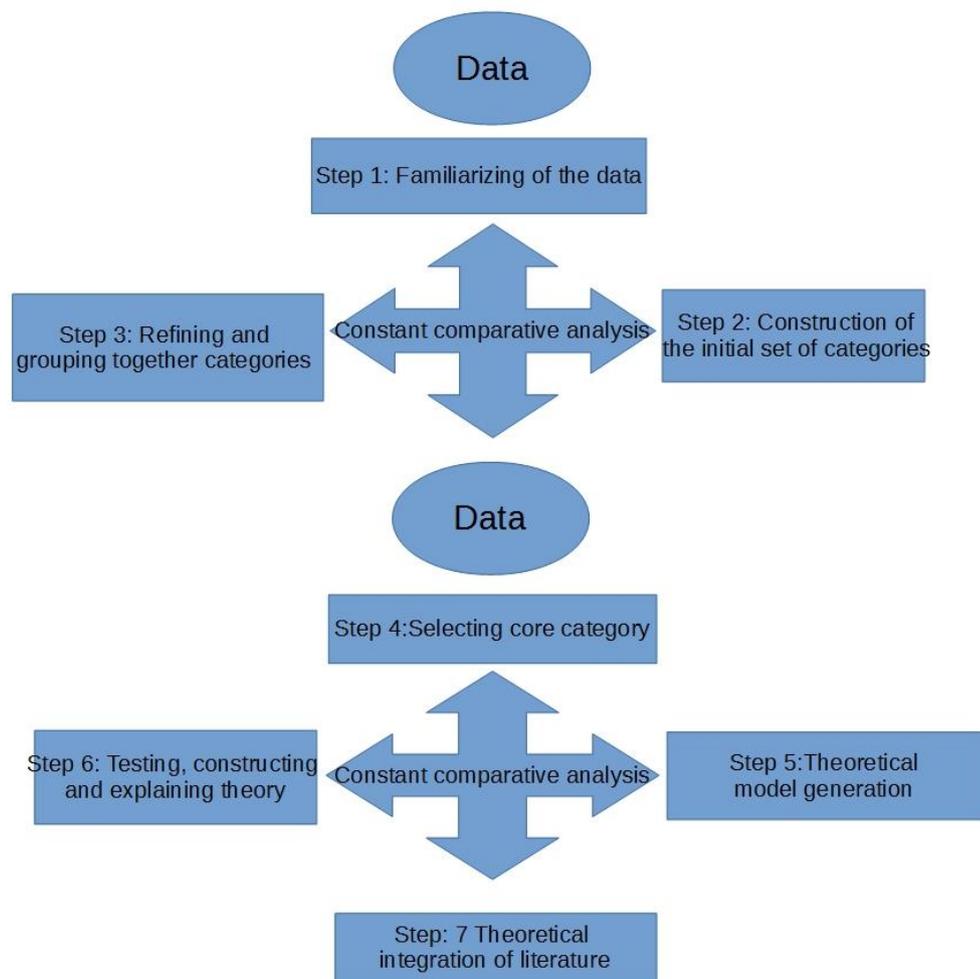
Coding is the naming of patterns and similarities that appear in the data. These codes can be used to compare with other codes and create categories. Categories and sub-categories are higher level concepts that are representing a group of codes. Codes are labels or names given to parts of data with analytical importance. (Briks and Mills 2011, 93- 101; Charmaz 2006, 42–47) In Figure 1, I have created a visualization for my use of the terminology in theory generation. The codes are drawn from the data. The codes start to form the categories. Constant comparative analysis happens at every step. First, the comparison is made between the data and codes, then between codes and categories and finally, it is used to organize the emergent categories into a substantive process model. Each category has properties that explain and describe it.



**Figure 1.** Theory generation

I selected grounded theory because it is the best fit for the goal I had with my research. Grounded theory gives structured tools to ensure reliable research. This method may be very work intensive and challenging at times, but it kept me engaged and interested in the process of research. Lao development work is something that is not very widely studied. I am interested in what people have to say about the research topic at hand and want to see what kind of perceptions they may have and what notions they are projecting through their communication. To understand some of these elements it is beneficial to analyze the interviews through grounded theory tools. Through coding, memo writing and theoretical analytical reflection, I hope to raise some questions for further research.

In Figure 2 I have described the research methods and analytical path used in this research. I previously mentioned that the grounded theory methods used for theory generation are not linear. The figure describes the two major phases of the theory generation. The first phase starts at familiarizing of the data which includes coding and analyzing which leads to the second step of generating of the initial set of categories. Refining and grouping categories together was a result of the constant comparative analysis explained in Figure 1. The steps were repeated several times before step 4 of selecting the core category. The emerging and formation of the core category was in part simultaneous to the emerging of the sub-categories. Theoretical sampling and saturation was used for the purpose of testing, generating and explaining the theory. This means that I went back to the data to make sure that all categories and properties of the categories were found. The theory was further developed by drawing diagrams with the core category and sub-categories organized into a substantive theory model. The theory is then explained in detail with data support for the properties of the categories. The last step is the theoretical integration of literature where previous literature or theoretical perspectives are compared to my generated theory.



**Figure 2.** Research process

### 3.2 Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is the quality of awareness of the outlets and processes of the information that is involved with the research. It is a process that happens during the research and the careful consideration of the order of introduction of other information for support or comparing. This includes sources from literature, personal experiences, and professional experiences for the analytical process. Theoretical sensitivity has a balance of being creative and being scientific by periodically stepping back and asking questions and maintaining an attitude of skepticism and following research procedures. (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 41–46)

My approach to theoretical sensitivity has been that I designed the research by having some basic literature to understand the context. My personal experience with the field

comes from my internship time and my personal experience of the culture comes from living in the country for 10 years. My analytical sensitivity and skepticism has developed over the course of the research. For a large part of my research I discussed the concepts that emerged in my data with my colleagues, and people working in the field. The research process had an impact on shifting my own thinking as well. Reflection with others led me back to the data for the purpose of checking my conclusions. I have waited to read more about research and theories connected directly with my research topic to avoid it leading my direction. I have read related topics which has given me a more open mind as to what I do and do not see in my analytical process. To some extent it is not possible to predict which direction the grounded theory process might take one which is why reading literature after the substantive theory has more benefit for reflection of accuracy for the theory.

### **3.3 Planning and Conducting Interviews**

A significant portion of using grounded theory methods in qualitative research is to reflect on the entire research experience and each step of the way (Charmaz 2006, 10). Next I reflect on my path to find my direction and gather data.

Before leaving for Laos I had been working with some resources I had obtained through the Internet regarding the context of Laos and information about the Lao civil society sector. I learned about the decree of 2009 and the legal regulations of organizational action as explained in the chapter about Lao civil society. I knew that I wanted to write about partnership in Laos. I was still a bit unsure on the specific relationships. I was initially interested in the intercultural relationships foreign workers and local Lao workers had in development. This then expanded to the organizational level. This inspired me to look into partnerships between local NPAs and INGOs.

Over the course of planning for the data collection, I revised my research plan a few times and tried to design my interview questions to the best of my knowledge of the context. With the help of professors and my peers I had a draft of questions before going to Laos. The first two months in Laos allowed me to see the context more clearly and gave me confidence and understanding on how I should edit my questions. I also invited a few other Master's students look at my questions.

The final interview questions were loosely structured and open ended. The first interviews were tested with a co-worker at the organization with which I was interning. I then had a Lao university student translate the interview questions into Lao language. I can understand and communicate Lao fluently but am not able to write the language adequately. I am able to read and understand enough to check that the questions in Lao corresponded with what I wanted to ask.

Initially, I reasoned that I would approach interviewees independently as I thought that this would give the interviewees the assurance that their information would not benefit any other organization. I quickly learned that in Laos you need to have connections to approach people. I had to request the organization with which I was working, to give me a letter of recommendation that indicated that I was volunteering for them and they approved and were facilitating my research for my studies. This was signed and stamped by the president of the organization. This was one of the documents I scanned and sent to all my interviewees when requesting for an interview (see appendix for documents). For the most part I contacted all the people I had interacted with through the organization with which I worked. This allowed interviewees to put a face to my emails which I found was the best way to get people to give me time for an interview. I also contacted some through recommendations.

Most participants I contacted via email, others I was able to ask in person. In the emails, I briefly explained the purpose of my research. The email was accompanied with three attachments: a formal request letter explaining the purpose of the research, a consent form, and the recommendation letter I had stamped and signed by the organization with which I was volunteering. Both the consent form and the request letter attachments were in Lao and English. I found that this gave the participants time to see what my intentions were and for what purpose the interviews were. I requested interviews from 43 people of which 32 were contacted through e-mail. Three scheduled interviews got canceled and nine emails were not responded to. The reason I interviewed this many people was that I wanted to get as much information and data as I could while in Laos. The intention was not to use all 30 interviews for my thesis but to have available additional interview material.

During the beginning of my interviews I felt that I was not getting enough information to sufficiently give me a generalized picture, which motivated me to go beyond 15 interviews. Many of the interviews I had later, had information that was analytically more interesting. Even though I had written out my interview questions, I maintained a casual interview format as was recommended to me by my Lao coworkers. Some interviews were more successful in creating a casual conversation, while others were choppy and had awkward moments as I asked the questions in my own words and found that the interviewee did not understand some of my questions. My confidence and control over the interview sessions had some impact to how the interview flowed. I did not see any impact in how the interviewees answered as a result of this, but I am sure there was some. Out of these 30 interviews, I chose 11 of the most significant and transcribed them for coding and data analysis. From the 30 interviews, 18 were Lao nationals working in both INGOs and NPAs, 13 were foreigners working mostly in INGOs and three worked at NPAs. Three of the interviews of Lao nationals were conducted in English because they chose to be interviewed in English. The interviews conducted in Lao language were translated by me with the help of friends who are proficient in the language.

Almost every interview was conducted at the interviewees' own organization during office hours. With the consent of the interviewees, the interviews were recorded with a Samsung Galaxy Android v 4.1.2 tablet with Smart Voice Recorder Application v 1.7 and saved the digital voice files on my password protected computer. Some notes were handwritten during the interview. On two occasions I interviewed two people at the same time and found that for this research design one-on-one interviews worked the best because often one would take the lead and the other would just agree with what the first one said or add only a little of their own thoughts. I did some experimenting of different approaches to interviewing. I gave some the interview questions ahead of time, others saw the interview questions as I asked them, but with most I just used the interview questions as a loose guide to our focused discussion. When the interviewees clearly understood the subject at hand, I gave them liberty to direct the conversation to topics I may not have asked about. I focused on what they were saying in order to know what to ask next, and kept track of what they had said, so that I was not asking the same questions again. I then formulated new questions based on what they were saying if something interesting came up.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Data analysis has been one of the most time consuming parts of my research. The digital audio recordings were transcribed using Express Scribe Transcription Software v 5.69 and Atlas.ti7 v 7.5.6. I used Atlas.ti7 also for the analysis of the data.

Initially a few interviews were transcribed and open coding method was applied to find some ideas about the main concerns of the interviewees. As I continued my analytical process I also continued to add interviews into my analysis pool. I selected interviews from both the Lao people and the foreigners I had interviewed. This way I could see if there were any major differences in the issues they talked about. My theoretical sensitivity toward the data started to develop as I wrote memos about my initial codes and started thinking about the connections between the interviews. I abandoned some ideas and codes as the rest of the data did not support enough empirical evidence to focus on them.

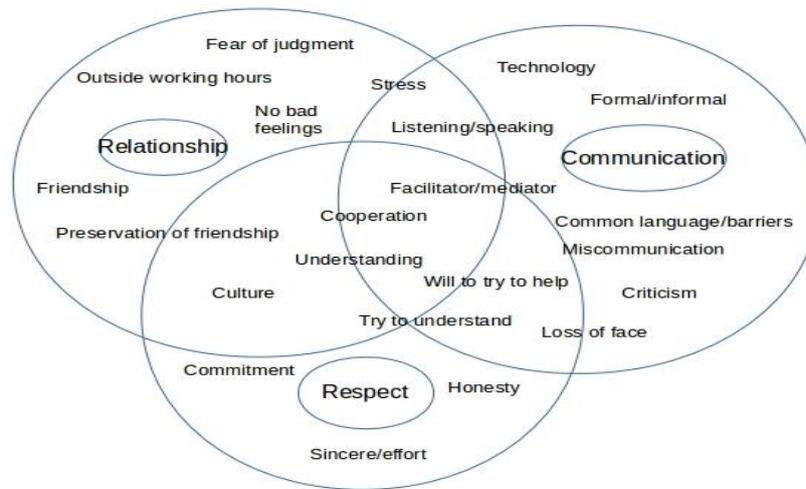
At first when reflecting on the different interviews, it appeared to me that the foreigners knew how to answer the questions I asked better because I was hearing a lot of analysis made by the informants. I observed that partnership was a current topic broadly discussed in the development community, especially to those who were accustomed to this type of discourse of partnerships in development aid and problems related to it. On the other hand, I was looking at some other interviews I had conducted with lower ranking staff who were more implementers and less concerned with the discourse of partnership and felt that they did not have as much to say about it. This led me to re-evaluate my own perspective of the topic and questioning the interview questions I had used. Could it be that I had entered the research field with more assumptions than I initially thought? I found that I was swimming in the same development aid terminology and concepts as the other foreign or foreign educated development professionals. I felt they had good answers because they were speaking the same language. The same critiques I had learned from textbooks were known to them as well.

My critical perspective led me to research more of what this “international aid system” (see Tvedt 1998) was doing in Laos. There were some links in my data to support that the aid system is also at work in Laos through the discourse, the methods of doing development work and teaching the local organizations how to be organized and how to think about development work. However, this was not satisfying to me. I kept on going back into my

data, reading the interviews with new perspectives over and over again. What I started to formulate in my mind about my data was that to make a better partnership was to have the will to help, open heart, time, listening, trust and understanding. Of these the most important were time and trust because they were interconnected to all the others. Time came to indicate a diachronic process but not a category itself.

I took a new attempt looking at what the informants were talking about more than what they were saying. Color coding was used to find and organize the data. Through this, a frequency occurrence comparison was made. The codes were labeled: cooperation, understanding, partnership, communication, respect, trust, time, relationship, reports, expertise, finances, decisions, facilitation or mediation, culture, mind set or feeling, judging, power, transparency and productivity or efficiency. These were all things I was finding in the data itself. I started to see that working closely together over time would build trust. Trust, and not blaming, was contributing to sharing more information between the partners. This I saw as evidence of trust. Time with respect, knowledge, understanding, relationship building, communication and balanced power equaled trust. I started to view trust as my main concern and possibly the core category to my substantive theory. At this point I drew a mind map of relationship, communication and respect as these became my top concepts. I found that many codes and concepts were interconnected with all three categories.

These codes involved interaction between the organizations, the financial and reporting aspect and other relevant themes to good partnership. After this second coding, I started to see a pattern of what people were talking about. I identified time, will to try, understanding, listening and trust. On the third coding round I started to make new connections and started to see that the concepts of “understanding” and “listening”, for example, were part of communication and the attitude of “wanting to learn” and the “will to try” was connected to new emerging ideas of “not judging” and “respecting the other”. I also started to take note of how people were talking about “building friendships” and being like “family”. This highlighted the importance of relationship. This led me to the fourth theoretical coding phase where the categories of trust, time, culture, relationship, respect and communication were coded and the relationship was organized into a substantive theory. Figure 3 shows my first mind map as a diagram.



**Figure 3.** Mind map diagram

As I was trying to define sub-categories, I came to the conclusion that everything that was essential and interesting to my research had a foundation in culture. I had been trying to avoid culture out of fear of misrepresenting a culture that is not my own. But the reality is that because I grew up in the Lao culture, I inadvertently had learned some core cultural values which affect my own culture as well. We are not able to talk about another culture without explaining a little of the other. I started to realize that my own blocks to research were that I didn't find my research interesting enough because it all seemed too obvious. Only after talking with someone did I realize that what makes this research interesting is the Lao context and that is something I have to explore on paper and show how partnership in Laos is so strongly based on relationships.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

In this chapter I will talk about the ethical implications of gathering and analyzing data for my thesis. I will also consider some limitations of the research. Knowing the possible political or socially sensitive areas, I wanted to ensure that all of the people who participated in my research were able to feel free and relaxed to share their information with me. To develop sensitivity to the approach I should take could only be learned by first observing and discussing about it with Lao colleagues. Getting to know the context also

informed me of such matters. I took time to get to know the context of Lao development sector before starting my research in Vientiane, the capital, where most of the development INGO and NPA headquarters are located.

In Laos the cultural approach for conducting research has its own form. To approach anyone as a researcher you have to acquire some connection or reference point. At first I was going to do my research as an independent student, but was advised not to, as this could cause risky situations for my safety, if I were to ask the wrong questions. The organization in which I did my internship was more than happy to write a recommendation letter that I could show to other organizations. The letter showed that they were supporting my research which was for the purpose of my studies and the organization would not capitalize from my research. The letter validated my request and also gave me credibility especially within the same network as the organization with which I was working.

There may have been concerns that because I had to be referenced by an organization, some people may have been more hesitant to share some failures, fearing I would share them with the organization with which I was working, despite my assurance that I would not. I believe that some people whom I interviewed who were more familiar with student research were freer in expressing their successes and failures.

I also built credibility by having clear consent forms in both Lao and English. In the consent form I indicated that I would be recording the interview but I also asked again for permission before each interview to record. The purpose of this consent form was not only to assure that their information would be confidential, but it also gave me protection and credibility that I was serious about the research.

I conducted the interviews in English or Lao depending on the preference of the interviewee. Most Lao workers preferred to be interviewed in Lao language. I speak Lao fluently, which allowed me to conduct the interview completely in Lao language. The interviews were translated by me with the help of others.

I believe allowing the Lao staff to talk in their mother tongue allowed them to be a lot more open about what they wanted to say as they were able to express themselves without being constrained by language limitations. Even with the ease of language and the

credibility that I built with them through sharing a language, I believe my appearance as a white foreigner did affect their freedom to speak directly. I also imagine that there are cultural rules of what can be shared outside of an organization and what cannot. Most of the interviews were conducted at their work place as this was preferable for the interviewees, with some exceptions of people wanting to be interviewed outside of the work place to indicate that it was their personal opinions and not the official position of the work place. I believe these individuals also felt freer to express themselves.

There are some limitations in this research. I did not have enough time to start analyzing the data during the collection phase giving me less control over how focused the interviews became. I also realized that working with translating from a foreign language has challenges. The greatest challenge and limitation to this research is that there is very little research done about Laos in general and even less research about this particular topic. It is difficult to find literature relating to organizational relationships in Laos. The analysis process was at times confusing which affected the smooth progression of the research.

To protect the confidentiality of the informants of this thesis, the direct quotations used will be identified by which type of organization (INGO or NPA) they work for, and whether they are Lao or foreign nationals. This will be indicated as “ln” for Lao nationals and “fn” for foreign nationals. For example, an informant working at an INGO who is a foreign national will be identified as “INGO1fn” with the number one identifying the individual of the interview. A Lao national working at an INGO would be identified as “INGO2ln”. In the same way informants working at NPAs will correspondingly be identified as “NPA1ln” or “NPA2fn”. The reason for using this type of identification for the informants is to show readers the diversity of answers yet the commonality of the patterns in the answers.

In this chapter I have explained my research design, methods and research process, and ethical considerations. In the next chapter I will provide the core of my research, a substantive process model of trust building in partnerships between INGOs and NPAs in Laos.

## **4. THE PROCESS OF TRUST BUILDING IN THE CONTEXT OF PARTNERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT IN LAOS**

In this chapter I will present a substantive process model for trusting in partnerships. This substantive theory is grounded in interview data collected from Laos during August and September 2014. The model which is generated with data is not based on previous theoretical concepts but the concepts and categories emerged from the data. First, I will describe the process of finding my substantive theory. Then, I will explain the substantive theory and the categories which emerged from the data. Finally, I will explain the properties of each sub-category with corresponding examples from the data.

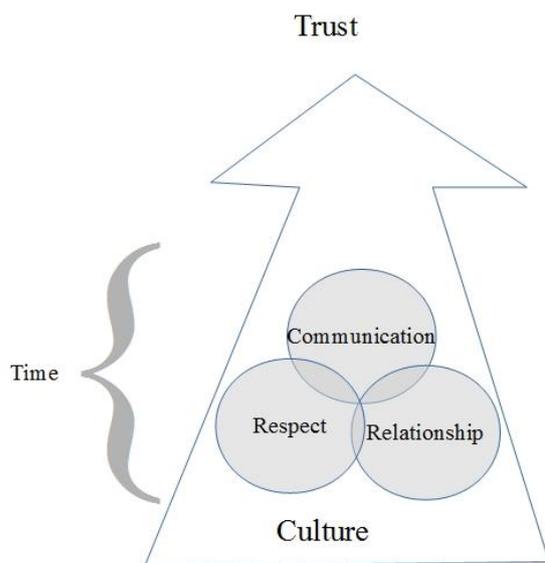
The core category, trust, emerged as the goal of having a more successful partnership. The sub-categories of building trusting partnerships emerged as three stages of a diachronic process where partners build a relationship of trust. The three sub-categories, also seen as stages of the process are: 1. building a relationship, 2. maintaining the relationship and 3. moving forward together in the respective partnership relationship. Cultural questions define the rules by which the sub-categories operate and what properties each sub-category has.

### **4.1 The Emergence of Substantive Theory**

The emergence of a grounded substantive theory takes a long and ever-changing path with sometimes unpredictable outcomes (Birks and Mills 2011, 27). The aim of this research is to show one perspective of what development professionals in Laos perceive to be important in order to develop more successful partnership relations. The journey to find answers started with broad questions about what is “good partnership” in Laos. The development professionals interviewed were from various organizations and positions in organizations, ranging from INGO country directors, Lao NPA directors and presidents, to field work staff in both types of organizations. The informants varied with both Lao and foreign nationals participating. The categories that emerged from the data will be presented next.

As was explained in chapter three, figure1, the data is coded into various incidents or concepts. These are grouped and organized until categories are emerged. The categories then are described and explained through properties. These properties are explained with evidence from the data.

The process of category emergence took several stages with the redefining and narrowing of categories to which the six major categories of relationship, respect, communication, time, culture and trust could be isolated. Relationship, respect and communication appeared as the most prominent elements of the data. However, after carefully re-evaluating and re-coding, trust was established as the core category. The reason trust is the core category is because all other categories point to trust as the goal to which other concepts are seeking to achieve. In Figure 4, below, I have depicted the first emerged process model. In this model I have placed Trust as the core category as the goal. The three sub-categories that are interlocked and together actively working to move toward trust. All properties of these subcategories described ways each contributed to building trust. The interconnected process of the three sub-categories was located within the context of a culture. In this research the cultural context was inter-cultural workplace in one dominant culture (Laos). Lastly this model shows that the model is located in time indicating a diachronic process.



**Figure 4.** First trust-building model

This model became difficult to describe as many of the properties had embedded qualities of all three sub-categories of communication, respect and relationship. Clearly grouping properties became confusing. Therefore a fresh look at the data was required to re-evaluate the organization and grouping of properties. I listed all the major properties I had found in the data and started grouping them according to commonalities they presented in the context of the data as shown in Table 1 below. Grouping the properties allowed the data to point to new sub-categories. The properties were refined and rearranged further from this point.

**Table 1.** Regrouping of properties

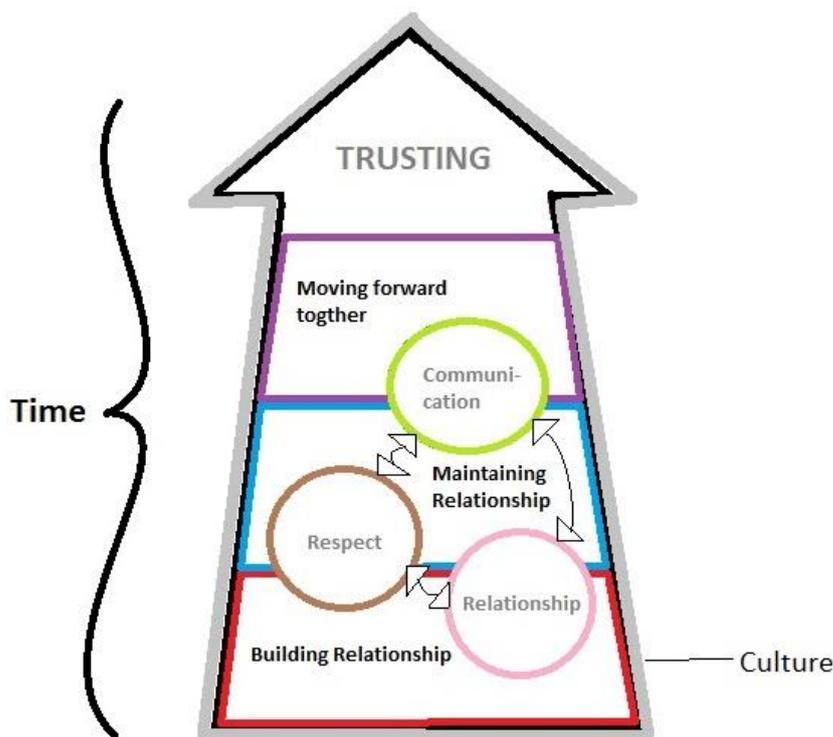
Adjusting, being flexible, being sincere, being patient, being open-mind, being respectful, being honest	Being openhearted, being committed, being non-judgmental, getting to know each other, spending time together, listening, understanding/ learning	Defining roles and responsibilities, being accountable, communicating clearly, being honest
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After analyzing and re-analyzing my data, it finally came together with a logical process model where the three previous categories were present but were no longer defining the parts of a process. I then asked myself, what are these groups of properties describing when looking in the context of my data? I then labeled the three groups of properties as building relationships, maintaining relationships and moving forward together. All of the properties and new sub-categories pointed to the core category of Trusting as organized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Categories and properties

Core Category	Trusting		
Sub-categories	Building Relationships	Maintaining Relationships	Moving Forward Together
Properties	Being open-minded Being sincere Being respectful Being honest Being patient Considering others Being flexible	Being openhearted Being non-judgmental Being committed Getting to know one another Spending time together Listening Understanding Changing/improving	Defining roles and responsibilities Being accountable Communicating clearly Communicating regularly Discussing and deciding together Balancing Mediating

The new grouping as shown in Figure 5 was still missing the presence of the previous concepts of relationship, respect and communication. The evidence of their presence in the process showed their critical role to be included into the process model. Their role now became underlying characteristics of an active process. The interplay between the three plays a part in all three sub-categories (building relationships, maintaining relationships and moving forward together). In different situations each may play a different role and have different amount of significance.



**Figure 5.** Second trusting process model

The next step of describing and reporting the properties resulted in another level of abstraction of the properties. Properties were grouped together into descriptive categories. These descriptive categories allow the properties to be described at a more abstract level. The properties of the sub-category “building a relationship” were divided in to two descriptive categories labeled “starting attitudes” and “adjusting” as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Introducing descriptive categories of building a relationship

Property	Descriptive category	Sub-category
Being open-minded	Starting attitude	Building a relationship
Being sincere		
Being respectful		
Being honest		
Being patient		
Considering others	Adjusting	
Being flexible		

The properties of the sub-category “maintaining a relationship” were divided in to three descriptive categories labeled “becoming vulnerable”, “investing in relationships” and “learning” as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Introducing descriptive categories of maintaining a relationship

Property	Descriptive category	Sub-category
Being openhearted	Becoming vulnerable	Maintaining a relationship
Being non-judgmental		
Being committed		
Getting to know one another	Investing in relationships	
Spending time together		
Patience		
Listening	Learning	
Understanding		
Changing/improving		

The properties of the sub-category “moving forward together” were divided in to three descriptive categories labeled “organizing structure”, “communicating” and “cooperating” as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Introducing descriptive categories of moving forward together

Property	Descriptive category	Sub-category
Defining roles and responsibilities	Organizing structure	Moving forward together
Being accountable		
Communicating regularly	Communicating	
Communicating clearly		
Discussing and deciding together	Cooperating	
Balancing		
Mediating		

## 4.1 A Substantive Theory of Trust-Building

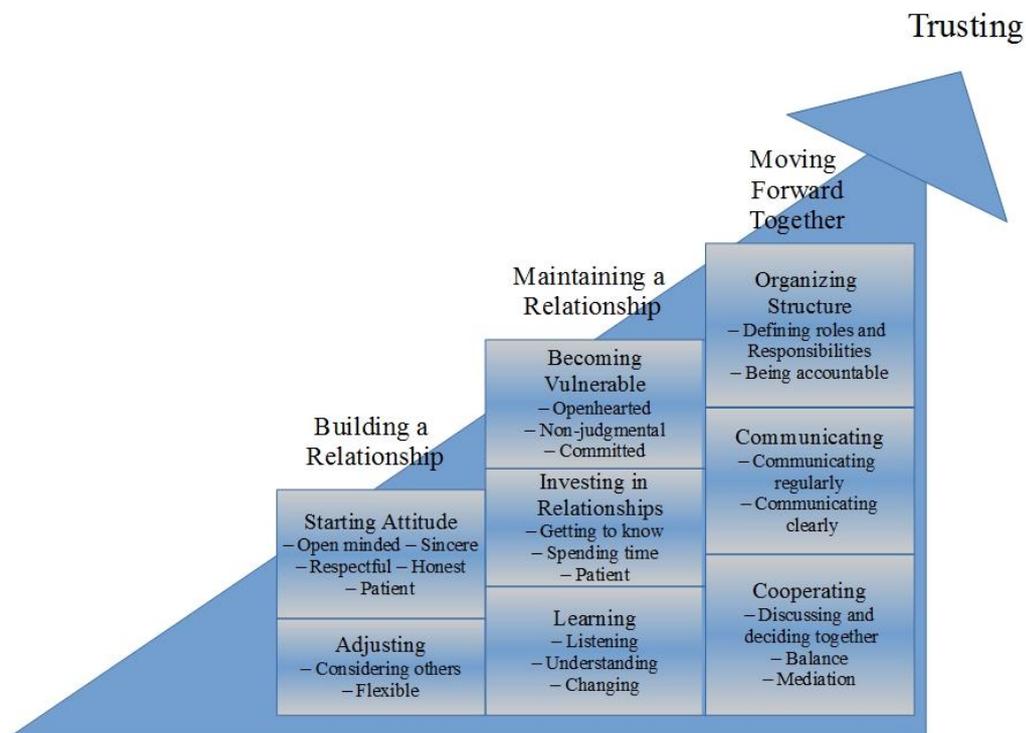
Looking for the answer how to have more successful partnerships, I came to understand from the data that trust building was the main category to which all of the data was pointing. The data was filled with many interesting phenomena about the interactions between individuals in organizations that were partnering. The first themes that emerged revolved around respecting, relationship building and communicating. Within these themes the story of trust building emerged as part of three accumulative processes. Culture and time play an important role in this model. Culture defines the role, importance and order in which some properties appear on the model. All of the categories in the processes require time to move toward trusting.

In Figure 6, a process model is depicted representing the substantive theory of trust-building in partnerships. There are three sub-categories which make up the core of the theory. The sub-categories tell a story of building trust over time. The story that emerged from the data shows a progress that sets a partnership up as one that can lead to more trusting and as a result, more successful partnerships. Building a relationship indicates the very first encounter with the partners. There needs to be a starting attitude that reflects a mindset of being open minded, sincere/honest, respectful and patient. These starting attitudes come hand in hand with the need to adjust to one another.

The second sub-category involves maintaining the relationship that has been built. Maintaining a relationship involves becoming vulnerable to one another. Becoming vulnerable means to open one's heart, be non-judgmental and being committed. This is followed by investment for the relationship. Investment for the relationship is fostered through spending time with one another, getting to know one another and being patient with the relationship. Lastly, learning happens through listening, understanding and changing/improving oneself.

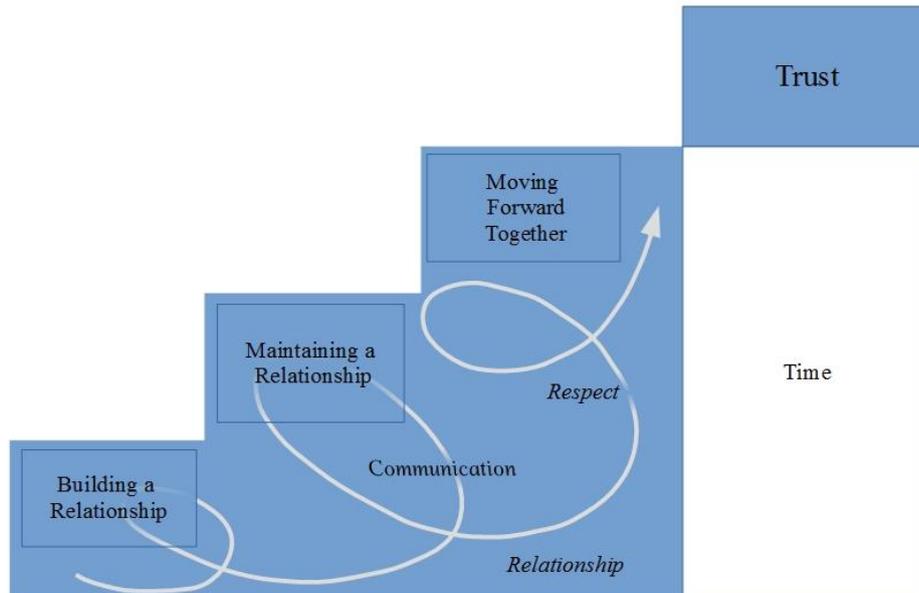
The third sub-category, moving forward together, is about actions that help improve trust building. First the organizational structure refers to setting up the partnership in a way that the roles and responsibilities are clear to both partners and the accountability in said partnership and between the individuals is maintained. Communication is the second property of moving forward together. Communication should happen regularly and clearly.

Cooperating, as the last descriptive category, involves discussing and deciding together. Cooperating also needs balancing and mediating to continue moving forward. All sub-categories and properties of the sub-categories are at work in the process of trust building.



**Figure 6.** Final trust-building process model

The characteristics of all properties are influenced by the importance of respecting, relationship building and communicating. While properties describe one sub-category, they may affect other sub-categories as well. Figure 7 depicts this nature of respect, relationship and communication as they are embed in the properties. Each property is also continuously building upon the other. There is a cyclical occurrence of some properties which I have described below with a spiral arrow.



**Figure 7.** Cyclical nature of components of trust-building process

## 4.2 Culture and Time

People talked about cultural differences and the struggles navigating through the elements culture brings to a partnership. There are different levels of cultural elements present in this case. First of all, there is a cultural context of Laos where all the informants are present. This dictates a lot of cultural adjustments that international organizations and foreign personnel working in Laos have to make. The country's customs, traditions and approach to different topics has to be taken into account. The foreign personnel have to adjust to interpersonal relationships when interacting with the local population. The rules of social interaction and social conduct are defined and regulated by Lao society, the dominant culture. If a foreigner wishes to have smooth social interaction, he or she will have to learn and adapt.

It is not only the outsider that has adjustments to make. The presence of an international community in the country and the growing interaction with INGOs, donors, donor states and international institutions require the Lao community to adjust to the international community. At a more localized level we can consider the adjustments that Lao development practitioners have to face when working in INGOs or in partnership with an INGO with foreign country directors and possible other foreign staff. The diversity of foreigners is vast with people from many different countries including other Asian

countries. This makes it difficult to generalize the foreign population as one demographic in contrast to the Lao. This distinction, however, has been made due to the way the dichotomy was presented in Laos. Distinctions between methods used by people from different countries were recognized, but for the purpose of this study, the separation is not necessary as the intention is not to point fingers at any one culture but to open a discussion on the challenges with cultural misunderstandings and cultural differences that people have experienced.

Cultural sensitivity has an important role in the discussion, pointing out differences and problems. These problems caused by those differences have shown the importance of how both Lao and foreign nationals alike must be more culturally sensitive and to better understand each other to find common ground where a healthy partnership relationship can be built. In the present thesis culture plays a role of explaining the context and how it contains and enables participants in partnership.

Multiple people I talked to during my time in Laos disclosed that “time” is something one has to have if they want to get any real changes done in Laos. The current trend in development work is to have quick two to five year projects where donors expect high results. Without going into the complex details of the problems small project funding have on Lao NPAs, it can be said that these expectations of fast results are unrealistic. Most development work deals with people and expectations for the people to change old habits or learn new skills. This means one has to take time building relationships and trust. In the substantive theory introduced in this chapter, the process model will have time as a diachronic variable. All the other categories are a part of a process which happens over time.

As an example, one informant shared how trust is built over time through the process of working together and getting to know one another.

“you build the trust by working together for long time. ...it’s been 5 -6 years of really working together closely so when we know each other, have spent so much time in the field or sitting in meetings trying to define activities exchanging ideas, exchanging challenges and so on. You build a trust this way; you don't have trust from the first day. So the trust has come from this really process of working together” (INGO1fn)

Trust comes over time while being engaged with each other. The relationship that is built over time strengthens the trust between individuals within the organizations.

“It is true that I put a lot of attention to this idea of building trust relation and taking time to build the trust and the relation” (INGO1fn)

At the same time entering into a partnership should not be rushed. Partners should approach each other slowly and take time to get to know each other’s organizations. At some point an organizational assessment may help some organizations.

“one thing that I guess, it’s really, really important, is the process of ... this assessment. And take time to look at what is the situation of the organization.” (INGO1fn)

Even when an assessment helps both organizations get to know each other’s strengths, weaknesses and helps with orienting the direction of the partnership, the process should be done in the right time.

“So how could I regret that we have not done it earlier because that could have been seen as the first thing you start a partnership with.... [at] the same time I’m sure if we had done it five years ago that [organizational assessment result] would have not been as rich and honest [as] what it was now, because we did it at a time when we knew each other enough already. ... If we start a partnership and we do something that seems like an assessment I guess...they could have felt a bit threatened and not felt at ease. But for us it[assessment] brought a lot to have this now that gives us clear direction about where is it that we need to support them and that comes from them. That is a very important step in our case.” (INGO1fn)

The quotations above tell a story about how time plays a role in trust. The two organizations approached each other first building trust relations. Over the course of working together planning and deciding together that trust was built. An organizational assessment was done for the other organization. This helped the stronger organization to know how they can support the weaker one. However, an organizational assessment places the weaker organization in a vulnerable position. When trust is built it is easier to enter into vulnerable spaces such as described. The informant above noted that having the information resulting from the organizational assessment would have allowed for more efficient partnership from the beginning. However, because people are social, it is more effective to first build the relationship.

### **4.3 Relationship, Communication and Respect**

Three characteristics of partnership building and growing trust emerged from the data as central themes: relationship building, respecting one another and communicating effectively. These three concepts play important roles throughout the trust building process. They are interwoven and affect each other at the same time. Different processes require different amounts of each but all processes have a foundation in all three. For

example, one can use communication to understand the other, understanding the other gives him respect and ways to show respect that is appropriate in that culture. Showing respect is a foundation to a growing relationship. Yet understanding and respect result from interacting in a relationship. It is difficult to say which comes first.

## 4.4 Building a Relationship

Building a relationship is the first sub-category to this substantive theory of trust-building. This involves approaching each other carefully with the right attitudes and adjusting accordingly to the needs of others. Table 6 shows the evidence from the data which point to the properties. Below I will explain in detail with evidence from the data what each property means.

**Table 6.** Sub-category 1: Building a relationship

Evidence from Data	Property	Descriptive category	Sub-category
“we need someone ... open-minded” (NPA4fn), be <b>honest</b> be <b>respectful</b> be <b>open-minded</b> if you don't have that as a starting point or a <b>starting attitude</b> whoever ...will sense whether you are <b>sincere</b> or not.(INGO4fn)	Being open-minded	Starting attitude	Building a relationship
	Being sincere/honest		
	Being respectful		
“take time, go slowly”(INGO1fn)	Being patient	Adjusting	
“don't want the other person to be sad.”(NPA1ln)	Considering others		
“we are very flexible.”(INGO2fn)	Being flexible		

### 4.4.1 Starting Attitude

The descriptive category of building a relationship is the starting attitudes that include properties of being open-minded, respectful, sincere/honest and patient. The evidence from the data shows that these attitudes and qualities build a foundation for starting a relationship for partnership cooperation.

Open-mindedness is essential in interacting with people with different backgrounds and world views. Having an open mind sets a pace for accepting different views.

“we need someone who knows the etiquette and ethics here and then we should have someone that ... is open-minded to how things work in Laos.” (NPA4fn) [ ]

“we can open our mind to understand everything together before we are going to implement the partnership agreement based on this agreement” (INGO3ln)

The social processes and social etiquette differ in each culture. Doing development work requires an open mind. Side-by-side attitudes of being respectful, being sincere/honest, and being patient play a role in setting up a foundation on which to build a relationship. Other starting attitudes include being sincere/honest and respectful.

”we try to build up a trustful relation like be honest, be respectful, be open-minded. I mean if you don't have that as a starting point or a starting attitude. I don't think it's gonna work. I think people, whoever, whichever nationality or wherever they work will sense whether you are sincere or not.” (INGO4fn)

Building a relationship means being patient as the process of building trust takes time and patience.

“They need to become more patient. If you really want to help them, you must have patience.” (NPA1ln)

Even if the initial attitude may be successfully portrayed, the process of building trust always takes time. Both sides need to be sincere and sensitive to the other's needs. Taking into account the other person's emotions is respecting that person. That means coming closer through sincere love, being soft and kind to each other, and helping each other. Sincerity is very important in building the respect towards a foundation of trust.

“It is a very sensitive work. It is an understanding that it needs time, and it needs both sides to be sincere. You need to use love and softness to come closer to each other. Be kind to each other, you help me and I help you. I would like it to be like that” (NPA5ln).

Being sincere means showing the other partner that one is truly meaning what they say, showing that one genuinely wants partnership. Being honest may seem to be a given, but the reality is that keeping information may feel like having secrets. Being honest is both speaking the truth about one's intentions or information, and not hiding information from the partner.

“we do not have any secrets for our partners, if you keep something a secret, you do not realize they do not believe you at all.” (INGO3ln)

When two organizations can be truthful and trust each other without secrets, they can get to know each other and understand each other even before they start the partnership. This

type of open and understanding communication in the planning process can bring clarity and expectations can be met. When people are sincere and honest they are easier to trust as this builds some level of transparency.

#### **4.4.2 Adjusting**

The second group of properties of the first stage of building a relationship is adjusting to one another and to the environment surrounding the partnership. Adjusting involves considering others and being flexible.

Considering others is rooted in values of respecting others, desiring to preserve relationships and avoiding conflict. Preservation of relationships may be a very large aspect of the Lao working culture but this was not specifically explored. Through the grounded theory approach this element became a crucial point to seeing the importance of relationship building for the purpose of building trust. This remains important throughout the different stages. The types of preservation of relationship that emerged from the data were conflict avoidance, the mending of conflicts via a conflict mediator and recognizing the importance of respect to maintain relationships.

Culturally, there are many different ways to approach conflict. Different societies have their own rules regarding how to express agreement or disagreement. In the Lao context it is valued to avoid direct confrontation. This is seen as a method of “keeping the relationship” as one informant explained:

“For example, Lao people, they will try to keep the relationship, if there is a problem, they won't say anything, they hardly ever say, they will be patient and find another time.” (NPA1ln)

Conflicts are handled with patience, waiting for the right moment and method to resolve a conflict. This is contrasted with the western foreigners' way of confronting an issue and trying to solve it instantly.

“Foreigners are not like that, if they have a problem, they say it immediately, we will work this through, and that's it” (NPA1ln).

The perception of the Lao informant was that many foreigners have a more direct and instantaneous method of resolving problems. This, however, in the Lao context is seen as a direct conflict.

“But if the Lao people would do like that they couldn't face each other. It is their culture, Lao people are not able to talk like that.” (NPA11n)

The Lao informant explained that in the Lao culture people do not confront each other about problems or correction that the other should make in a way that could make the other person feel sad.

“Everybody is lenient; we work like in a family. It is culture, Lao people don't like to discredit other people, they don't want the other person to be sad. Even if you don't know how to do your work, I won't say anything, otherwise you might be sad. So, no one discredits or compliments, there is no corrections. We use our feelings. We use intuitive skills.” (NPA11n)

The consideration of other's feelings is important, i.e. being intuitive and using feelings to interpret situations to avoid conflict. Criticism and direct confrontation may be seen as discrediting the other. Even when someone does not know how to do something they may not need to be corrected. When the two cultures come into contact, these approaches to criticism and correction can clash and cause friction which can lead to distrust toward one another.

“So these two people, the way they work, the way they look at the problems, it causes friction, they don't trust each other.” (NPA11n)

Next, it is highlighted how work relations are important to maintain. These relationships need to be preserved and kept in order. The consideration of people's emotions is high in order to maintain trust.

“You don't need to speak and correct, if we can help each other, we do, and we don't need to speak against each other, it effects the basic culture of Asian people ... If you can help, help, if not, don't even speak. It's good, we keep our friendship”(NPA11n)

This consideration of others through preserving relationships and avoiding conflict is a part of adjusting in that one needs to consider the cultural differences encountered and adjust to a possible new way or method of considering others. This leads to the second property of improving or changing oneself to adjust to the new surroundings.

There are some very important concepts in Lao language that cannot be translated into English which explain a lot about how things work in Laos and some other South East Asian countries such as Thailand. For example, the word ເກງໃຈ, pronounced as kè:ŋ-cài, can be translated to mean fear of being trouble to someone, not wanting to bother them, to be ashamed or shy, to treat with esteem or respect, to be afraid of offending, to look up

with great respect, to give high priority to how another person feels/thinks about something, have deference, caring for, to be too courteous. (Chitrada 2004; Demystifying Kreng Jai 2012; Fitzroy 2013; Funk 2015; kè:ŋ càì 2015; krè:ŋ càì 2015)

It is a very rich word and often explains actions that foreigners at times might not understand. Someone may do something or not do something out of this fear of offending and respect toward the other person. This term opens understanding to some cultural values such as respect for people with higher status. Age, wealth, and power all have a role in this status. To demonstrate this, one interviewee explained how in their office different people would have a different authority to address conflict situations. In this quote a foreigner is describing a colleague's methods and authority to pressure NPA staff to follow their agreements:

“we expect them [partnering NPA] to stick to agreements that they make and sometimes it’s also cultural thing. I think our Lao staff finds that more difficult than our falang[foreign] staff. Like I think ... she finds it easier to say: 'but hey we agreed'. So it’s very difficult ... [she] can be more direct in sharing at(sic) very polite and friendly way. Our Lao staff, depending on who they are talking to, will find it more difficult. Especially if they are older directors of NPAs, for example. I mean [she] also has her age as an advantage [laughing].” (INGO4fn)

From this excerpt it can be seen that the foreigners have a different approach to how agreements need to be followed. They also have a different approach on how to deal with the situation; that is to communicate directly with the partner what their expectations are, and how they expect the other to act. It can be seen how the Lao staff find it difficult to implement this same request or communication. The informant also admits to knowledge of cultural respect for age. This shows that the Lao staff is hesitant to act in the requested way because of the cultural value of criticizing an elderly person and an individual holding more authority than themselves.

Adjusting is a complex process, and each person will have their own adjustments to make. The adjustments will also depend on the context. Above, it was explored how conflict can be one example of cultural clash that one has to adjust to. The process of adjusting is difficult to predict which is why the next property of adjusting is being flexible to any possible unexpected situations one may face.

Flexibility is important because things do not always follow a plan, and most importantly, the cultural difference plays a big role in the need for flexibility. Listening and being flexible to adjust are expressed in the following quote:

“The actual building (sic) the strategy together and leaving a lot of flexibility and listening a lot...we are very flexible...we don't impose formats, we don't impose anything, but again there is change. It is becoming more difficult to find as it is very competitive, so you cannot be too flexible”(INGO2fn)

Building the strategy together allows for a process where both can be a part of the process and the planning which can become more flexible to meet the needs of each partner. Listening allows both to understand how to adjust to the other and learn more about the other.

Flexibility can be an attitude. The attitude and mindset can indirectly show and communicate respect. When working in a multicultural setting with both foreigners from various cultures and the Lao, the respect is shown in the sincerity and commitment of the work or the willingness to learn more about the other culture. This can be accomplished through learning the other's language or participating in cultural customs. This is part of the process of learning to understand the other.

“how we try to build up a trustful relation like be honest, be respectful, be open-minded (sic). I mean if you don't have that as a starting point or a starting attitude, I don't think its gonna (sic) work. I think people whoever, whichever nationality or wherever they work will sense whether you are sincere or not. And I think also (sic) show that you are committed to help... consider if you can help them in something else also. Or something that is not directly related to the project but you (sic) doing it together but show that you are interested and show that you are committed”(INGO4fn).

In this excerpt from an interview, this foreigner explains that to build up a trustful relationship one has to be honest, respectful and open-minded. These are starting points to the relationship. It is an attitude of showing sincerity and commitment. These are the foundations for a more trustful partnership. These are all attitudes that are easily portrayed and easily seen by other people no matter what background one comes from. In addition, a person is showing these attitudes by acting on them. Sometimes this means one may have to go beyond what is agreed. It may mean that they do something unrelated to the project together to show interest and commitment. Doing something unrelated to the project together reflects flexibility to go out of the norm to adjust to the circumstances.

## 4.5 Maintaining a Partnership Relationship

The second sub-category is to maintaining a relationship. Maintaining a relationship means becoming vulnerable, investing in to the relationship and learning. Table 7 shows the evidence from the data together with the properties. In this chapter I will discuss further about the properties together with evidence from the data.

**Table 7.** Sub-category 2: Maintaining a partnership relationship

Evidence from Data	Property		Sub-category
“we have to open our hearts” (NPA1ln)	Being openhearted	Becoming vulnerable	Maintaining a partnership relationship
“respect for the organization and people in the organization being non-judgmental and whatever we observe” (INGO4fn)	Being non-judgmental		
“ show that you are <b>committed</b> to help” (INGO4fn)	Being committed		
“to get to know each other's setting, but more generally as an individual”(INGO4fn)	Getting to know one another	Investing in the relationship	
“spending time with people outside of office hours” (INGO4fn)	Spending time together		
Well, you build the trust by working together for long time... so when we know each other, have spent so much time... you don't have trust from the first day (INGO1fn)	patience		
“listening a lot” (INGO2fn)	Listening	Learning	
“foreigners must understand the Lao people's viewpoint, Lao people must understand the foreigners' viewpoint,”(NPA1ln)	Understanding		
“But it hurts, to change oneself hurts, but when it's time every one must change” (NPA1ln)	Changing/improving		

### 4.5.1 Becoming vulnerable

Becoming vulnerable involves opening one’s own heart, not being judgmental and showing commitment to the shared work and expecting the same in return from the partner.

“The best would be to study each other, the working methods, we have to open our hearts also, not thinking we are the only clever one. Same with the Lao people, we

have to also open our hearts, The thing the foreigners do differently, they do sincerely, we should not get stressed out.” (NPA1ln)

The Lao word ຕີນໃຈ, pronounced as pə̀β:t càì, has significant cultural nuances. (pə̀β:t-cài 2015) In the above quote, the informant explains and gives an example of what it means to open one's heart. Openhearted means to study each other, to know the working methods and realize that there are differences between cultures. It means to try to look past the differences, to see that each is doing the work sincerely. She explains that both the foreigners and the Lao people have to open their hearts to each other. Not being openhearted can cause problems in a partnership.

“So there is(sic) problems, because first of all people don't open their hearts, secondly they don't have a commitment to build this world to be unified” (NPA1ln) Commitment is a part of the next steps in relationship maintaining in that it shows trust through putting oneself in a vulnerable position. Showing commitment expresses to the other, one's willingness to put in time and effort. The level of commitment that people are willing to put into the partnership affects the success rate.

“I see that ... [the more] the director or the board is committed the more that project will be successful” (INGO2fn) This is why it is important to look at the amount of commitment both partners have and to what degree they can commit when developing an agreement plan.

“In terms of human resources limit (sic) and even the number of the staff of [NPA] whose working for [NPA] and also including the capacity of the human resources of the partners and we look at, moreover, you need to look at how much contribution or commitment the both partner can be committed to, to what we are going to do, for example, we just necessary (sic) to develop the agreement together.” (INGO3ln)

Being non-judgmental shows respect to the vulnerability of the other by not critiquing harshly what the other does even if their way is different.

“What we use to build a trustful relation is starting with respect for the organization and people in the organization being non-judgmental and whatever we observe. Um. Yeah try to ask open questions that don't imply a judgment. For example, trying to explain also that we are not there to judge their work we are there to support where they feel they need support and if they don't feel they need support, that's fine too. We don't want to push ourselves on them” (INGO4fn)

Being non-judgmental and asking open questions that don't imply judgment creates a safe environment for opening up and being vulnerable to one another and to start talking about the things that can be improved together. Being non-judgmental also ties in with being vulnerable in that one has to give the other the benefit of the doubt: to trust that their way can also work.

#### 4.5.2 Investing in the relationship

The second group of properties, maintaining relationships, are related to investing into the started relationship. These properties are spending time and getting to know one another. The “key” to partnership in Laos is balancing between having clear partnership and work boundaries, but yet developing close personal ties between the workers of the organization. Sharing personal lives together and building relationships within the organization is important.

“[For] good partnership I would say: approach each other slowly and bring [together at] multiple levels. I think they really need to plan how to integrate their staff to each other because if we look back to the history of Laos, relationship is probably really the key here. And it's really beyond just you and [your] colleagues and our managements and our personal life sometimes. I think partnership here in Laos has to be that. With a line, we also have a clear line between what is a partnership, what is work, what is personal. I think because if we rely on partnership too much it can get out of hand. ... so I think there needs to be a clear line between partnership at the same time develop that closeness.” (NPA2ln)

A good partnership is founded on closeness of relationship between individuals and a balance of organizational structures of partnership to keep formality. A relationship is vital before implementing any change. Many INGOs partner for the purpose of helping NPAs build their capacity. In capacity building the organization (typically INGO) giving the capacity training will have to be acquainted with the weaknesses and strengths of the other organization (NPA). This is why organizations should start

“Building a relationship way before facilitating any change. When someone outside comes in and teaches people things, it's better if they have a familiar face and have maintained strong contact.” (NPA4fn)

Even personal relationships are important as they bring a sense of working together. When Lao informants talked about partnerships they often referred to words reflecting a friendship nature of the partnership, meaning true cooperation could happen when partners were friends. This indicates how important personal relationships can be.

“If we say that we are partners we are friends, we can just work alongside. But if it is like that, it is actually like this, the cooperation. [ ] Helping each other and being friends, being organizations that help each other.... When we hold hands, it will be good, and people will see that we have fellowship, working together.”(NPA5ln)

Personal relationships, such as friendships or family relations, are important especially in the Lao context. A remark made by one informant shows how organizations are made up of people, emphasizing human relations.

“For me it is a partnership in two organizations between individuals from two or more organizations”(INGO1fn).

This gives an insight to the attention that should be placed on the building of the working relations of individuals between the organizations. The atmosphere of the work place affects the positivity of the feeling of being a part of something. The work place could be described as a safe environment where one can “work like in a family” (NPA1ln). And when the two organizations work closely together and “know them through activities from some layers” (NPA2ln), they become familiar with one another. The intimate relationship between the organizations would allow the workers to feel like the two organizations were one.

“So now when we go to [name of partnering INGO] we feel like it's a part of [our NPA]” (NPA2ln).

Some of the ways that these personal relationships are built are based on time spent together getting to know one another outside of the working place. This can take the form of eating together and sharing personal life.

“Generally I think it's also spending time with people outside of office hours. So, invite them for a lunch sometimes, or when they have a party, join the party, go for dinner, share more, like things in your private life, more general things too, yeah, to get to know each other's setting, but more generally as an individual, and sometimes do some smaller things that are not necessarily a part of the agreement but we realize that it helps, I don't know, appreciate or value what we can offer.”(INGO4fn)

Spending time with one another outside of the working place brings people together to understand and value each other more. This creates bonds of friendship that make working together easier as the level of trust and tolerance to differences may be increased due to shared experiences. In a culture where relationships and networks are important social resources, it is important to value the relationships in the workplace which is why the preservation and maintenance of relationships become important as well.

Taking time to get to know one another is important, not only for being able to understand each other through communication and respect, but to build relationships. This is often highlighted as the only way to truly understand the living conditions and the world view of a person in a different culture. Getting to know people and their culture will result in learning. I will cover this type of learning in the next section.

Acceptance can be communicated through eating food from the other cultures. When I was eating food made by the Lao, they expressed much appreciation for my effort to integrate and understand their way of life. I was indirectly showing the Lao that I trusted their taste in food, their food preparation methods and hygiene, that I trusted their culture to have nutritional food and that I would taste even “unorthodox” food. I believe it shows transparency and vulnerability. Food brings

people together. In comparison, some other foreigners who refused to eat some Lao food with them made the Lao people feel disappointed. (Field notes 2014)

Gift giving was another way to invest in relationships. At every work related celebration there were gifts given to honored guests. This is especially reflected in reciprocal and networking societies. (Field notes 2014)

#### **4.5.3 Learning**

The third characteristic of maintaining a relationship is learning about one another in order to understand and know how to treat each other with more respect. This becomes essential when dealing with intercultural partnerships. The differences result from different world views, and different working practices. The process of learning is accomplished over time by working together. It is not something that can be studied ahead of time. It takes listening and effort to understand each other to learn, improve and change oneself.

Listening is the first step to learning when entering a new culture or coming into contact with individuals of a different culture. Speaking and listening are basic verbal communication methods that happen daily when communicating with other individuals within and between organizations. There are cultural rules about when and to whom one should speak. What emerged from the data was an underlying difference in cultural communication. It appears that problems occurred when individuals did not know, or went against cultural values in communication. Some value clashes included the different meanings of speaking up or listening. Another was when, to whom, and how to speak. The ways which these communications proceeded affected negatively or positively the relationships, respect and ultimately the trust. The methods used to communicate also projected respect to build relationships.

The culture of listening and speaking differs between the foreign staff and the Lao staff. As was explained by one informant, (NPA11n), the foreigners had a working culture of speaking when something was on one's mind. Failure to do so was reflected as foolishness because it meant that he or she did not have any ideas. (NPA11n) explained that in Lao culture speaking too much was seen as foolishness. From a young age people are taught not to speak too much and to listen more. Thinking and acting is valued more than voicing one's opinion.

“Lao people are taught not to speak too much; the one who speaks much is the foolish one. You need to think a lot, do a lot, so there is a different working culture... The Lao people are listening. We have been taught like that since we were young, we grew up like that.” (NPA1ln)

This causes cultural conflict in communication at the workplace. Often the foreigners will try to urge the Lao to speak more. At the same time they will not realize that they are talking more than the Lao would prefer.

“They [the foreigners] tell us to just speak, speak. But we were taught from little that be quiet, be quiet. It is in their hearts, so it is hard to make them [Lao] into people who will speak up. Same way, if we try to make the foreigners speak less, it is not easy, right. They speak so much; it's hard to make them quiet.” (NPA1ln)

She described a conflict of when foreigners are trying to make Lao people speak up more. Yet this is difficult as the Lao are taught to stay silent and listen more. On the reverse side she says that the foreigners in the same way have just as much difficulty adapting to a new cultural attitude of staying silent and speaking less.

In a situation where foreigners are speaking more, listening less and the Lao are listening more, speaking less, there can be negative effects. This can have an effect in meetings where decisions are made. When foreigners who are used to expressing their opinions expect the Lao to do the same, they do not realize this cultural difference; they can unintentionally limit the voice of the Lao workers. Together with other differences, this causes a divide between the foreign and Lao staff. This can lead to fear of saying what needs to be said. (NPA4fn) talks about not being able to speak up out of fear of going against the words of the INGO or against their policy. In this way issues that should be brought up are not. This fear also stems from decisions that are made without the further consultation of the Lao NPA or staff. This type of cultural exchange needs adjusting on both sides.

“When you must speak, then speak, if you don't have to, then don't. Adjust towards each other.” (NPA1ln).

As some foreign staff have noted, “listening a lot” (INGO2fn) gives the Lao staff more time to express themselves and also allows the foreigner to understand better.

“I find myself listening a lot to my partners a lot, so really sitting down and they talk you through very, very long discussions on why something can be done or can't.” (INGO2fn).

Listening is also respecting. Learning requires the absorption of a lot of information. The willingness to learn by listening shows respect for the other as they are given a voice. The Lao culture highly values listening. It is inherent in their upbringing.

Listening to the Lao on why things can or cannot be done allows the person from the other culture to better understand the context and the way of thinking of the other.

A part of learning is adapting the ways of the people one is working with. In this case the Lao culture values staying silent and listening. When the foreigner finds himself listening to extensive discussions, he is actually meeting the expectations of Lao culture and therefore gaining their trust (Memo 2015).

Understanding one another through communication requires a common understanding. Some intercultural learning and understanding is required to communicate viewpoints effectively.

“People’s culture is also correct in their ways. But they don't mix, therefore, foreigners must understand the Lao people's viewpoint, Lao people must understand the foreigners' viewpoint, how should it be done.” (NPA11n)

The informant explains how culture has subjective value, and when conflict comes from two cultures, both sides have to try to understand each other’s viewpoints and how to adjust to the other. The process of understanding takes time. It means changing or improving oneself.

“Even when you understand each other already, you need time to take it in. Then you must be brave to improve yourself. [...] If you see strengths on something, you will be ready to learn, and develop. But it hurts, to change oneself hurts, but when it's time every one must change. Foreigners have to change, Lao people have to change.” (NPA11n)

Understanding one another does not come easily. It takes time to digest the information even after one understands. It takes courage to change and improve to be more accepting and understanding. The ability to see strengths in the other can be challenging and sometimes even painful, but the challenge is to change oneself to work together in a multicultural setting.

“For example, Lao people might get stressed out when talked to, and go away, but they should not get stressed, they need to continue working, and change. The foreigners also, when there is feedback, they should know what they should do according to the occasion, what can be said, what cannot.” (NPA11n)

Culture is full of communication tools that are connected to how one relates to another. This involves respecting one another through communication. In some cases it is not appropriate to ask or say certain things. Each culture will have its own rules and these rules

have to be learned through interaction with the culture and its people. Learning is a process of coming to understand the other's world view and values.

The idiom of putting oneself in someone else's shoes describes the best way to truly understand another person as it is to see their perspective. If a foreigner is to truly understand the condition and world view of the Lao, they must take some time to live a Lao lifestyle.

“You have come to my house, my home; you practice my culture and customs. You live and eat like I do, we work together, and that is good” (NPA6ln)

“I think the foreigners have to live in Laos, live like the Lao people, under the same conditions, same villages, same houses, same families, for a period of time, then they will truly understand us. Learn by living with them for six months to one year. Work in their working conditions, learn some good things, and what is important, you must focus on their goodness, don't look at their ugly side” (NPA1ln).

“to take time. One advice that I would give to ourselves also is to um, respect the nature and the identity of the local partner to start by knowing them” (INGO4fn)

The above quotes show how vital it is to spend time and learn the local way of life to truly understand and be able to have the basic knowledge to do successful development work.

One way of communicating respect to the other is by accepting their culture and by taking part in cultural customs. If a foreigner eats and lives with the Lao then they are with that communicating many things, but most importantly they are communicating acceptance and willingness to learn.

## 4.6 Moving forward together

**Table 8.** Sub-category 3: Moving forward together

Evidence from Data	Property		Sub-category
“[in the] agreement you need to define clearly,...what kind of activities your partners [are] going to implement, what kind [of] support...” (INGO3ln; NPA6ln).	Defining roles and responsibilities	Organizing structure	Moving forward together
“we should have a more structured way of being accountable ” (INGO1fn)	Being accountable		
there is a lot of daily or you know communication with [NPA] from the project teams... there is good communication but... informal, ... to be regular, ... direct communication between [project directors] ... another more formal	Communicating regularly	communicating	

discussions ... have some quarterly meeting or quarterly review (INGO1fn)			
“sticking to agreements or being clear about agreements” (INGO4fn)	Communicating clearly		
spent so much time in the field or sitting in meetings trying to define activities exchanging ideas, exchanging challenges (INGO1fn) “build the trust by working together for long time...trust has come from this really process of working together,” (INGO1fn)	Discussing and deciding together	cooperating	
“we try to strike a balance” (INGO4fn)	balance		
mediator. There needs to be one that understands both sides, culturally (NPA1ln)	Mediation		

A partnership by its definition alone implies a relationship. This relationship is created for the benefit of both organizations. Each organization has its own strengths. Many Lao NPAs are very young and still lack strength as organizations. Through partnering with INGOs they benefit from “strong financial technical support” and support for “project implementation”(INGO1fn) that the INGOs have to offer. The INGO benefits from partnering with an NPA by gaining a “better understanding of the reality of the situation” gaining a “link and [a] better understanding of the local context ... [and the] target [population]” (INGO1fn). The Lao organizations know the country and the situation better than the international organizations. Another benefit that is “not an exposed one but it’s a reality” and seen often as a “requirement from [their] donors” is to have a partnership in order to receive funding.

In short there are three benefits INGOs and NPAs gain from a partnership. First they “benefit from learning from each other”. Second, the “expertise” that each organization brings into the relationship creates a larger pool for resources available for both organizations. Third, many donors require these types of partnerships for receiving funding. This requirement by donors may come from the wish that to include local organizations will help make the NPAs stronger and eventually replace the need for INGOs altogether (Hudock 1999; Field notes Sept. 5 2014). When working together organizations “have a greater productivity” and when partners share a plan together the “outputs increase and the budget is decreased” (NPA2ln) this in turn allows the rest of the funding to be used in “unplanned but necessity [sic] activities”. (NPA2ln).

“The risks are that sometimes in the cooperation those that become our partners are not sincere.”(NPA5ln)

An organization or individual could fear that the other organization is not sincere with their cooperation and is wanting to partner only for their own benefit and take advantage of the other. This type of fear can come about when the trust of a mutual partnership agreement is violated. It causes much damage but is not unrepairable.

“Then on a good day, we can cooperate and be sincerely working together. Helping each other truly.” (NPA5ln)

When both organizations can finally come and partner with mutual sincerity, a new journey for trust can begin.

#### **4.6.1 Organizing structure**

Organizing structure is essential for a successful partnership. The evidence shows clearly that cooperation in partnership is founded on strong and clear organizational structures. This means that the roles and responsibilities of each organization are clearly defined (INGO3ln; NPA6ln; NPA2ln) and there are measures in place to ensure accountability. Defining roles and responsibilities are most often done in a form of partnership agreements. “Initiative discussion[s]” are held before a partnership agreement is made. It is “necessary to develop the agreement together” in order to “look at how much contribution or commitment” (INGO3ln) each organization is ready for. The beginning may have “many challenges”(INGO3ln) due to the capacity of a NPA being lower than that of an INGO. This may include limited human resources or low capacity of the staff. If during the course of the partnership there is a plan for the INGO to help build the capacity of the NPA this has to be written in the partnership agreement.

“within the agreement you need to define clearly, for example, what kind of activities your partners [are] going to implement, what kind of technical support, what kind of financial support your partner requires in order to reach the goal you expected to reach” (INGO3ln; NPA6ln).

It is important to list out the needs, roles and responsibilities of each organization to have a common understanding of the starting point of the partnership and the direction of the future cooperation.

“in the beginning it is not easy to work together if you don’t understand each other quite well, if you do not have clear view of (sic)future what are you going to do, what is your role, what is your responsibility, how much support you can contribute

[to] it. [ ] If the partner doesn't have a strategy ... there are many challenges ... because we don't know exactly what they are going to do.”(INGO3ln)

Having “internal strategies” (INGO3ln), discussing and agreeing together on the objectives and details of what will be implemented (NPA6ln), setting limits and enforcing them (NPA6ln) will help accomplish setting up clear boundaries, clear roles and responsibilities for the partnership.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities makes cooperation in partnership easier as each party knows what to expect from the other and knows what and how much each should contribute to the shared work. Some work involves helping each other such as in the case of capacity building for the weaker organization. In these cases, it is also beneficial to know each other's strengths and weaknesses in order to know what partners can do to support the other. Each organization has its own mission, goals and a strategy. When they are clear the partnership roles and responsibilities can be more easily defined. If they are not clear, it can make the partnership process more difficult.

A clear agreement makes it easier for the partnering organization to know how the other organization should act and how they should respond. This predictability creates stability that can allow an environment of respect and trust toward the other institution.

“...objectives that are spelled out, enforced, and the limits are set in the agreement...” (NPA6ln).

With shared values, partners have common ground on which to build. With “clear internal strategies”(INGO3ln), “shared values”(NPA2ln), clear roles and responsibilities a shared strategy between the organizations can be written to give a clear view of the direction for the future.

The concern for clear roles, responsibilities and agreements was talked about a lot especially among the Lao development workers. It appeared that this was something they were reflecting on currently. They had learned that they need to have a clear strategy for their own organization in order to offer more in the partnership. (Field notes 2014)

A large part of being partners involves reporting to and evaluating one another. This reporting and evaluation is a type of accountability that builds trust between organizations

as they are able to see the progress. Formal annual reporting and other forms of formal communication is most often a part of the official agreement.

“There will be more formal communication also because either we move into provision of budget, then there is formal reporting requirement that will come from [name of NPA] to [name of INGO], ... there will also [be] some formal communication through regular reports and for them to regularly claim for the money and justify for the expenditure so... [there] will be some requirements from them to report to us.” (INGO1fn)

Here the informant explains how formal written reports show accountability between organizations. The organization hopes to establish reporting as a regular routine to explain expenditure justifications. The informant explains that the INGO would become a budget provider, in which case the NPA would report these expenditures to the INGO.

“First because we are accountable to our donors so that's a big risk that we take as soon as we transfer money to any partners and we were not in full trust that their systems and their practices could match the standards to reach for our donors. um... and that is a question of trust. I think it really took time.. it's very recently, it's really from last year that we started considering, OK let's consider if we have a budget of 100,000 let's consider we give them a share of that, which is still very limited”(INGO1fn)

#### **4.6.2 Communicating**

Communicating is one important property in every stage of partnership. In the third stage of moving forward together, communicating was highlighted in the evidence as communicating clearly and communicating regularly. Informants discussed the lack of understanding that resulted from issues in communication. One problem came from the lack of contacting if there was a problem. The goal in many organizations was to increase contacting each other for the purpose of learning and supporting.

Formal meetings allow space to address problems, changes or decisions to be made together. Different types of meetings happen less or more frequently.

“... a meeting every three weeks, so we do that to tell each other on the progress and the decision we made of the outcome opportunities, and then we have twice a year partners' meeting. So this is when the ten partners come together to have a meeting on what has been done in the past few months. What should we have in for the next few months?” (NPA2ln)

In this example we see that there are smaller formal meetings that happen at close intervals and are designed to induce discussion on the shared progress. Then there are bi-annual meetings where multiple partners might come together to discuss what has been done and what should be done next.

“Formal discussions we want to have, is have some quarterly meeting or quarterly review where we could discuss OK where we are with the work, where we are at the partnership, what are the problems and what do we want to discuss . . . we want to still keep this informal thing, but sometimes too informal is not enough, so we wanted to establish more formal systems.” (INGO1fn)

The informant explains that formal meetings are spaces for discussion that is categorized as formal opposed to informal communication that happens on a more regular basis. Before a decision is made, many organizations will gather together to discuss plans, objectives, implementation of activities or other organizational matters such as capacity building or reporting as mentioned above. These meetings may happen more or less often depending on the needs of the organizations. Some organizations felt meeting too often can be “difficult and annoying”(INGO4fn) suggesting that the frequency of meetings has adverse effects on the partnership and a balance needs to be found.

“Initially we had sort of a rule that we would follow up with the partner’s directors like every two weeks or so to see how things were going um. and both our team members, our relationship manages, and the NPA find that really difficult and annoying. so we gave up on that.... we try to strike a balance between leaving it up to the partner to contact us and following up on agreements that have been made earlier.” (INGO4fn)

The intention of this example was to create the possibility for frequent discussion and analysis of the situation but soon it was realized that having meeting too frequently proved to be too bothersome to commit to. From the INGO point it was important to stick to the agreement made, but they was realized that more flexibility was needed, and respectfully the NPAs could themselves regulate the follow up contact. This way the INGO was giving the NPA more trust in the matter of follow up to keep the agreements.

At times reporting can also be a way to report difficulties or problems that may occur for the donor or partnering organization to help the NPA to improve.

“If I have any difficulties, I will report to the partner.” (NPA6ln).

Communicating clearly is essential for moving forward together in partnership relationships. This property is broad and covers different aspects that can hinder or help clear communication. Firstly, technology and technical report writing affects formal communication. Secondly, language and facilitation affect even informal communication.

An insufficient skill or access to these can cause difficulties in communication which in turn affects building trust.

Good partnership consists of clear communication and clarification of possible misunderstandings.

“You need to intend to work together well, talk and cooperate at all times. If there is anything to clarify, then you need to do it. That is good partnership”(NPA6ln)

Technology is enabling easy access and fast communication. Most people interviewed claimed to use various different types of communication tools including, e-mail, phones, and web-based social media applications. These technologies make communication easier.

“[Communication is] not difficult because ... of the high modern technology.” (INGO3ln).

The access to phones and the Internet has made daily communication and more frequent communication with different actors easier.

Technical report writing affects communication of project results and can be a stumbling block to funding projects. The international credibility and trustworthiness is sometimes contingent on adequate technical writing skills. Many NPA staff still need training in writing reports and proposals for new funding (Field notes 08.2014)

Because of the importance of good report writing skills, many NPAs are seeking to improve their skills in order to be able to compete for funding and show accountability.

“[NPAs want to].. learn about proposal writing and they want to have a coach... [...]writing the level of difficulty[...]you need to be an insider to really understand these details and where the budgets are going.” (NPA2ln)

Some organizations recognize this and provide more educational training in technical writing of projects and project planning.

The negative effects on funding due to poor reporting and proposal writing reflect the notion of development isomorphism and development systems (Tvedt 1998). Not being an insider and understanding the development “system” can be a disadvantage as those who know how to write in this donor language have the upper hand as they will more likely be approved for funding while a good idea written poorly may not pass (Memo 01. 2015).

Inadequate language skills can hinder understanding. The most common language to communicate between INGO heads and donors is English. Poor English language skills can sometimes be a stress for people who do not speak it proficiently. The stress is caused by difficulties when reporting in English and the fear of miss-communication.

“the problem is that I am not talented in English language. Right? Not being talented in English language makes cooperation in partnership have many obstacles. Not understanding each other. There are instances where I am afraid that ... I will speak the language incorrectly. I am afraid that we won't understand each other.” (NPA6ln)

Language can also affect the report writing process. Mastering both languages gives an advantage.

“... she can speak both Lao and English, before [she] came, my work was difficult during reporting time, it took forever to get the report done” (NPA6ln).

The informant claims that work can move faster as the reporting language is no longer a huge obstacle when the organization has a staff member who is able to write reports in English. A translator may help bridge language barriers but come with its own challenges.

“this organization would translate all of that and give the report back” (NPA2ln)

In daily communication this can be seen as a problem if the message intended is not fully portrayed. Translation is an alternative method many organizations use to bridge the language barrier. However, it can also lead to misunderstandings as the quality of translation is not always reliable.

“basic (sic) is you have to have a common language. Some partnerships they struggle, that's why. ... Some staff with [INGO] try to interview with some translator. But translating not (sic) work.. or not (sic)content of the sentence which they wish to transfer.” (NPA3fn)

While there are plenty of examples of foreigners who did speak the Lao language. I found that many INGOs had many English speaking Lao staff and often the foreign staff did not speak much Lao. One informant brought this to my attention when she described how one INGO seemed to hire Lao staff on the basis of their ability to speak English. (Field notes 2014)

“The main thing that they look in hiring is are you able to speak English, that's the most important.[laughing] If you can speak English that's great. It doesn't matter what background you come from as long as you can speak to them in English.” (NPA4fn).

The importance placed on the ability to proficiently speak and write English in the hiring process at INGOs shows the importance of a common language for better understanding through communication.

Facilitators, communications officers or partnership coordinators were responsible to share information, communicate between organizations and focus on the partnership, making it better. Some organizations hired a person specifically to coordinate the partnership,(INGO4fn; NPA6ln) while other INGOs requested that one of the NPA

workers would be placed in the INGO to work along with them and at the same time communicate between the organizations and be a representative of the NPA.

There are two kinds of facilitation roles; there is the formalized facilitation that is recognized as a role that needs to be fulfilled in meetings to facilitate discussion, and then there is the implicit facilitation role where someone takes a mediator role. Facilitation for clear communication in meetings and other interactions within organizations bridges gaps in understanding. For facilitation in meetings, the facilitator has to know how to facilitate in a way that will promote expression of ideas and opinions. Their role is to make opportunities for both sides to have their voice heard.

“Both sides, right, only try to listen to each other’s ideas and facilitate. When you work together you need one facilitator, if someone doesn't speak, then you must make them speak. Then you take their idea and expand on it. So they are participating. If we can't participate, we don't really want to work.”(NPA11n)

This allows all to contribute to the work, and in turn it gives each member a sense of ownership and motivation to really want to work on the project. It is also important in decision making, as the end result is to have both sides feel that the work is their own and want to contribute to it equally. Facilitation works best when the person doing the facilitation or mediation understands both cultures well.

“There needs to be one that understands both sides, culturally ... If we have these kind of people working together it is good. Because we will understand. When there is a meeting he knows how to facilitate, make us Asians have our voice heard. They know how to give opportunity to others speak also.”(NPA11n)

A “support person” or facilitator is not a temporary role. There will continually be a need for someone who will mediate between the two sides.

“But there must be a support person, when they are gone ... everything is like before. When I was there, I pushed, I was their voice for the working team, for both sides, now there is no mediator.”(NPA11n)

Without a facilitator the distribution of conversation is uneven.

“The foreigners have strong speaking skills. The Lao people are listening” (NPA11n).

Properties of communicating that contribute to trust building include communicating frequently and communicating clearly. Communicating clearly is a part of many different communication methods, such as being able to communicate through reporting well, or understanding each other's languages, or having a facilitator to facilitate clear

communication. Communicating frequently is made easier through technology and meetings that are balanced with the needs.

### **4.6.3 Cooperating**

Cooperation involves discussing together all matters involving the partnership, deciding together, balancing and mediating between actors. These are all properties of moving forward together for more trusting partnerships.

Discussing together means taking the time to come together and discuss and decide together on what and how things should be done in the projects.

“We are trying strategic meetings, where we would both bring to the table issues that we have, and visions we have for a strategy, and so on. And we kind of constructively criticize each other, and I think it was very useful, you know, at least to get a sense... I think we should have a more structured way of being accountable, and this is a discussion we are having nowadays” (INGO2fn)

In this quote we see how the two organizations came together to discuss different aspects of working together. It can be about the mutual strategy or about problems that can be solved. It is a space for constructive criticism for improvement or it can be a way to become more accountable to each other. Cooperating is bringing together all the different elements explained previously and incorporating them into the work done together. This leads to learning how to balance everything together. There will still be cultural differences and tensions, but it is a matter of finding the right balance for moving forward.

Previously criticism was mentioned as one of the conflict areas. Constructive criticism is an interesting case that can be seen as a good example of learning together, finding a balance together and discussing it thoroughly.

A balance is also needed in the expression of ideas. As previously mentioned, in some cultures people are more prone to speak freely and may dominate the discussion without realizing that their behavior is restricting others. People in charge of discussing and decision making should learn to balance the discussion to bring many perspectives into the discussions.

“As I see it, for the most part, workers are Lao people, ideas are from the foreigners. And they just have to do like they are told. If the Lao people would have

ideas and you would incorporate their ideas into work, it would feel like this is a shared project.” (NPA1ln)

When all parties in a discussion can feel they have contributed equally to an idea it brings a sense of pride for the work. It motivates people to continue working together and growing together as partnering organizations. Resource sharing brings balance to organizational stability as well. For example, two weak organizations can support each other.

“If you know that I am having a training, you can draw from another source, then you come to me and tell me, I have some funds for training, and I know some people who need training, I have this much of funds, will it do.” (NPA5ln)

This balanced cooperation creates trust as repeated experiences together show stability in the relationships.

“This is the kind of cooperation that is sincere towards each other. Or if I see that you have funds for this place, you are working there, and your goal is to work there. I don't have funds, could you go and work over there since you have funds. It is a very good thing if we discuss with each other.” (NPA5ln)

Once the roles, strategies and objectives are worked out, there needs to be a respectful balance on how to keep the set limits and follow all the agreements.

“we normally develop an action plan that, at the beginning of that agreement. So there is some kind of planning. It's difficult. you have to be careful to strike up a balance between being respectful and sticking to agreements or being clear about agreements or when you can't keep them and ... being seen as pushy and paternalistic. So it's the whole thing about mutual respects. I think that is one of the areas where we try to strike a balance. [Being] respectful and also make sure that things keep moving forward” (INGO4fn)

The ability to keep a balance of sticking to agreement and not appearing pushy takes some diplomacy and flexibility.

Relationships can be fragile. Much care has to be taken to build and maintain them. With cultural conflicts and troubles understanding each other, the task becomes difficult. This, therefore, requires more assistance in the form of a mediator who can help understand each side. The mediator role is taken on by someone with diplomacy and understanding of both sides. If there is a conflict due to cultural differences, this person may try to explain to both sides what the other is meaning. In a case of intercultural interaction where there might be a gap in understanding due to cultural differences, the mediator is there to help both sides communicate and understand each other better. The need for this arises especially from conflict.

Constructive criticism is used as a positive tool to develop strategies of projects and to improve methods used in the organizations. This space for constructive criticism is meant as improvement and not as a judgment of the other's work.

“we try to look at the proposal not as something we are judging but as something we can improve together” (INGO2fn).

The rules of direct and indirect communication may have much impact on how people interpret the meaning of the message. There needs to be an attitude of patience and being careful as to how one addresses things to help improve social relations in the workplace.

“Even when we understand their way, but when they are angry at us, we get stressed out. And I told the foreigners that this is the Lao culture, you must do like this and this. They got frustrated, why does it have to be like that. (NPA11n)

In the Lao culture it may be inappropriate to show anger. So when a foreigner who does not share this same value shows strong emotions as a part of their persuasiveness, the Lao person can naturally feel stressed even if they are knowledgeable of these types of cultural differences. In the same way foreigners may also feel frustration dealing with cultural differences.

It can be argued that over time people can reach a complete understanding of each other. This assumption is too simplistic. There are elements of another culture that one may understand at the face value but they still remain somewhat mysterious, and predicting the response or next step of the other can be challenging. (Memo 2015)

“They were feeling distressed, because they didn't know how to please him, because his style and our Asian styles don't mix together very well. They tried to do it, but they didn't know it very well.” (NPA11n)

The need to please other coworkers, especially the leadership is strong, and not knowing how to please can cause stress. The Lao staff want to please the foreigner but they do not understand what the foreigner wants or expects as they have different cultural expectations of what the result will be.

Asking questions and asking for help is communication that is done in a context where there is some trust. These types of communications can expose one's weaknesses or lacking attributes.

The fear of judgment was brought up often by Lao development workers. The fear of judgment can prevent people from asking for help, asking questions or honestly reporting

failures and weaknesses. When INGOs are the money holding party, this fear of judgment is greater. If the INGO can foster a trial and error, or allow for failure when learning, then the NPAs are more likely to learn to trust that the INGO will not to judge them. Mediation can help the cooperation concerning this issue.

” Lao staff, depending on who they, they are talking to, will find it more difficult especially if they are older directors of NPAs for example. I mean [Name of foreigner] also has her age as an advantage. (laughing)” (INGO4fn)

After analyzing how criticism, blame and judging are fears Lao staff often have when dealing with foreign staff, I started to wonder how to deal with correcting a problem or a mistake. The answer for this may be beyond the scope of this thesis, but in an attempt to answer this complex culturally charged question, I drew upon a conversation I had with a Thai development worker working in Laos.

We discussed about the sensitivity of criticism in the Lao culture and the issue of needing to correct someone. The story is of two contrasting approaches of foreigners working in Thailand. Both had spent much time in Thailand and spoke the language. At a training event a foreigner was being translated by a Thai woman. The Thai woman made a mistake in translation by omitting important information. The first foreigner noticed it and called the translator's attention saying that she had translated wrongly. This caused much stress and grief to the translator. When the translator later again made a mistake, the second foreigner raised her hand and with very polite and respectful language asked the translator if she could add to what the translator had already told. The translator reacted to this positively and felt respected by the foreigner. The lesson of this story, according to the development worker, was that sometimes we adhere to strictly to our own country's rules and forget to observe how the local social norms may be very different. The first foreigner publicly pointed out the translator's error whereas the second foreigner showed respect to the translator by not shaming her in front of everyone, but covered her mistake by offering the missing information as her own comment. (Field notes 2015)

In this chapter I have outlined the core of this study. Grounded theory is about seeing categories and sub-categories emerging from the data to show a social process. A substantive process model has been explained with data evidence that supports the processes. The process model of trust building in Lao civil society partnerships between INGOs and NPAs is founded on relationship building. The three sub-categories include building relationship, maintaining relationship and moving forward together. These sub-categories together with underlying characteristics of relationship building, being respectful and effectively communicating make up the core of the story of trust building for more successful partnership. The core concepts of this theory will then be compared with some literature in the next chapter.

## 5. LITERATURE INTEGRATION

The purpose of this thesis is to construct a substantive theory based on a case study of perceptions of field workers in Laos doing partnership between two in-country organizations, one being an International Non-Governmental Organization, the other being the local organization called Non-Profit Association. The substantive process model shows a story of partnership between these organizations and the path towards a trusting relationship.

Traditionally grounded theory is very strict about not doing a literature review prior to the research, analytic and theory generation phase. The ideal is to avoid engaging in other theoretical frameworks, concepts, hypotheses or theoretical ideas that could be imposed on the research that may not even be relevant to the specific study. This danger of 'contaminating' the data collection, analysis and theoretical development can threaten the originality, authenticity and quality of the grounded theory. The goal is to let the categories emerge from the data and form their own framework. Some would argue that due to the unpredictable nature of grounded theory research, relevant literature may not be found by the researcher at the beginning of the research as the concepts have not yet developed. This may make it difficult to know where to look for support literature and may arguably be a waste of time. (Dunne 2011, 116) At later stages, preferably after the analytical process is complete, integrating literature is important for demonstrating how the study can build on and compare with previous existing studies and theory. Reading of literature in other fields is encouraged for boosting theoretical thinking. (Chramaz 2006, 163–167)

First, I will give a brief overview on research done in NGO partnership focusing on the key points of effective partnership and how these researches are similar and different from my research. Secondly, I will talk about trust and social capital as a theoretical concept and give a brief overview of major trust theories. Lastly, I will talk about how to be culturally sensitive in multicultural situations.

## 5.1 Partnership in International Development and Cooperation

Much research has been done on partnership with the greatest question being, what exactly is partnership in the international development cooperation sector. The controversy over the definition stems from the disconnection between theory and practice. In theory, partnership should be about solidarity and mutuality. (Brehm 2001, 7) This entails having clearly defined expectations, rights and responsibilities, accountability, transparency and truly being interdependent in sharing and planning together for mutual benefit. This kind of ideal partnership also should follow values of equality, joint commitment, long term interaction, shared responsibilities, reciprocal obligations, and a balance of power. (Brehm 2001, 14–15; Hudock 1999, 20)

However, in practice partnership seems to look more paternalistic (see Eriksson-Baaz 2005). One major factor is the flow of funding. Often the INGOs are channeling the money to the local NGOs which gives the INGO the more powerful position. Much accountability is upward with very little downward accountability (Ebrahim 2003a, 816; Hudock 1999 25–27). It was found that many NGOs and their local partners had much emphasis on upward and external accountability. Many INGOs are the middle-man between donors and the local partner for funding, which results in the upward accountability emphasis. This means the local partners are reporting and being evaluated while the INGO does not show much accountability to the local partners. (Ebrahim 2003a, 819) Some evidence suggests that in partnerships where there is a continued commitment to power-sharing the trust-relationship is strengthened and the partnership becomes more sustainable (Jagosh et. al 2015).

Accountability in my research was not defined extensively as the informants did not go into detail about the process. It was assumed that the understanding of what accountability was did not need explanation. I did not realize this at the time of the interview, so I was not able to ask further questions about accountability and its meanings in the context. What I found later during my literature review was that accountability in civil society and NGOs is rather contested as most research on NGOs and their accountability has been done by researchers prone to see NGO work as beneficial, while the researchers for the private sector do not really concern themselves with comparing the accountability of the nonprofit

sector. One research paper did discuss how the private sector sometimes questions the self-assessing accountability of the Non-Profit Organizations. In this research the argument was made that civil society organizations do have much accountability but it appears in a different form. NGOs are looked at by many governments as charitable and thus have different laws about their performance accountability. NGOs are often under scrutiny and are carefully watched by media and the public about their informal means of accountability. The community they are embedded in mandates active accountability through the shared values, understandings and knowledge between staff and members, with whom they operate, cooperate and share professional knowledge. Furthermore, there are formal systems of reporting and disclosure that mirror other corporate accountability approaches. At the base, accountability is a right of the society, whereas in a partnership relationship between organizations, accountability emerges as a right for both. In short, Rob Gray, Jan Bebbington and David Collison claim that accountability is embedded in the relationship between the organization and the stakeholder groups. (Gray, Bebbington and Collison 2006, 354)

Another study described accountability in an NGO as taking the form of reports and disclosure statements, performance assessments and evaluations, participation, self-regulation, and social audits (Ebrahim 2003a, 819–820). Accountability in non-profit organizations take significantly different form from other institutions. Accountability has a relational nature that is formed through the inter- and intraorganizational relationships. Non-profit organizations take two roles as principals and agents of the relationship which makes accountability complicated. Each organization will have different characteristics as there are many different types of organizations. These organizations have internal and external processes to the accountability. There needs to be a balance of both as relying too much on external accountability will miss many aspects crucial to the nature of non-profit organizations. (Ebrahim 2003b, 208)

Recommendations for better partnership advised NGOs and their local partners to have strong shared value base. The INGO should seek to be evaluated also by its partners this way having more downward accountability. Also, the INGO should seek to change in any way that will make it a better partner for the local partner. This may include training skilled workers, renewing internal procedures and measures that are used for achievements and improving the organizations agility and flexibility.(Fowler 2000, 9) The INGO should

try to collaborate for a long-term partnership and try not to partner only to implement projects. Often short-term and functional partnerships are preferred for fast results but are not a sustainable relationship for future collaboration. (Fowler 2000, 9) This is interesting to me as this author calls for the INGO to become internally more accountable as a partner to the local organization, and to change to become a better partner for the partnership's sake rather than having more projects successfully implemented. The projects should only be a means to a partnership. (Fowler 2000, 9)

Another issue with the partnership power imbalance is that the local partners often are not equal in capacity with the INGOs. This creates problems in accountability, dependency and mutual benefit. The shift has been to fix the problem by increasing funding for capacity building. The goal with capacity building is to create more sustainable local organizations that can eventually take over when the INGOs leave. Capacity building of the local organizations helps them to become empowered by learning how to continue services, capitalize skills, teach technical skills and be a financially self-supporting institution. (Althair 2015, 5–6)

Ideal partnership principles sound effective and have led to partnership becoming the go-to when it comes to so-called sustainable development. In many cases, including many of the INGOs and NPAs I interviewed, the rationale for partnership is to have access to share the resources. The local organizations have extensive knowledge of the development target group and know the way of the country, which is essential for the INGOs. From my research I found that informants were concerned about shared values, clearer roles and responsibilities, accountability, discussing and deciding everything together, and sharing resources. Sharing resources entailed many aspects including knowledge sharing, technical skill exchanges, and capacity building for the NPA. The INGO would benefit from the expertise of the partner in the target country's ways and systems, and the connections to the target population. The NPA would benefit from the INGOs international connections, funding, technical expertise, and capacity building. One of two major types of projects commonly occurs: projects implemented by the NPA or capacity building of the NPA. The project implementation often was designed by the INGO and funded by the INGO and the NPA would implement the project and then report back to the INGO. This created an upward accountability through reporting (Field notes and interviews).

## 5.2 Trust

What is trust? The online Merriam-Webster dictionary defines trust as a “belief that someone or something is reliable, good, honest, effective etc.” (trust 2015). This definition gives a sense of seeing another person to have traditional values of honor and good character, someone one can count on.

However, from a sociological perspective trust is a very complex social concept that has been researched extensively, yet does not always reach the discussions of mainstream research (Kramer and Cook 2004; Sztompka 1999). Trust has also been studied in various other disciplines such as economics (see Fukuyama 1995), psychology (see Mitzal 1998) and others, each trying to define trust and describe how trust is important for social life. Trust is essential for social life, because humans are not capable of knowing everything and having certainty of the future. Social reality makes this even more difficult as each person has their own motivations, reasons and self-interests (Mitzal 1998, 12–13). With a world full of social actors, it is almost impossible to predict with absolute certainty what the future holds. We decide and act toward future events. We try to act in predictable ways and respond to events. For each action one has to make calculations based on knowledge of how things work and what might happen. But, it is impossible to know everything and go through all possible options which result in the need to trust.

“Trust is a bet about the future contingent actions of others” (Sztompka 1999, 25) Sztompka was able to simplify a theoretical definition of trust to mean a “bet” on someone or something. We have different levels of trust toward different objects and roles. Trust is most often granted to people we feel some type of imagined community even if we don't personally know them. We also trust different social roles more or less. We put a lot of trust in doctors, parents, teachers and religious leaders. We can place trust in institutions or even systems of technology such as the Internet. (Sztompka 1999, 41–44)

My research does not seek to define trust but how trust is built. Much of the classic theories on trust are about defining trust which is why I have included a discussion and review of the definition of trust. But it is important to understand the basis of trust as a bet on other people about the future because in an international setting this can be difficult. Trust is needed in uncertainty. International development cooperation partnerships are set

in a context where things can seem very unpredictable because there are different cultures framing the way people respond to situations.

Sztompka argues that there are three grounds to trust on. People will grant trust based on reflected trustworthiness, personal trustworthiness and their own trust culture. Reflected trustworthiness is based on the perception of their reputation, performance and appearance. Personal trustworthiness is a disposition to trust, where a person trusts without much calculation and knowledge of the other person based on previous relationships of trust. Trust culture is based on a system of norms and values that direct decisions to grant trust or mistrust. The culture of trust can be established so strongly that it will affect the trust decisions even when it goes against self-interest. (Sztompka 1999, 41–48)

According to Fukuyama, the level of trust in a culture can be categorized as high-trust or low-trust societies. He argues that societies with higher trust for non-kin community members are more likely to participate in volunteer associational activities. This is a part of the development of the larger economic stability thus making trust a necessary part of viable economic systems. Fukuyama believes humans are mostly by nature rational and self-serving with a portion of irrational and self-defeating qualities. He believes that this is due to cultural habits of society such as the trust culture of Stompka's. (Fukuyama 1995 as cited in Sztompka 1999, 68) Trust by its nature is in every kind of social relationship (Kadefors 2004) and thus also is a part of partnership. Trust produces a sense of community where working together is easier and social life feels more predictable (Misztal 1996, 18). In our global society we can no longer assume trust based on a sense of commonality and understanding, which is why there has to be ways to generate sustaining and enriching solidarity, tolerance and legitimacy (Misztal 1996: 207).

Various studies in different fields have found that trust plays a role in workers' performance (Kadefors 2004, 180; Vanhala 2011), commitment, satisfaction (Vanhala 2011, 20) and improving working culture (Moxley 2001). Others argue that trust is important to build well-functioning relationships (Karlsen et al. 2008, 19). In order to grow a foundation in trust, work places should develop team building and communication early on. This foundation in trust makes collaboration more a disposition that is guided by intuitive and emotional reactions. It also brings sensitivity to behavior in ways such as showing respect and concern. (Kadefors 2004, 181) In a project-stakeholder relationship

research, it was found that the most important factors to building trust included improving communication skills, behaving reliably, showing commitment, being sincere, benevolent and competent, obtaining and acting with integrity, working towards reaching project milestones and establishing common goals. Because relationships and trust are reciprocal, it is something that has to be earned, yet remains fragile. (Karlsen et al. 2008, 19)

Amadou Diallo and Denis Thuillier show that trust and communication are inseparable and critical factors for project success in international development. The critical importance of the project team atmosphere shows the need for more team building in the initial stages of projects. On-site visits of coordinators and face-to-face communication and meetings establish trust. (Diallo and Thuillier 2005, 244) A higher level of trust by contrast heightens project performance. The perception of capability and fairness that the organizations portray to its workers and its partners influences how much trust one can put in it (Vanhala 2011, 20). In comparison with this previous research, it can be said that many of the same elements are also found in my research.

On the opposite spectrum of trust is mistrust. Mistrust is seen to perpetuate fear, negative assumptions, self-protective behavior and it reinforces negative assumptions according to Kathleen D. Ryan and Daniel K. Oestreich in *How to Drive Fear Out of the Work Place* (1998). The book identifies fear as the reason people don't speak up and discuss issues openly in the workplace. Fear stifles creativity and participation of workers. One of the fundamental strategies given to build high-trust work environments was to build relationships without fear. This includes mutual helpfulness, understanding, trusting, serving a reality check for one another, providing feedback from one another, influencing each other's ideas and decisions with willingness to be influenced, finding ways to enjoy each other's company by being humorous and creative in problem solving, respecting difference in backgrounds and talents, being reliant on each other's expertise, having the willingness to work through conflicts and disagreements, having common commitment to the same goal and each other's success, straightforward communication and having rapport and honesty with one another. (Moxley 2001) From the previous list, many similarities with my findings in Lao civil society sector can be drawn. These concepts show relationship building, methods of avoiding fear, and building trust.

Ryan and Oestreich also identify methods managers can use to promote less fearful and more trusting working environments. The following list has many similar applications as was identified in my study: listening, being a role model, initiating trust, being open to feedback, adjusting personal behavior, being vigilant, dealing with own fears, facilitating discussion, taking a developmental learning oriented approach, and getting outside consultant help (Moxley 2001) What this shows is that the methods to have effective and cohesive workplace relations are not that different from culture to culture, but it does not mean that the working cultures are similar. These methods need to be applied to each separate culture in order to find the working culture that is most beneficial for a high trusting and low fear working place. Moreover, Anna Kadefors argues that trust plays an important role in client-contract relationships in construction projects. She shows that close monitoring of performance creates a climate of distrust which also introduces opportunism and impedes cooperative interaction. (Kadefors 2004, 176)

Another concept that is interlinked with trust is social capital. The concept was popularized by Putnam, Bourdieu and Coleman who are all from different fields of study (Field 2003, 11-40). Social capital, like trust, has many contested definitions. Francis Fukuyama sees social capital as the combination of norms and values which is rooted in a culture that is a resource from which people can draw. He argues that trust is secondary to social capital (Fukuyama 1993, 10–11). Others have also argued that trust is only one part of social capital along with networks and norms. Social capital according to Putnam is resources and features of social organization that can help one achieve what may be difficult or impossible to achieve alone (Putnam 2000, 18–25). The aspects of social organization which include trust, norms and networks can improve efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action (Putnam 1993, 167 cited by Field 2003, 31). Social capital in essence is a set of the resources that one has at disposal because of the relationships they have, or institutions they are connected with, and the value system or norms one follows. In the purest form, social capital implicates that relationships matter (Field 2003, 12).

The importance that social capital has to my substantive process model is that in essence all the processes of building relationship and maintaining relationship could be interpreted from the sense of social capital as resources to gain trust and thus move forward. My grounded theory model is concerned with the production of social capital. This was not evident until the theoretical integration phase as I was not familiar with the concept before.

In comparison to Fukuyama's claims on the nature of the relationship between trust and social capital I can concur that social capital is the primary component to trust.

### **5.3 Adjusting to Multicultural Settings**

In my research, properties that emerged under the starting attitudes of being open-minded, patient, honest, respectful and sincere led me to literature on intercultural sensitivity. Chen and Starosta use the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) and found that it is correlated with interaction, attentiveness, impression, rewarding, self-esteem, self-monitoring, and perspective taking. Individuals scoring high in these skills were likely to have high intercultural effectiveness and intercultural communication attitude scales. (Chen and Starosta 2000) An earlier study by Chen and Starosta identified cultural sensitivity also as open-mindedness, empathy, interaction, involvement, and non-judgment (1997, 5).

Stella Ting-Toomey developed a model for intercultural competence which includes appropriateness, effectiveness, adaptability and satisfaction. These four criteria can be used to learn how to mediate facework in intercultural conflict situations which is based on the face-negotiation theory. This theory makes assumptions about social interaction in relation to people's facework. (Ting-Toomey 2010, 21–37)

Face-negotiation theory assumes that all people try to do some type of face-negotiating in all communication situations. The face becomes problematic in an emotionally threatening situation where one's identity is called into question. The styles and concerns of facework is shaped by the cultural value spectrum of individualism-collectivism and small-large power distances. The use of particular facework behavior is determined by value dimensions of individual, relational and situational factors. To have competent facework managing skills one needs to have knowledge, mindfulness and communication skills in managing vulnerable identity-based conflict situations. (Ting-Toomey 2010, 21–37)

There are four parts to becoming competent in facework mediation. First is the knowledge dimension which includes knowing the dualities of individualism-collectivism, small-large power distance, self-face models, and facework communication styles. Then there is the

interaction skills which includes mindful listening, mindful observation, facework management, trust-building and collaborative dialogue. The next one is mindfulness dimension which is about doing mindful reflexivity, openness to novelty, multiple visions, analytical empathy and mindful creativity. The last aspect is the facework competence, criteria which includes perceived appropriateness, perceived effectiveness, mutual adaptability and mutual satisfaction. (Ting-Toomey 2010, 21–37) I found that many elements of facework competence and intercultural sensitivity competence have similarities to the findings in my research.

In intercultural interaction, one is encountering a new culture with a new set of norms and values. This foreign culture at first will seem strange and unintelligible. The process of learning and understanding is called sense making. Sense making is the interplay of action and interpretation. One will adjust to the events and information that is not part of their normal expectations. (Mughan and O'shea 2010, 110–111) This is a cognitive activity that one processes in constructing a mental model of the situation they are placed in. This model then will help them cope and assess how the situation might evolve over time. When talking about sense making in the context of an organization it is “a collaborative process of creating shared awareness and understanding out of different individuals' perspectives and varied interests” (Weick 2000 cited by Mughan and O'shea 2010, 111). This process of creating shared awareness and understanding affects the individual's activities because of the social nature of the exchange. Making sense is initially recognized when there is a lack of order. The first steps include noticing the unknown phenomena. Next they are labeled to allow individuals to be able to communicate about and manage them. After one understands, the abstract concepts are connected to concrete concepts and everything can finally be organized through communication. There are some element of knowledge acquiring and recognizing one's own cultural influences. Making sense requires attributes of ambiguity, active listening and mindfulness. This mindfulness comes close to what my substantive theory has tried to offer in the form of starting attitudes. Mindfulness is about staying open and actively attentive in the present. On the website Psychology Today, mindfulness is defined as the following:

“When you're mindful, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness means living in the moment and awakening to experience.”  
(Mindfulness 2015, 1)

I find it important to note that mindfulness is about not judging which came up in my research as important for not creating fear or distrust in vulnerable situations. Being non-judgmental also puts oneself in a vulnerable position as not setting up systems that may seem more efficient or entering situations where one might be wrong. It is an act of trust toward the other: trusting that their way might make sense after all.

Mezirow describes transformative learning theory as a process of learning for adults. The premise he makes is that everyone has gone through a formative learning process during their childhood through socialization and schooling. This sets the norms, values, beliefs and the way of making meaning of everyday life that for the most part is taken for granted. This learning is a process of becoming self-aware and realizing where one comes from and is able to express this. Each individual has a unique starting point, process and end. The individual learns to critically negotiate meanings, purposes and values. They do this reflectively and rationally instead of passively accepting social realities that are defined by others around them. (Mezirow 1991, 1–36)

Some of the connecting points of this theory with my research can be compared. A few of the highlights in the transformation that are related would be the sharing of social reality being constantly negotiated through communication and that the process of learning and experiencing, and “making meaning” is done intentionally. Intentionality requires reflection, problem solving, and validity testing through rational discourse. In order to move forward in learning all of these elements must happen intentionally. If we compare this to the trust building process model constructed in this thesis we can compare the active building of the three categories of relationship, respect and communication as areas where individuals can intentionally learn to communicate better, to respect through learning the culture and build relationships. The whole process is a kind of cultural learning that happens. This theory sees learning as problem solving activity. The individual is learning by interacting in a new environment with different kinds of people from different world views with different values, customs, norms, and communication languages. The language also is structured in the culture. This type of active choice to learn in a transformative manner may lead to better learning outcomes and possibly help the cooperation due to better understanding of each other and in effect move toward more trust. Transformative learning theory, in short, means that individuals start with pre-learned assumptions about the lifeworld (everyday life) and through much reflection, validation and critical thinking

transform their previous knowledge instead of adding to knowledge (Mezirow 1991, 1–36). The transformation theory is useful for understanding the process that goes on in the cultural learning process of both partners, but it does not give a holistic framework for building trust. It makes no claims of what comes after transformative learning when placed in a context of relationships, nor the impact the learning has on those relationships. In order to learn one has to have some sort of respect toward the new; nevertheless this theory does not discuss it very much.

To show the importance of cross-cultural communication sensitivity I will talk about conflict management. In my research I used some examples of cultural conflicts. A study done in cross-national conflict management style differences shows that Chinese and US managers have different conflict resolution styles. The Chinese managers tend to use an avoiding style to conflict due to their values rooted in conformity and tradition, while the managers in the US used a more competitive style to try and find the best way to resolve a conflict which pointed to the cultural value of individual achievement and self-enhancement. The study concluded that the conflict style had fewer differences between the countries than did the value dimensions (Morris et al. 1998). This means that the values held, highly impact the style or methods used for conflict resolution. This notion is supported by the views portrayed in the interviews for my research. What Morris et al. research suggests for further research is about the possibilities of the effects different status of the person in conflict can have (1998). This is also noted in my research but not researched as a variable. A similar study conducted in Thailand found that the preferred conflict management styles by Thai managers was avoiding and obliging. The amount of time spent abroad affected negatively to an individual's preference to this style and positively to alternative conflict management styles such as dominating conflict management style (Boonsathorn 2007, 205). Among nurses, accommodation is often used to manage conflicts (Kunaviktikul et al. 2000). In a comparison with Hong Kong and the US management styles, it was found that managers from Hong Kong showed concern of collective interests and concern for authority. They were more likely to involve higher management in conflict resolution. The American managers discussed parties' interests and synthesized multiple issues. They resolved a greater number of issues and reached more integrative outcomes. This study showed that cultural norms have a significant effect on methods used to reach an outcome (Tinsley and Brett 1997). A 1999 study on individualistic and collectivist societies in relation to conflict situations showed that

individualistic societies preferred assertiveness to achieve justice while collectivists preferred avoidance due to concern for relationship with others. The study shows a difference in cultural values toward justice and the preservation of social relationships and norms (Ohbuchi, Fukushima and Tedeschi 1999).

In this chapter I have explored literature that corresponds with the analytical findings of the substantive process model of trust building that was detailed in the previous chapter. I discussed two major social theory concepts of trust and social capital and reviewed development partnership theory to compare with my findings. The purpose of literature integration was to bring literary critique and compare it to my model to see the possible connections that can be made with it at a more formalized theoretical framework. Lastly, I reviewed studies on how to work effectively in intercultural work places. This entails sensitivity to cultures, transformative learning and conflict mediation. In the next section I will discuss my thoughts about the research findings and what limitations and further studies could improve this study.

## **6. Discussion**

In this chapter I will discuss first the findings of this thesis which is the substantive process model of trust building through relationship building in Lao development sector partnerships. I will then discuss the reliability of this study and any ethical concerns. Lastly, I will discuss my suggestions for further research.

I started my research with an idea of finding what good partnership in Laos is. I can say I had quite little knowledge of what this really entailed at the beginning. My journey took me through learning about civil society, to understanding the current context of Lao civil society. Within the Lao civil society, the two players I became most interested in were the International Non-Governmental Organizations and the Non-Profit Associations. I had the privilege to do an internship in a Lao NPA and really get to know how the situation and setting really look like. I came to know many people from both NPAs and INGOs and learned a lot about the issues with development and partnership that were going on in Laos in 2014. I still keep in contact with some people there to learn more about development work in Laos. Laos is a unique country in the middle of more populous South East Asian countries. Each country should be looked at individually within its own context. By doing my study in Laos I have tried to contribute to the small number of research done in Laos.

### **6.1 Findings**

My findings that developed into a substantive process model show a story of building trust through relationship, respect and communication. The process takes three major steps to move toward creating a relationship where trust can continually be built.

The first stage, building a relationship, involves having a starting attitude that is open-minded, sincere, honest, respectful and patient. Having a good starting attitude shows respect to the new culture but it also helps the acting party to learn and adapt, which is why the second part of the first stage is about adjusting. Adjusting involves considering others and being flexible to differences and changes in unpredictable situations.

The second stage is about maintaining a relationship which involves becoming vulnerable, investing in the relationship and learning. The properties between the first stage and the

second stage are parallel and may happen simultaneously in some cases, but the maintaining relationship stage is more than a cognitive decision to be open to a new relationship in an intercultural setting. The second stage involves investing emotionally and physically into the relationship. It is not only about seeing and understanding the difference, but understanding at a level where one starts to change their behavior to actively and intentionally maintain the relationship.

The third stage, moving forward together, is different from the first two stages in that its more formal and systematic. The first set of properties deal with organizing the partnership in a way that it has a well set up framework. Secondly, the role of communication becomes increasingly important for cooperation. Clear and frequent communication helps to avoid misunderstandings and keeps both parties updated on the motives and goals of the other, and most importantly cooperating together through discussing everything relating to the partnership together. This includes important decisions and fixing or improving on the partnership. In the end balancing is where flexibility and structure come together to form more successful collaboration.

The reason I have placed these properties in the third stage is because examples given of risky partnerships or failed partnerships by the informants were rushed partnerships. The formal structures for partnership were established before a deeper get-to-know-you stage was done to see if the partnership was a good fit. Another example that drew my attention was that it really took time for some organizations to open up, be honest and let the INGO help in capacity building. This showed me that relationship is a base in building trust in the Lao context. Sound institutional structures, well framed partnership, good accountability and transparency would not hold without a foundation in relationship. I do not claim to understand Lao culture thoroughly, but I have come to learn that the social structures of a more collectivistic society will operate differently than in the West.

Through this grounded theory approach inquiry of the development workers in Laos on their perceptions of better partnership, I found that most of the discussion was around the concept of relationship and trust building. Other literature talks about how the new trend of partnership should focus more on doing real sustainable development in these partnerships. This means to focus on the capacity building of the local organizations. What I would like to suggest is that in order to do real capacity building, the organizations really have to

rethink their approach to the partnership relationship. What I have learned through this research is that change comes from trust, and trust comes from a careful, patient and intentional relationship building. Once the relationship has been founded, it is less threatening to be honest with one another about weaknesses and strengths. In particular one informant shared how once trust was established things moved faster and real organizational development took place.

At the start of this research I expected to find that the biggest problem in having a successful partnership was due to a power difference. I expected to find clear tools that identified how to do a good partnership. What I found was that there was no clear step by step guideline of tools to be used for a successful partnership. The process of building a working partnership was a learning process for the people in the field as well. The complex interconnected elements of relationship, respect and communication in the process of becoming partners was hidden in the examples people gave. Social relationships are not simple. Grounded theory was able to guide me to look at the experiences shared by the informants and recognize the importance of trust building through a deeper relationship. As I was seeking the core category I did not expect to find trust as the main goal in the relationship building process that my participants were describing.

## **6.2 Reliability and Reflexivity**

Grounded theory as a method is not a linear one, which makes writing a linear report difficult (Dunne 2011, 120). This reality and the difficulty with grasping the fullness of what grounded theory really means in practice have taken me on a long learning path. Grounded theory is a complex method with many depths to it which also gives it the freshness as a research approach. A substantive theory can be of one case, this case can be compared with others and can be studied further to develop into a formal theory.

In the most basic form reflexivity is the act of becoming self-conscious as a researcher in relation to the researched. The problem that self-reflexivity is trying to address is the problem of social research and its supposed objectiveness. Reflexivity traditionally was used to try to make the research more objective through laying out all the personal biases, values, beliefs, and the starting point. Reflexivity does not make the research more

objective but it makes the researcher more aware of their social position and how they are interpreting the research. The problem is also what the researcher's position is in relation to the researched, when there is a power dimension. A researcher is often more educated, comes from the West and is observing the subject. This type of objectification should be avoided at all costs. It is better not to claim objectivity in defining the other. This problem is addressed by Spivak in her discussion of the subaltern (see Spivak 1988). The limitations of objectivity of a researcher that should be addressed through the reflexivity process (Kenway and McLeod 2004, 526–527). Who is the researcher, what is their background, how does this affect the research, and what does it mean for this research topic to be studied in the specific institution? In this section I would further like to reflect on my research process.

“In reality, of course, 'doing science' is a highly social enterprise and scientists' personal beliefs and values enter the process throughout. The subjects they choose to study will depend on their previous personal studies and reading, and the hypotheses or research questions will represent their own ideas on the subject. The methods of data collection and the ways the data are analyzed are also the result of numerous personal decisions taken by the particular researchers, and their own perceptions will condition the interpretations they make.” (Webb 1992, 748)

In this research I have chosen to write in first person as I find this most appropriate to stay grounded in personable language and not perpetuate a distant researcher. The way I present the research reflects my person and current position as a master's student. Through reflecting on my research process I am able to discuss honestly what influences were directed by choices and decisions and why certain options were not taken (Webb 1992, 747-750).

Constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) takes a very critical view of research by arguing that theories and data are constructed by the researcher as they interact in the field with the informants. The values, privileges, interactions, Geo-graphical locations, position, and perspective of the researcher give a tint on the data. In the present thesis I have shared reflections in the methodology chapter about methodological choices and ethical concerns involving the research process.

Grounded theory as a method gives very efficient methods for researchers to use to do as objective qualitative research as possible. Depending on the persistence of the researcher, these methods can be used along with reflexivity to bring about reliable social theory.

Grounded theory gives seven major guidelines for doing sound research. Firstly, the data collection and analysis are simultaneously involved. Secondly, constructing analytical codes and categories from the data are not preconceived through logically deduced hypotheses or previous theoretical frameworks. Thirdly, the constant comparison method of comparing each stage of the analysis is used to find emerging categories. Fourthly, the emerging categories advance the theory development during each step of the data collection and analysis. Fifthly, the importance of memo writing is to elaborate the categories, specify their properties, define the relationships between the categories and identify any possible gaps in the data. Sixthly, sampling is aimed toward the theory construction and doing more theoretical sampling for sample saturation and representation. And lastly, conducting the literature after the development of an independent analysis is done to compare and strengthen the findings.

Memos also provides me a space to reflect on my methodological and theoretical sensitivity development. Analyzing these reflections is a reflexivity exercise. Writing memos in the beginning was odd and tedious. Interestingly as the process of memoing was a part of building my theoretical sensitivity, it also was evident that as my theoretical sensitivity grew I became more aware of the importance of memo writing. Looking back I realize how much more I could have written and organized memos earlier in the research process.

### **6.3 Limitations**

For the scope of this study it was not relevant to consider gender differences in the generation of this theory. However, over the course of analysis I have started to wonder what differences in emphasis I would find, if I compared answers between genders and only generated substantive theory based on each gender. Even from the small sample I have been able to see that for men there is more of a concern for organizational structures, and for women relationships and conflict management were more evident. This, however, is not something I took special interest in, so I am not able to definitely say if there are such divides.

A limitation of this study in regard to grounded theory is that typically Grounded theory is conducted over a long period of time where the analysis and data collection happen simultaneously. Due to the limited time I was able to interview people in Laos this analytical process directing the later interviews was limited. The direction of this study could have potentially been somewhat different if multiple interviews rounds were made. The amount of information I received in just the first round of interviews was abundant to take multiple research paths.

## **6.4 Future Research**

This study has concentrated about perceptions of trust building process models in Lao development sector. It would be possible to concentrate in many other questions about this process. In the data there was interesting elements of power, conflict, cultural exchange, inter-cultural communication, isomorphism of organizations, patron-client relations between the organizations and more. It may be interesting to discuss any gender differences in perceptions of partnership building and trust building that was not present in this study.

A theoretical perspective on patron-client relations between organizations was something I was initially interested to study as many South-East Asian cultures operate with strict patron-client social structures with clearly defined hierarchy structures that are highly respected. I found interactions between the Lao, who are more inclined to interact and respond more according to a patron-client or a high power-distance cultural structure, and the foreigner who is not from a strong patron-client or a high power-distance culture. This interaction would be interesting to research as concerning how people navigate through the cultural exchange. From what I observed, the negotiations that were made sometimes seemed illogical to the foreigners. One example I witnessed of such cultural misunderstandings was during an interaction between a volunteer going against the hierarchical trickle down from the top structure. This individual tried to pay for a service out of gratitude but it ended up creating a misunderstanding. A more familiar example can be observed in the previous chapter in a quote about a foreigner feeling more at ease in approaching the partnering organization to correct an issue rather than the lower ranking Lao officers. Another example showed where respect for authority and age where cultural

inhibits what a westerner would perceive as effective communication. Along with this phenomenon the term “keng-jai”, which falls short of description when translated as consideration, would have to be studied more in depth in regard to power relations and interaction between Lao and foreign staff. What conflicts arise from this cultural value in the work place? Other concepts such as fear, pride, and face-loss or face-saving would greatly enhance this discussion.

I found that the more my theory developed the easier it was to find related literature from my properties and concepts. Brehm (2001, 53) explains much about NGO partnerships that I saw in Laos: the different types of partnerships and what they did. In particular she pointed out the transition of moving away from operational partnership toward a partnership where the NGOs are working together with the local partners. This shift in partnership modes was evident in Laos. I have chosen to talk about the positive processes of building trust in partnership, because partnerships working together will increasingly have to rely on trust.

In this chapter I discussed my thoughts on this research and the findings. Next I explored the reflexivity of my research process. And lastly I considered the major limitations to this study and my suggestions for future research in Lao civil society partnership.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the perceptions of civil society workers in Laos concerning the partnership between International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and Lao local Non-Profit Associations (NPAs) to find out what practices can improve a partnership to be more successful. In chapter one, I stated the research purpose and question with definitions to key terminology used in the thesis. In chapter two, I discussed the background and context to the study, providing a brief overview of Lao history and the emergence of the civil society in Laos. I then set up the context by describing the dynamic of partnership between INGOs and NPAs. The international development cooperation sector promotes partnership as a more efficient, sustainable and equal way to do development. This has led to partnerships all over the world. In the case of Laos, the young Lao Non-Profit Associations are partnering with International Non-Governmental Organizations. My research involved investigating the perceptions of workers in these organizations that were partnering to find out what practices contributed to a successful partnership.

In the third chapter, I explain my research methods. I employed grounded theory methods to code, analyze and develop a substantive process model that emerged from the interviews I collected. Grounded theory is an inductive research method that gives a structured method as a guide for theory generation, which takes the researcher through every step in the research. The methods guide the researcher to collecting data and analyzing it concurrently, generating theory through constant comparative analysis with the help of memoing, coding, theoretical sampling and category selection. At the last stage, theoretical integration is used to compare the generated theory with existing literature. In this thesis, a substantive theory was generated from emerged categories found in the data. The data was comprised of 11 interviews of development work professionals working in Vientiane, Laos in the fall of 2014.

In chapter four I present the research body. I first guide the reader through the most significant analytical processes and changes to the generation of the substantive process model about trust building in partnerships in the Lao development sector. In this process, I present the core category, sub-categories and their properties. The core category that

emerged was trust building. The sub-categories which build the trust building process are “building a relationship” with the partner, “maintaining the relationship” and “moving forward together”. Each of the sub-categories is explained through properties that are directly derived from the data. These properties are described in groups of more abstract categories which I have named descriptive categories. These descriptive categories work to explain at a more general level how the properties point to the sub-categories.

Briefly explained, the substantive process model of trust building is made up of continuous and cumulative stages of relationship building. In the first stage of building a relationship both partners need to enter with a starting attitude of being open-minded, patient, sincere, respectful, and honest. Building a relationship implicated adjusting to one another by being considerate toward each other and being flexible. In the second stage of maintaining relationships, partners should approach each other by being openhearted, non-judgmental and committed. Maintaining relationships involves investing time through getting to know one another and spending time together. Maintaining relationships requires some learning which comes through listening, understanding and changing or improving oneself. The last stage of moving forward together brings in more systematic and functional processes of partnership interaction. The organization of the structure of the partnership comes through defining the roles and responsibilities and being accountable. Communicating becomes evidently important in this stage as clear and regular communication is essential. Moving forward together requires cooperation through discussing decisions together, maintaining a balance and continually mediating between actors to continue the mutual understanding and resolve potential conflicts.

Embedded in the process are relationship building, respecting each other, and communicating to building trust in one another. The first sub-category, building a relationship is described by the starting attitude and adjusting to a new work setting that involves cultural exchange. The second sub-category, maintaining a relationship, is about becoming vulnerable, investing into the relationships and learning to understand each other. The third sub-category is about moving forward together, which involves setting up organizational structures that allow a clear framework of partnership, good communication and cooperating together.

In chapter five I integrate literature with the substantive theory. I discussed literature that I was directed to by the findings in my analytical phase. I do this by discussing previous research and theoretical perspectives on some corresponding concepts. I open the chapter with a short discussion on why it is important to leave the literature integration to the last part of the grounded theory research approach. The previous literature of partnership focuses on defining what the partnership in practice is and how partnership can be made more equal and more sustainable for the southern NGOs. Partnership is ideally used for more effective development. However, the idealistic view of an equal partnership is often less equal and accountability tends to go upward. Accountability in NGOs takes on a different kind of accountability involving a mix of internal and external accountability.

Recommendations given by other researchers for better partnership indicated the positive effects of shared values, flexibility, agility, more equalized power dynamics, long-term partnerships and having a goal of becoming better partners rather than focusing on project implementation. Many of these findings are parallel with the findings to my research, but direct similarities can be found in the flexibility and focusing building a better long-term partnership.

The theoretical integration surrounds two major theoretical concepts of trust and social capital, looking at what is trust in social theory and how it is used in research to understand organizational behavior and the possibilities of improving organizational behavior by increasing trust. Trust is a complex and widely studied concept, which at the base is about placing a bet about the future depending the actions of others. In an unpredictable environment, trust is needed to cope. Trust is needed for partnerships. Trust plays a role in improving workers performance. Mistrust and fear are counterproductive to the partnership.

Social capital is integral to any discussion about relationships which is why the literature about it is important to include. In this research, social capital can be mirrored as the whole process to trust building. In the same way, the literature discussed how social capital can create trust.

A discussion regarding adjusting to multicultural settings is accompanied with reviews of studies using theories of intercultural sensitivity, face-negotiation theory, sense making,

and transformative learning theory. These theories are comparable to my descriptive concepts of attitudes, adjusting, learning, and communicating. This literature supports the importance of a proactive approach to learning and understanding the other culture for a better partnership.

In chapter six, I open a reflective discussion on my study findings and the research process. I consider the limitations to the study and recommendations for future studies.

I first briefly overview some conclusions I made from my findings and what their implications are. Then I discuss reflexivity and how it helps build reliability to my study through constant reflection and locating myself in relation to the research.

The limitations of this study were the limited access to do multiple interview rounds for further theory development and the lack of resources to do a more extensive study that could include possible gender differences. For future studies I recommend research that would particularly start theoretically and conceptually from the relationship building perspective. This could broaden and deepen the discussion on what the differences are between individual relationships between organization members and how are these individual relationships used to build organizational level trust relationships. Future studies could also do a longer study on how the concept of time plays a major role in partnership building particularly in the Lao context.

This research led me to understand that development work in Laos is highly dependent on being open to interactions with people of different values and cultures, but most importantly this research shows the value in build interpersonal relationships for the sake of building trust. Trust brings the individuals in both organizations together without fear of judgment and with honesty to find a way together to move forward to a better partnership.

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## **Appendixes: Research request and consent forms**

### **Appendix 1: Semi-structured thematic interview format**

#### **Interview Questions**

Context (roles and responsibilities)

1. What does partnership between organizations mean in your opinion?
2. What INGOs are partnering with your association?
3. What does your association benefit from partnering with an INGO?
4. How long have you worked in partnership with each INGO?
5. What kind of work do you do together as partners?
6. Projects:
  - Describe the purpose of the project?
  - Describe the flow of money from the donor to the target group?
  - How are the tasks and roles divided between the partners?
  - Where are most of the decisions about the project activities made?
  - Who implements the activities?
  - Do the roles and responsibilities in the project change over time?

#### **Successes and challenges of Partnership**

7. What does a successful project mean to you?
8. Please describe an example of a successful project.
9. Please briefly describe an example of a weaker or challenging project.
10. In these scenarios, what qualities of the partnership contributed to success?
11. In these scenarios, what qualities of the partnership were challenging?

#### **Decision making Accountability and Transparency**

12. What do you do to include your partner in decision making?
  - a. In a case where it is difficult to include the partner... because?
  - b. In a case where it has been an easy task the partner..... because?
13. Do you have examples of when you did not understand why a decision was made by your partner?
14. How do you share information and how frequently, and involving which staff? (Frequency of emails, face-to-face, casual meet-ups, meetings, phone calls?)
15. What do you think are the qualities of good communication with your partner?
16. How have you and your partner built trust before and during these projects?
17. What processes do you and your partner have in place for Monitoring and Evaluation of your projects?

#### **Other**

18. If a new iNGO or NPA approached you wanting advice on how to build a strong partnership for a project they would like to start, what recommendations would you give?

## Appendix 2: Research request forms

### INTERVIEW REQUEST LETTER

My name is Sky Purdin and I am a Master's student at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. I am studying Development and International Cooperation. I am writing my thesis about partnership cooperation between INGOs and local non-profit associations in Laos.

I am interested to hear the views of Lao development workers about partnership between INGOs and NPOs. This is an opportunity to hear the voice and opinions of Lao workers to have a fuller understanding about how partnership for development is best done in Laos. Reflecting on the challenges and successes of past and present partnerships can help move toward better partnerships in the future.

I would be interested to hear your experiences, or if you could recommend me to someone in your organization who would be interested to let me interview about this topic. The interview questions will focus on roles and responsibilities between an existing partnership and what examples of success and challenges there have been in working through partnership.

The purpose of this interview will be for my Master's thesis. I will not be using any real names of organizations nor people's names in the final report. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Sky Purdin  
skypurdin@gmail.com

## Appendix 3: Consent form

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM (INTERVIEW)

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Sky Purdin from University of Jyväskylä. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about perceptions on partnership between iNGOs and NPAs in Vientiane, Laos. I will be one of approximately 10-15 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

Participation involves being interviewed by Sky Purdin. The interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

1. I understand that the researcher will NOT identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
2. If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher (Sky Purdin, [skypurdin@gmail.com](mailto:skypurdin@gmail.com)) or the Programme Coordinator in University of Jyväskylä (Jeremy Gould, [jeremy.j.gould@jyu.fi](mailto:jeremy.j.gould@jyu.fi), tel: +358408054128)

I have been offered a copy of this consent form.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

## Appendix 3: Reference Letter



Lao People's Democratic Republic  
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity  
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**LAO DISABLED PEOPLES' ASSOCIATION (LDPA)**  
Phonesavang-Nongtha Rd, Ban Phonesavang, Chanthabuly District  
P.O BOX: 6751 Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR.  
Tel: (+856 21) 562-963, (+856 21) 562-964). [www.ldpa.org.la](http://www.ldpa.org.la)

No. **1463** /LDPA  
Date **15 AUG 2014**

### Reference Letter

Lao Disabled People's Association (LDPA) is a non-profit association that works in disability rights promotion and different social and economic inclusion programs for people with disabilities. LDPA has hosted Sky Purdin as a volunteer for her intern placement for the University of Jyväskylä from June until the end of September. She has helped with various tasks and is helping to write a project proposal. Her time here is ending soon and she is preparing to do research for her Masters degree studies in Development and International Cooperation. Her thesis report will be on partnership between INGOs and NPAs. LDPA will help facilitate her research during this time. Please help support her by connecting her to some people at your organization who would be interested in being interviewed. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,



Me Bounvien Luangyot  
Executive President of LDPA