Strategy Formation in Pluralist Collaborative Networks: An Interactional Perspective

Alexandre Dubois

Department of Management and Organization
Hanken School of Economics
Helsinki
2014
**Title of thesis:**
Strategy Formation in Pluralist Collaborative Networks: An Interactional Perspective

**Abstract:**
Organizations exist in dynamic conditions and aligning their strategies in multiplayer networks is not enough to overcome competition and achieve success. They must engage in multiplayer strategies in collaborative conditions and enter strategic networks to reach an optimal strategic fit with the other organizations in their respective environment, which allows for the extraction of synergic value and relational rents. However, the pluralist conditions of the network may be the cause of conflicts between the different participants, which represents an important challenge for the network orchestrator, due to the diversity of interests represented in the network. This thesis, rooted in grounded theory, presents an interactional perspective on the formation of nascent inter-organizational strategies and how such strategies are designed, by proposing a model addressing the different phases, challenges and outcomes of such process, using a case study on the Plan Nord, a governmental initiative in the province of Quebec in which a public-private partnership (PPP) was created to develop sustainably the North of the province. The model suggests that dialogue and network orchestration are essential to nascent strategies. Foundations of dialogue and its catalysts are discussed, as well as the roles of the network manager, notably arbitrage. Findings suggest that humans are central to strategy making and that their interactions must be managed to create constructive conditions within the network. This theoretical contribution is applicable to other pluralist networks, among which PPP’s like the one hereby studied form a subcategory.

**Keywords:** Strategy Formation, Network Orchestration, Pluralist Collaborative Conditions, Network Strategy, Nascent Inter-organizational Strategy, Conflict Resolution, Interactions
"If strategy making can be a process of planning and analysis, cognition and learning, so too can it be one of bargaining and compromise among conflicting individuals, groups, and coalitions. Introduce any form of ambiguity and politics arises.” (Mintzberg, et al., 2009)
# Table of Contents

1  Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 5  
   1.1  Research Problem .................................................................................................................. 8  
   1.2  Structure of the Research ...................................................................................................... 9  
   1.3  Scope and Limitations ........................................................................................................... 10  
   1.4  Key Definitions ..................................................................................................................... 11  
   1.5  Structure of the Thesis ......................................................................................................... 12  

2  The Plan Nord Explained .............................................................................................................. 13  
   2.1  Its Objectives ....................................................................................................................... 16  
   2.2  Its Structure ........................................................................................................................ 17  
   2.3  Relevant Legal Frame .......................................................................................................... 17  
   2.4  Diversity Among the Plan Nord ........................................................................................... 18  

3  Methodology .................................................................................................................................. 20  
   3.1  Research Strategy ................................................................................................................ 20  
      3.1.1  Research Design ............................................................................................................ 22  
      3.1.2  Case Study Selection ..................................................................................................... 22  
   3.2  Data Collection .................................................................................................................... 23  
   3.3  Research Data ....................................................................................................................... 25  
      3.3.2  Additional Data for Triangulation ............................................................................... 30  
   3.4  Analysis ..................................................................................................................................... 30  
   3.5  Trustworthiness and Authenticity ....................................................................................... 32  

4  Findings ........................................................................................................................................ 35  
   4.1  A Model of the Strategy Making Process in Collaborative Pluralist Networks .................... 36  
   4.2  Foundations of Dialogue ..................................................................................................... 43  
      4.2.1  Context .......................................................................................................................... 43  
      4.2.2  Governance .................................................................................................................... 47  
      4.2.3  Participants ...................................................................................................................... 51  
      4.2.4  Expectations and Individual Interests ........................................................................... 53  
   4.3  Dialogue .................................................................................................................................. 57  
      4.3.1  Catalysts ........................................................................................................................ 58  
      4.3.2  Communication Patterns .............................................................................................. 60  
      4.3.3  Influential Behaviors ..................................................................................................... 62  
      4.3.4  Conflict .......................................................................................................................... 64  
      4.3.5  Successful Arbitrage ...................................................................................................... 66
4.3.6 Perceived Possible Conflict Resolution and/or Satisfactory Outcome ...... 67
4.4 Outcomes.................................................................................. 68
4.4.1 Nascent Inter-Organizational Strategy.................................. 68
4.4.2 Possible Exit and/or Opposition........................................... 71
5 Discussion..................................................................................... 73
5.1 Proposed Improved Model for Strategy Formation .................. 74
5.1.1 Failure of Arbitrage............................................................... 75
5.2 Potential Differences with Other Collaborative Networks ........... 75
5.2.1 Cultural Factors.................................................................. 76
5.2.2 Traditional Pluralist Collaborative Networks v. PPP’s............. 77
5.3 Areas for Further Research....................................................... 77
5.3.1 Formation of Networks........................................................... 78
5.3.2 Discontinuity of Projects........................................................ 78
6 Conclusion..................................................................................... 79
7 Acknowledgements ..................................................................... 85
8 Works Cited.................................................................................... 86
9 Appendices .................................................................................... 91
9.1 Appendix A: Members of the Partners’ Table ......................... 91
9.2 Appendix B: Structure of the Network of the Plan Nord............. 92
9.3 Appendix C: Interview Guide ..................................................... 93

Figure 1. The area covered by the Plan Nord (Nature Needs Half, 2011) ............... 14
Figure 2. A model of the strategy making process within pluralist collaborative networks .............................................. 42
Figure 3. A model of the strategy making process within pluralist collaborative networks .............................................. 42
Figure 4. The Dialogue Within the Network ........................................ 57
Figure 5. The dialogue and its possible outcomes ...................................... 68
Figure 6. Potential Model that Further Research Could Support ............... 74

Table 1. Summary of Data Collected and its Usage ........................................ 24
Table 2. Interviewees and their roles during Plan Nord ............................... 26
1 Introduction

Organizations exist in a dynamic world with ever-changing conditions. There is no firm engaged in a linear relationship only with its environment. Every entity is a member of one or many networks. (Håkansson, 2006) Organizations must increasingly seek an alignment with other firms and with their environment to find an optimal strategic fit, which exhibits the importance of network strategy. From network strategy can be derived a better alignment with both the environment and other organizations, and marginal value that would not otherwise be created can be extracted from the networks due to synergies and collaboration. As firms entertain increasingly closer interdependencies, the strategic importance of having the right strategy in a multiplayer network to succeed in competitive conditions is not enough. Organizations must engage in multiple-players strategies, collaboration, to find a better alignment with their surroundings and derive more value from their partners by taking advantage of the dynamics of collaboration.

The concept of strategic networks has been studied extensively in the past. It has been understood for a long time that organizations exist in relationships with others, and continuously engage in relationships with those other parties to better adapt to the dynamic conditions of the environment. (Håkansson, 2006) Consequently, the strategy implemented by organizations must consider a multiplayer environment. Researchers also examined the concept that cooperative strategies and interactions are essential to organizational strategy, and that they are not incompatible with competitive views. (Jarillo, 1988) Correspondingly, it has been argued that they can be a source of strategic competitive advantage. (Gulati, et al., 2000) To extract value from their strategic networks, organizations engage in alliances to benefit from yet inaccessible resources. (Gulati, 1998) However, when organizations enter in repeated collaboration, the governance system must be adapted to the network for an optimal orchestration. (Ring & Van de Ven, 1992) In brief, cooperation within strategic networks has been explored by many researchers. However, the process in which many organizations design a common strategy within pluralist conditions has yet to be studied in depth, as the diversity within strategic network may cause challenges to a common alignment. Therefore, studying how such network behaves and operates allows a better understanding of them and of the
motives and behaviors of the different participants, which can in turn allow a better orchestration of the network in the aim of reaching agreement on optimal common strategies and possibly implementing them more efficiently. The present work explores this phenomenon from an interactional perspective.

The red thread of my thesis is strategy formation in pluralist collaborative networks of organizations, studied in the context of public-private partnerships (PPP’s), using the Plan Nord, in Quebec, to exemplify such process. The Plan Nord is a network created from a governmental initiative to unite several entities to design a common strategy to sustainably develop the North of the province of Quebec.

To reach a better common alignment, different entities create cooperative bonds together. Sometimes, to extract more value from a strategic network, entities must collaborate with other inherently different entities, which can complicate the interactions between them, and those conflicts may impede the extraction of as much value as possible from the strategic partnership. Understanding strategic collaborative networks consequently becomes important, as the success of the network, may it be economic, or continuity of the organizations involved may be directly linked to the potential value creation of the network. In the strategy formation process, the network has the responsibility to take into account all its members and their interests and to evaluate the legitimacy of their claims (Forkmann, et al., 2012), which raises challenges for the network orchestrator to manage the network efficiently to create constructive conditions for cooperation.

The orchestration of such networks faces several challenges that the network manager needs to address early to maximize the chances of successfully reaching nascent inter-organizational strategies. Some of these challenges include aligning the project with the environment, aligning the interests of the members to create common objectives and reaching consensus for the strategies to adopt in order to maximize the value creation of the project from the network. (Margerum, 2002) In orchestrating the network, conflicts may arise from an array of different sources, such as the network configuration or stability, goals that are not shared, cultural differences or relational issues. (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005) Consequently, commitment from the network orchestrator is highly important (Zou, et al., 2014), as the quality of governance displayed by the network
manager is directly related to the governance and managerial efficiency. (Lockwood, 2010) Because sources of conflicts can be numerous in collaborative networks, managers may choose a participative and transparent approach, by including the different stakeholders and clearly communicating the objectives and priorities of the network, in an attempt to decrease position bias of the different members of the network, and therefore increase goal convergence. (Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004) A governmental project like the Plan Nord is then established as a PPP in the purpose of mitigating those possible challenges faced by inter-organizational collaborative networks.

The example of the PPP studied in this work is interesting, because it is also highly compelling that public and private organizations, as well as non-governmental organisms and communities, which often have conflicting orientations and objectives, can collaborate together and manage to agree and reach common grounds in decision-making for the success of a pre-determined project. Although collaboration between the private and public sectors has occurred consistently in the past through different means, like outsourcing or consulting, increasingly common PPP’s are a relatively new appellation for such collaboration. (Hodge & Greve, 2010) PPP’s, due to their heterogeneous composition of different entities and groups, behave like and resemble other collaborative pluralist networks, and the degree of heterogeneity among the network highlights the possible challenges of conflicts of interests and their resolution, which is the main focus of the present work. (Hodge & Greve, 2010) They are therefore pertinent to study, as opposing views and conflicts of interests impede the consensual process of strategic decision making. The Plan Nord, along with other PPP’s, exhibits those characteristics, which make them valuable cases to study pluralist conditions.

Such networks, due to their internal diversity of members, highlight the possible conflicts of interests and relational challenges that the network may face during its orchestration and strategy making processes, and the strategic benefits of a smooth and efficient orchestration. Therefore, I am interested in the interactions of the different parties involved in strategy formation, and in the process itself of elaborating a strategy among such a heterogeneous network of organizations. From a personal perspective, a societal project of this magnitude undertaken in the province where I grew up is of the highest interest. The prospects of international recognition for Quebec through this
project were fascinating. The Plan Nord was a pioneering project with immense ambitions on the different social, economic and environmental levels, which made it highly stimulating for me.

In this thesis, I propose a model of strategy formation within pluralist collaborative networks from an interactional perspective, which can contribute to the understanding of how pluralist networks operate. Such knowledge increases the understanding of interactions within a network, and lays some bases for a more complete understanding of the internal operation of pluralist networks. Therefore, it offers further options to study collaborative networks from different perspectives and enables the strategic development processes to increase the efficiency in such network of organizations, in terms of strategy formation, by contributing to their potential success, by addressing a number of key elements, like adhesion, commitment and cooperation of the different members of the networks.

1.1 Research Problem

In the book Strategy Safari, Mintzberg et al. wrote a chapter on the power school of strategic management to describe how politics arises when uncertainty and different interests coexist within the same network. (Mintzberg, et al., 2009) Concerning this school of thoughts, they wrote:

“Accordingly, proponents of this school argue that it is not possible to formulate, let alone implement, optimal strategies: the competing goals of individuals and coalitions ensure that any intended strategy will be disturbed and distorted every step of the way.” (Mintzberg, et al., 2009)

The authors imply that politics represents a counterproductive and negative influence on the interactions among the strategy making processes in organizations, or in the present case, in networks of organizations. I believe that this phenomenon is mostly considered as such, due to the misunderstanding and the lack of conscious control that a network can have over political and influential behaviors. I trust that a better understanding of the phenomenon could lead to more efficient ways to use and oversee politics and to orchestrate the interactions in a more effective way, in the quest of being able to design and implement the most optimal strategies possible. In addition, the phenomenon of strategy making in collaborative networks of organizations has not been
studied extensively, and some contribution in the subject of management could be profitable for the academia.

The thesis is intended to generate knowledge, describe and assess the strategy formation process in networks of organizations to allow a facilitated comprehension of how such networks operate in the early stages of strategy formation, and how the network dynamics operates, taking into account the relationships between the different members. The thesis provides answers to questions like: How is strategy formed in pluralist collaborative networks of organizations? What are the success factors of constructive interactions among the network? The thesis also provides additional knowledge on the elements that influence the process of strategy formation among the networks, as well as the relationships between the different members involved in the processes of dialogue and negotiation, notably.

This current work is intended to lay some basis for further research on the observed phenomenon, to design effective frameworks to benefit from politics in networks of organizations, which could ultimately lead to practical improvements both in understanding and orchestrating, among managers and members, and therefore improve the process of making, and possibly implementing if enough research follows, better collective strategies.

1.2 Structure of the Research

This theoretical contribution specific to pluralist conditions is an inductive project based on grounded theory, in which interviews, conducted according to a purposive and snowball sampling methodologies, are triangulated with working material, meeting minutes, newspaper articles and existing theoretical literature to analyze the network and its process of strategy making. Slightly similarly to the research conducted by Mintzberg’s on the National Film Board of Canada (Mintzberg, 2007), for example, who used a strategy that consists of identifying critical events in the strategy formation process on a time-line, I focus on identifying important aspects and phases that contribute to reaching nascent inter-organizational strategies, by using examples from the network of the Plan Nord, which operated over approximately a year and half of meetings and interactions to design an action plan. Throughout the interviews, the respondents were chosen according to the importance of the role of their organization in the process, and
the perspectives of the most influential groups were gathered, in order to generate a neutral, holistic and objective research project. Some promotional material has also been gathered in order to help contextualizing the network and the project, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the Plan Nord its content.

1.3 Scope and Limitations

This work covers such topics as the process of decision-making and strategy formation in networks, from an interactional perspective concerning the different parties involved, as well as the relationships and negotiations between parties, in order to satisfy all the different interests that are represented in the network, using PPP’s as the research context. Therefore, my project research is conducted within the limitations of the school of power, presented by Mintzberg in Strategy Safari (2009), which defines strategy making as a process of negotiation, and will not treat the subject from the point of view of the other descriptive of prescriptive schools of thoughts. Different approaches should be combined to gain a holistic understanding on the phenomenon, as different perspectives cannot be accounted for in a single, focused and concise research project. Consequently, only the interactional perspective is addressed in this work, even if others could provide incremental interesting findings, such as strategy formation as cognitive or learning processes.

Additionally, I exclude any financial implications, costs and financial forecasts, as the approach is intended to be focusing on explaining the formation of nascent inter-organizational strategies in pluralist conditions from an interactional perspective. Moreover, as the project started in 2011, and was planned to be carried on for 25 years, the project was still at its initial steps and I ignored the final realized strategy and its implementation, topics that could be studied later on in the future steps of the projects, and upon its completion. Since then, the government has been overturned for 18 months, which put a halt to the Plan Nord. However, in April 2014, the Liberal Party of Quebec has been reelected, and projects to carry on the once initiated project.

The proposed model is also not applicable to any inter-organizational network. The presented network was about pluralism and collaboration. Many other networks present some level of competition between some of the members, while the Plan Nord was focusing on collaboration and conflict resolution, when the different participants
were in conflict of interests. The attitude of the participants, the desire to have constructive and cooperative interactions may differ from many other networks, which render the proposed model applicable to collaborative networks in pluralist conditions.

1.4 Key Definitions

**Strategy:** “Corporate strategy is the pattern of decisions in a company that determines and reveals its objectives, purposes, or goals, produces the principal policies and plans for achieving those goals, and defines the range of business the company is to pursue, the kind of economic and human organization it is or intends to be, and the nature of the economic and non-economic contribution it intends to make to its stockholders, employees, customers, and communities” (Andrews, 1980), which “characterizes the match of an organization with its environment […] and that is determinant for the attainment of its goals.” (Hofer & Schendel, 1978)

**Inter-Organizational Network:** “A set of actors or nodes along with a set of ties of a specified type that link them. […] The pattern of ties in a network yields a particular structure, and nodes occupy positions within this structure.” (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011) It is a “social system in which the joint activities of at least three entities are reflectively coordinated on a repeated basis in order that joint benefits may accrue to all parties concerned.” (Müller-Seitz, 2012)

**Network Orchestration:** “The set of deliberate, purposeful actions undertaken by the hub firm (network manager) as it seeks to create value and extract value from the network” (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) in which the network orchestrator “acts as a broker to plan and coordinate the activities of the network as a whole.” (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003)

**Governance:** “Complex of formal and informal institutions, mechanisms, relationships, and processes between and among states, markets, citizens and organizations, both inter- and non-governmental, through which collective interests on the global plane are articulated, rights and obligations are established, and differences are mediated.” (Thakur & Weiss, 2006)

**Dialogue:** “The process people engage in when they reveal feelings, explore assumptions, suspend convictions and build common ground” (Daft, 1999) in “a climate of openness, free of preconceptions” (Isaacs, 1994) “that has a far more open role [than discussion], involving the breaking down of entrenched positions and the loosening of assumptions.”
Political Behavior: “Behavior by individuals or subgroupings within an organization that makes a claim against the resource-sharing system of the organization.” (Pettigrew, 1977)

Influence: Created when “a set of resources that an actor can mobilize through their existing set of social relationships” is mobilized by the said actor to affect the decision taken or the outcome of a process. (Hardy, et al., 2003)

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The present thesis is made of an introduction chapter, which consists of an overview of the thesis, the research problem, the research structure and its limitations, as well as some definitions to clarify some important terms that will be present throughout the thesis. The introduction chapter is followed by a chapter presenting the Plan Nord. The chapter on the Plan Nord is constituted of relevant information that the reader must know in order to contextualize the findings of this research. Consequently, an overview of the project is presented, the main members, its mission and general objectives. The legal frame of the Plan Nord is also discussed, as many issues relevant to the interactions between the Government of Quebec and the First Nations are influenced by legal decisions. Due to the inductive nature of the present work, relevant theoretical literature is integrated in the chapter where the model is presented, as it has been used to triangulate with research data to design and support the proposed model. Therefore, there is no chapter dedicated for the theoretical framework of the research. The third chapter consists of the methodology of the research, providing a detailed description of the process of gathering data and how the collected data was used to conduct the analysis of the thesis with the justification for the methods used. Afterwards, a chapter on the findings is included, which proposes a model for strategy making in pluralist collaborative networks. A chapter of discussion then addresses different aspects, like potential difference between the proposed model and the practice and potential additional research topics. Finally, concluding remarks makes up for the end of the thesis. Appendices include additional material to better understand the Plan Nord and an interview guide.
2 The Plan Nord Explained

The Plan Nord is a project undertaken by the Government of Quebec in 2008 that had the purpose of a sustainable economic development of the North of the province that was supposed to generate 20,000 jobs per year over 25 years, and investments totaling more than 80 billion of Canadian dollars, with 33 billion dollars for renewable energy and the remaining for public infrastructures. (Government of Quebec, 2012) The area of the territory covered by the project is more than 1.2 million square kilometers. It represents 72% of the area of the province and is inhabited by 120,000 people, which is less than 2% of the population of the province. Among them, roughly 33,000 are indigenous people. (Government of Quebec, 2011) The following map depicts the territory covered by the Plan Nord, the communities living on it, and the resources that could be exploited.
The results of the work and the initial action plan were announced publicly on May 9th, 2011. The process started with a wide consultation of the communities living on the territory, to verify whether they were open to such project. Northern Quebec possesses significant resources, notably in the fields of hydroelectricity, mining and forestry, which exhibit important potential for economic benefits and to attract foreign investments. (Government of Quebec, 2011)
Because many stakeholders are present on the territory, Quebec has to consider many groups and communities when making decisions, hence, the reason of creating a PPP to develop the territory. Consequently, the Government gathered stakeholders from the different relevant industries – mining, energy, forestry, agriculture and tourism, communities occupying the territory – the First Nations and the Inuits, and municipalities and non-governmental organisms like environmentalists, to join forces to develop a plan for the future development of Northern Quebec. (Government of Quebec, 2012) (See Appendix A: Members of the Partners’ Table)

In 2012, the Liberal Party of Quebec, the party that initiated the project, lost the elections and the project was forsaken. Its implementation was then stopped. However, in April 2014, the Liberal Party of Quebec regained its position as the majoritarian leader of the Province of Quebec, and the revival of the Plan Nord is now intended by the government.

As they may be defined as an “agreements where public sector bodies enter into long-term contractual agreements with private sector entities for the construction or management of public sector infrastructure facilities by the private sector entity, or the provision of services by the private sector entity to the community on behalf of a public sector entity” (Chinyere & Xu, 2012), PPP’s are a valuable example of collaborative networks, considering the resource-based heterogeneity of all the members’ own contributions, by generating relational rents and creating benefits like eased management, increased accessed to resources or risk sharing. (Linder, 1999) In the studied network, the association between the public and private sectors was representative in many ways, as, for example, construction of infrastructures, roads and energy facilities, were intended to be some of the outcomes, to develop and exploit new mines on the territory.

In the modern era, PPP’s become necessary to infrastructure development; as such projects require complex, innovative and considerable upfront investments. PPP’s are therefore an important and modern way to finance the construction, development of certain areas and management of infrastructure. (Chinyere & Xu, 2012) Essentially, they consist of an investment of companies that legally leverage public capital against the incoming cash flow stream in order for the project to remain self-sufficient. In return, some promises for profits and returns on investment are part of the long-term contract
that is typical of PPP’s. (Chinyere & Xu, 2012) The strategic interfirm alignment with the environment is the central motive to create such a network, as its dynamics allows for strategic synergies to arise. As other collaborative networks, PPP’s are aimed at achieving common goals while reaching individual objectives. Thus, the network studied is relevant because the difference of interests represented in the network studied is marked. The network of the Plan Nord satisfies a need of adaptation that can benefit all sides of the alliance, improving service quality, efficiency and social accountability for all the actors involved, and the findings of this research can apply to any collaborative network. (Hodge & Greve, 2010) Concretely, members of the network could derive economic, social or environmental value from this project.

PPP’s, as pluralist collaborative networks, are included in an environment where they are in a position of satisfying certain weaknesses observed in the past. (Linder, 1999) Government has often been criticized for its lack of efficiency, as well as for the obsolescence of its practices and management. The private sector has been targeted on several occasions for maintaining a greedy perspective detached from the well-being of the community. (Hodge & Greve, 2010) Consequently, the marriage of the different members of the network allows for the perceived weaknesses to be acted upon, due to the presence of their counterpart in a network of organizations and highlights the potential benefits that any member of a pluralist collaborative network can gain. (Linder, 1999)

2.1 Its Objectives

The objective of the Plan Nord was to sustainably develop Northern Quebec, creating a strategy that would maintain equilibrium between three main pillars: social, economic and environmental development. (Government of Quebec, 2011) The intent was to leverage the resources of the territory to generate economic development, improve the living situation of the communities of the territory, and protect the environment and the unique ecosystems that are part of the territory. (Government of Quebec, 2012) The Government of Quebec also intended to increase the communication between the different communities, groups and organizations on the territory to facilitate cooperation that could potentially lead to more partnerships and joined effort, outside of the Plan Nord, between those instances. (Government of Quebec, 2011)
2.2 Its Structure

There were a total of 26 partners around the main table. The Partners’ table met 11 times over 18 months of developing the strategy and action plan. The meetings held by the table were general, to provide updates on the advancement of the work done in the working groups and for the members to share their opinions and voice their concerns. Partners were also expected to point out issues, if they believe some important issues were not already covered by the project. (Government of Quebec, 2012) (See Appendix B: Structure of the Network of the Plan Nord)

Eleven working groups and an additional one for sustainable development were created, each working on different domains. Education, habitation and health, culture, energy, mining, forestry, tourism, agriculture, wildlife, communities’ development and access to territory were the working groups established. They were co-presided by the relevant deputy minister and a representative of the industry. Their co-presidents were sitting at the Partners’ Table, and their composition was made of knowledgeable people and experts on the aspect treated. (Government of Quebec, 2011)

In response for the legal obligations concerning the relationships between the Government of Quebec and the First Nations, an Indigenous Partners’ Table was also established. This table was meeting the day before the Partners’ Table’s meetings, and was instituted for the First Nations to be able to discuss their issues, and voice their own concerns and opinions about the different aspects of the project and how they affect the First Nations. A ministerial committee was also established to orchestrate and organize the progress of the Plan Nord. Finally, a network of researchers was put together to insure that the different working groups would be able to gain knowledge in different areas, if needed, to make better decisions. (Government of Quebec, 2012)

2.3 Relevant Legal Frame

The project and negotiations were subject to a certain relevant legal frame. First Nations and Inuits claim territorial rights on part of the territory encompassed by the project. (Government of Quebec, 2012) Different law decrees, articles agreements or court decisions shaped how the project could be conducted. Three significant legal elements shaped how the project was conducted. The first one is Article 3 of the United
Nations Declarations on Rights of the Indigenous People. The article stipulates that First Nations have a right to self-determination, which grants them the right to protect cultural heritage and to discuss on a nation-to-nation basis with the Government.

The second one is the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement of 1975 and modified in 1978. The treaty assesses territorial rights and stipulates that First Nations have to be consulted for any activity on their ancestral territory. Furthermore, it allows those nations to have their own governance. Within the Plan Nord, the Crees, the Inuits and the Naskapis were bound by the treaty. The only other First Nation in the project not included in the project was the Innus.

Finally, the Paix des Braves of 2002, a continuity of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, states that there should be a sharing of the revenues of economic development by the Government of Quebec with the Crees on the territory stipulated by the JBNQA. Consequently, the different First Nations were negotiating under different legislations, and many others were, at that moment, negotiating with the Government of Quebec concerning territorial rights, governance structure, and/or revenue sharing agreements, for example.

2.4 Diversity Among the Plan Nord

The network of the Plan Nord is interesting to study, and is a relevant pluralist collaborative network, because of the multitude of interests of the different participants within it. Those differences in interests, agendas, objectives, attitudes and histories translate into potential conflicts of interests between the different members of the network. There are many examples within the Plan Nord. First, there were many aboriginal communities participating in the Plan Nord. Those communities live in different areas, each regulated by their own tribal council, speak different languages, have different cultures and each have different treaties, agreements and ongoing negotiations with the different levels of governments. Furthermore, the Crees, Innus, Naskapis and Inuits entertain only limited communication between the different groups. By having different orientations, statuses with the governments, and territories, each community has its own agenda that may or may not be aligned with those of the others.

Furthermore, the relations between many of these groups and the government are often tense, as negotiations for territory and rights have been ongoing for as much as
many decades, for many of these communities. The government also has the reputation of not consulting and involving enough these communities in projects that have impacts on their territories, which often makes those communities suspicious of any governmental undertaking that could affect them. Their different statuses of negotiations, derived from the treaties, can also be a source of discord between them.

Concerning their specific negotiating status with the Government of Quebec, many other municipalities may feel that the balance of power in such network may put them at a disadvantage, as they do not have the status to negotiate from nation to nation. Additionally, these municipalities and administrative regions have a shared history and frictions have occurred in the past, which may impede collaboration. Naturally, those communities want their own people to benefit as much as possible from such as project, which is noble.

Moreover, the different industries are often in conflict with NGO’s, as the former often favor economic development while the latter wish to save and preserve the environment, two ideologies that often collide. Consequently, as one can observe, the differences of perspectives, needs and desires of each organizations present in the network present many possible opportunities for conflicting ideas, views and objectives, which could result in conflicts of interests that would need to be resolved within the network, in order to reach common nascent inter-organizational strategies, which could be attained through dialoging within propitious conditions.
3 Methodology

The present chapter outlines the research aim and design, along with the detailed reasoning behind the use of the methods, techniques and theories used in order to design the research, gather and analyze the data afterwards. This inductive study is rooted from grounded theory and is intended to improve the understanding of strategy formation in pluralist collaborative networks of organizations.

3.1 Research Strategy

The basic strategy of the research is, using induction, the generation of theory from findings, using a relevant example to make a theoretical contribution, by proposing a model of strategy formation, from an interactional perspective, specific to plural conditions, which PPP’s are part of. (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) The aim of the research is to describe and understand the process of strategy formation in pluralist collaborative networks of organizations, to allow a facilitated comprehension of how such networks operate in the early stages of strategy making, and how the different members of the network cooperate and interact together to achieve common goals, while still fulfilling their own interests. The present thesis provides some answers as to what are the key success factors in such a process, how the network operates, and which elements influence strategy formation, negotiation and conflict resolution in collaborative networks. As PPP’s are increasingly present and important among modern economies, and exhibits marked differences among a diverse network, they represent a valuable context for studying networks, in order to lay the bases to derive more theory about such phenomenon, in the ultimate goal of passing on the knowledge to managerial practitioners, to improve the efficiency of such process in practice.

With rigorous enough methods, the studied phenomenon can be studied thoroughly. Afterwards, theory can be derived from the findings, based on the fact that “social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision.” (Bryman & Bell, 2011) With that concept of change being at the forefront of the strategy formation process, Strauss and Corbin (1990) have presented a set of procedures and techniques to guide the
induction of theory using grounded theory.

A grounded theory approach is a scientific method that is constituted of “qualitative research methods that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop and inductively derive grounded theory about a phenomenon.” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) Grounded theory is discovered incrementally by constantly going back and forth from the data, its analysis and the literature. In order to generate valid results, grounded theory has to fulfill four different criteria: it has to accurately represent reality and be presented in a comprehensible manner; the theory generated must be abstract enough so that it can be applied to other similar contexts, and the conditions of the study must be clearly established. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) In this present study, the findings are maintained to a level that is applicable to collaborative pluralist networks, not only at the level of PPP’s.

In this present research project, grounded theory is a relevant method to conduct the research, as it offers openness and flexibility to the researcher to study the evolution of the phenomenon observed, which are critical in studying the processes of strategy making and dialoging, as many decisions or actions may be incidental on future behaviors of the actors and events. To enhance the understanding of a studied phenomenon, grounded theory has the researcher constantly taking a step back to reevaluate the project and the findings, and to constantly adopt and attitude of skepticism. This approach allows for the creation of a new order, or understanding, made of an older one. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) Such an approach increases the validity of the findings, as I constantly compared the existing literature and the data analyzed to consolidate both in supported conclusions.

Literature also represents an important aspect in grounded theory, as it was used as a tool to stimulate theoretical sensitivity when the reader can discover about new elements or sensitive issues that are related to the ongoing research. Literature was used as triangulation tool to support the data gathered on the field and helped to strengthen the model and arguments proposed in the findings. It can also stimulate questions and therefore reorient the research, or to provide advice for sampling data. In fact, literature was used importantly as a supplementary validation for the theory generated, as I had to constantly move back and forth from the data and its analysis, and the current knowledge
of the topic to periodically reassess the findings and generate valid theory. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

3.1.1 Research Design

Research on a particular network is an appropriate form of design for this purpose. Case studies allow for flexibility and adaptability, as theory and conceptual categories can act as guidance for the research. (Patton, 2002) As opposed to a multiple case studies research design, which allows for more generalizability, increased external validity and provides protection against observer’s biases, a single case study allows for more flexibility when new processes are explored. (Eisenhart, 1989) Moreover, the diversity and marked different interests within the Plan Nord make the case a unique and revelatory. Therefore, a single case study research design was the most fit to study this unique network. As every network of organizations is unique and exhibits different characteristics, formed by different actors and orchestrated through different formal and informal ways to interact, each network has to be observed, examined and assessed separately. Afterwards, one could combine the findings in different case studies to possibly outline some commonalities and thus generalize certain findings on the topic.

The study of a single subject allows for the researcher to study in depth the case to understand it thoroughly, which in turn allows to lay foundations for further research in the subject of study, using different other cases. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) A thorough understanding of one case may be critical to the complete understanding of a phenomenon, and a single case study research design allows it, promoting a more complete research of one case instead of studying superficially several ones.

3.1.2 Case Study Selection

The Plan Nord has been selected as the context of choice for this research project, because it is believed to be both revelatory and unique. As strategy formation in networks has not been studied thoroughly by contemporary scholars, this case can be a fascinating example that could potentially generate new knowledge to be added to the rather limited existing collection on the subject. Furthermore, as PPP’s do, by definition, involve public authority and other organizations, it could be argued as well that the Plan Nord can be a representative and insightful case, due to the marked difference in the objectives pursued
by the different entities. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) A PPP network is relevant in this case, because the heterogeneity observed among the members of the Plan Nord highlighted the different positions and therefore allowed to study marked conflicts of interests. Moreover, this inductive case study, having the purpose of exploring the specifics of particular phenomenon, is selected for the learning opportunities that it can provide to both the scientific community and practitioners.

Because the Plan Nord is a high-profile case that involves major investments, worldwide attention and has the composition to highlight marked challenges and different interests, it is a project that is worthy of studying. Additionally, the case has been selected for its heterogeneous composition: public governing body, private companies, NGOs, First Nations and local communities, which makes the interests of the different members unique and opposite in many outlooks, which entails a large amount of negotiation, bargaining, and struggle for power and influence among the network. Also, the change of government in 2012 influenced the choice of case study. As the current research takes place just after that change of government, it makes the case even more relevant to study, as the implementation had barely began, while the strategy formation phase was over. Hence, there was a clear delimitation of the phases convenient for the present study.

3.2 Data Collection

In order to conduct the current research project, information from different sources had to be gathered. The foundation of the research project is constituted of interviews conducted with many participants and stakeholders of the Plan Nord and further data like the meeting minutes of the meetings between the members of the Plan Nord, internal documents provided by the participants of the network or the Government of Quebec, and archives from newspapers and news stations.

In order to access the data, different means were used. First, contacts were established at the government in order to request the access to public information for some internal material, meeting minutes and working material. The main stakeholders and participants of the network were contacted for interviews. A table summarizing the data collected is presented below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Type</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>12 Semi-Structured Interviews, lasting from 40 to 90 minutes, for an average of 60 minutes</strong></td>
<td>Audio Recordings</td>
<td>The entirety of all interviews was electronically recorded.</td>
<td>The records were transcribed to conserve exact quotes of the interviewees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcripts of Recordings</td>
<td>Every interview record was transcribed verbatim, including notes made by the interviewer before, during and after the sessions.</td>
<td>The transcripts represent a significant portion of the data for analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Documentation</strong></td>
<td>100 pages of meeting minutes, covering 11 meetings</td>
<td>Resumes of the 11 meetings of the Partners' Table, which summarize the main issues discussed among the participants and establish a progress of advancements of the project.</td>
<td>The meeting minutes were used as analyzed data, but also provided a context and a time frame of the different events and discussions between the participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 pages of working material</td>
<td>Material sent by participants in the network that contained information on different aspects of the project, like the structure of the network, organizations and representatives participating, and operations of some working groups.</td>
<td>The material supplemented the understanding of the structure of the network and provided precisions on how work and discussions were conducted in the working groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media Reports</strong></td>
<td>80 Newspapers Articles</td>
<td>An array of selected newspaper articles preselected on the basis of that they were addressing the interactional aspects of the project.</td>
<td>The articles provided data for analysis, useful to triangulate with interview transcripts, meeting minutes and existing literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotional Material</td>
<td>Promotional material published by the Government of Quebec to promote and explain the details of the plan to the general population.</td>
<td>The promotional material was mainly used to support the preparation of interviews and to reach a deeper understanding of the project, its goals, potential benefits and initiatives decided upon for the first 5-year plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Summary of Data Collected and its Usage
3.3 Research Data

Interviews were conducted in order to be provided with details on certain events, decisions or interactions, to gather opinions of the members and to gather additional information about issues not mentioned in the press. Those interviews aimed at being helpful in drawing a clearer picture of how strategy formation among the members of the Plan Nord took place to improve the level of understanding of the phenomenon studied. People both within the network as well as knowledgeable respondents outside of it were interviewed. A table providing the array of the interviewees is presented below:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Role in Plan Nord</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jean Charest</td>
<td>Former PM of Quebec</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Initiator and worldwide promoter of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathalie Normandeau</td>
<td>Former Vice-PM of Quebec and Responsible Minister of the Plan Nord</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Main leader and manager of the project, presided the Partners' Table and the Aboriginal Partners' Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Sauvé</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Plan Nord</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Coordination and facilitated the advancement of the Plan Nord at the National Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Dubois</td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Plan Nord</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Coordination between the participants and of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre Corbeil</td>
<td>Former Minister of Aboriginal Affairs</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Co-presided the Aboriginal Partners' Table, conducted the initial consultation among the communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghislain Poirier</td>
<td>President of the Association of Mining Exploration of Quebec</td>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>Sat at the Partners' Table, co-presided the Mining working group and sat at the Sustainable Development working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghislain Picard</td>
<td>Chief of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador</td>
<td>First Nations</td>
<td>Not directly involved, facilitates communication and cooperation between the different First Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzann Méthot</td>
<td>Regional Director of Canadian Boreal Initiative</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Sat at the Partners' Table and co-presided the Sustainable Development working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Coone-Come</td>
<td>Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees</td>
<td>First Nations</td>
<td>Sat at the Partners' Table and at the Aboriginal Partners' Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc Dubé</td>
<td>General Director of the Regional Conference of Elected Officials of Saguenay/Lac-St-Jean</td>
<td>Municipalities</td>
<td>Involved at the Partners' Table and in working groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>André Gaumond</td>
<td>President of Virginia Mines</td>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>Participated in the Mining working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Roy</td>
<td>Director of the Métallos Union</td>
<td>Unions</td>
<td>Not participating, but had interests concerning the mining industry, notably</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Interviewees and their roles during Plan Nord
As noticed, more interviewees were from the public sector. Although more groups were contacted for interviewees and chose not to participate, a seemingly heavier focus is put on the public sector during the interviews. However, because the Government of Quebec organized and managed the project, discussing with its officials was relevant to get precisions on the mechanisms and orchestration of the network. Furthermore, the government officials had an overview of how the project was conducted and the interactions between the members carried out. To avoid bias in the findings created by having an unbalanced amount of interviews with representatives from the public sector, I have triangulated and verified the data collected with interviews with other participants and the other data gathered. Triangulation served as an assurance policy, among others, to minimize this source of bias, as well as the observer’s bias, by using a wide array of sources.

In total, 12 interviews were held and all interviews lasted from 40 to 90 minutes, for an average length of about 60 minutes. During those interviews, many topics were discussed, such as the personal role of the interviewees, their appreciation of the process, the orchestration of the project, their interactions with the other representatives and influences of the different members. A general interview guide is presented in the appendices. (See Appendix C: Interview Guide)

3.3.1.1 Type of Interviews

The interviews were conducted according to a semi-structured method. Semi-structure interviews allowed me to prepare the interviews and to prepare certain questions in advance to explore certain directions. As the interviews were meant to add precisions or details to certain events and interactions, some questions needed to be asked to the different interviewees. However, the semi-structured interview form also leaves room for flexibility and adaptation when the interviewees touched upon interesting relevant aspects. This evident benefit allowed me to change the course of the interview by leaving the respondents explore certain aspects or areas that were not part of the initial plan of the interview, when I deemed relevant the information to be gathered. That flexibility and open-mindedness can ultimately provide significant information that would not have been discovered under a structured form of interview.
3.3.1.2 Selection Method

The candidates for interviews were selected according to a set of criteria, depending on the organization they represented and their role in the network, among others. A purposeful sampling method was followed as it enables the interviewer to select the candidates strategically and in a number that is relevant and necessary for the project. (Patton, 2002) It was important to interview the main participants of the network and to interview members of different backgrounds and interests to be able to report a reliable and fair portrait of the network. The sampling strategies used were many, in the objective of responding to the multiple needs of the project. I wanted to interview the most important groups involved in the Plan Nord. Therefore, after the reading of the meeting minutes of the Partners’ Table, I contacted the groups that were the most involved. Interviewing the most important people of their represented group was also intended to increase the credibility of the thesis, like the former prime minister of Quebec, the former vice-prime minister, the chief of the Crees and presidents of companies.

The first strategy used was snowball sampling. As it is often the case within heavy bureaucratic organizations like government, the access to information can be complicated to gather, as several officials may claim that the information asked lies within the competence of another service or person. Moreover, respondents mentioned names of relevant people or groups during interviews, common situation that offered the possibility to deepen my knowledge in the inquired subject by often being introduced by those interviewees to potential people of interest. This sampling strategy turned out to be useful, as the interviewees not only suggested me knowledgeable people to interview, but also introduced me to these potential interviewees. Consequently, chain sampling strategy provided flexibility and relevance of sources for the project that allowed me to deepen the research in the areas that seemed promising for the project. (Patton, 2002)

The second sampling strategy used was emergent sampling. Closely related to the chain sampling, emergent sampling allows the researcher to follow new leads or explore new subjects that could potentially be pertinent to the project. It allows for flexibility and enables the interviewer to adapt to unexpected information. (Patton, 2002) Yet again, many new topics emerged during the process of gathering data that I did not intend to study extensively from the start, like network orchestration and coordination.
Interviewees suggested me people to interview and newspaper articles to read in order to pursue this topic further, which provided valuable outcomes and allowed me to discuss with important coordinators of the project.

The last strategy used during interviews was sampling politically important cases. As the members of the Plan Nord are several and diverse, so are their respective influence, interests and power. In order to capture a more complete image of the process from a macro perspective, potential interviewees that play major roles in the development of the strategy were interviewed. (Patton, 2002) As the main aspects of the Plan Nord revolved around the mining, forestry and energy industries, along with environmental conservation and First Nations, they were the main organizations targeted for interviews. However, no representatives of the energy industry accepted to be interviewed. Interviewing all the members of the network would have provided a better outlook of the network, but not every organization agreed on being interviewed. Budget and time constraints also impeded such an undertaking. On the opposite, I felt like the quantity and quality of the interviewees was sufficient, as no new information or insight was transpiring from the last interviews.

3.3.1.3 Keeping Records

In order to maintain the most accurate recording of the interviews conducted, I asked the participants beforehand if I could record the interview, for a later transcription. With the respondent’s approval, the interview was recorded and later transcribed in writing, along with the notes I took during the interviews. The respondents were told the general objectives of the research project and interviews, and agreed to take part in it. The possibility of anonymity was offered, as well as the possible access to the work before or after submission.

The majority of the interviews were held in French, my mother tongue, as well as the working language of most of the parties acting within the Plan Nord. The transcription and analysis of the data was made according to the interview language, and relevant quotes in French were appropriately translated in English, when needed, to include them in this work.
3.3.2 Additional Data for Triangulation

Additional material was gathered to triangulate with the information from the interviews was obtained through the access to the minutes of the meetings that were organized between the participants in the network, and provided help to identify important events following the tracking method proposed by Mintzberg. (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982) As the government is involved, such information is accessible to the public upon request. Such documents ensure reliability and neutrality of the research. They report facts and portrait an accurate image of the meetings that took place, as well as a chronological suite of events that allowed for triangulation during the analysis. Furthermore, as those documents only provide facts and a summary of the points debated and decisions taken, relying on such information provides neutrality to the project.

In addition, internal working documents and newspapers were also consulted to supplement the information gathered from the access to the meeting minutes. Some notable newspapers and news stations covered the Plan Nord thoroughly and objectively, and could therefore add to the body of information already gathered. A bank of articles containing hundreds of articles on the Plan Nord from Quebec media was pre-screened to select about 80 articles that treated topics like interactions between the parties or the mechanisms used to manage the network. Even in the case where the said newspapers or news station would not exhibit complete objectivism in their reports, it did not affect the project, as I was focusing on facts and on what actually happened and was said during the process of strategy formation, rather than external perceptions. Therefore, the effect of any possible political twist that could be added by the reporting media is minimalized.

3.4 Analysis

The collection and most importantly analysis of data were conducted accordingly to two reputable methods used by two accomplished scholars. Firstly, in order to effectively use the study of the case study design, the method proposed by Eisenhart (1989) to generate theory from a case study was used. The eight steps process provides a framework to induce theory from a case study using grounded theory. The process includes directions to remain focused on a single case, and advises to avoid formulating a hypothesis, to retain more theoretical flexibility. Eisenhart also recommends to use different sources of information to strengthen the grounding of theory by triangulation,
which is the reason why this project uses public and internal documents, reports written by external actors, as well as interviews with individuals that are (or were) part or not of the process of strategy formation among the Plan Nord. The findings were then compared with literature for triangulation purposes. (Eisenhart, 1989) However, this step is relatively limited in this particular research setting, as the relevant literature is scarce and limited.

Regarding the analysis of the data, the tracking method employed by Mintzberg is well known and reliable. He used this particular method to study both the National Film Board of Canada and Steinberg Inc. (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982) Using his tracking strategies, Mintzberg has established a method to study the process of strategy formation in an organization. A similar process, which has been used multiple times in the past and carries significant credibility, has been used to study the process of strategy making in the Plan Nord network. In that method, Mintzberg instructs researchers to follow a four steps process for the gathering and analysis of data. The first step consists of gathering the data. The analysis of that data starts by the identification of major events in the strategy formulation process and then the categorization those events according to pre-determined themes using open and axial coding. It also involves the establishment of a chronological chain of events in order to identify patterns. The researcher then has to investigate each period extensively in order to answers both the “how” and “why” questions. The last step involves building theory from the findings. (Mintzberg, 2007) Here, the proposed model in the findings follows that structure, as steps of the progression of the strategy making process are identified.

More precisely, coding played a central role in the analysis of the data. As prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the breaking down of data allows building theory instead of only testing it. Concretely, three types of coding are involved in the analysis process: open, axial and selective coding. The first step of the analysis consists of open coding. By conceptualizing and categorizing the different events, it allows the researcher to make comparisons and ask questions to increase the precision and specificity of the process. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) Once the different events are broken down into categories, I used axial coding. In other words, I reorganized the categories in a new order, taking into account the context of the phenomenon, the causal and
intervening conditions and the interactions between the different actors in the phenomenon. Axial coding is done while accounting for the development of the phenomenon, considering the consequences of the different events on subsequent ones. I then tracked the relationships between the different categories. In fact, I, through the coding process, alternated between those two types of coding to constantly verify findings. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

The third type of coding used is the selection of core categories and the validation of the already established relationships in order to propose a new conceptualization of the story (process). The integration of all categories is done similarly to axial coding, but at a more abstract level. The different steps of selective coding are the explications of the story line, relating the categories and their subcategories, validating the relationships against the data collected and filling the categories. From this process, grounded theory is derived, as it is abstract while still portraying the phenomenon accurately and accounting for context, changes and effects of interactions, causal and intervening conditions. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

In this case, in many instances, I had to go back and forth with literature to design a valid model that would truly represent the events in the network and in which all the elements would be clearly defined, concise, easy to follow and applicable to more general contexts.

These particular methods were used to follow methodologies applied by accomplished scholars, methodologies that have been judged relevant and remained appropriate for several decades. As the tracking method was used by Mintzberg in very similar circumstances, I believe that it could be properly applied to my own research project, as the appropriate data could be gathered in order to identify major events and patterns as well as to establish a chronological order.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Because qualitative studies are significantly different in nature than quantitative studies, the traditional assessment for validity has to be revisited to adapt to the methodology and type of research design used in qualitative work. Therefore, trustworthiness and authenticity should be the main criteria to assess the validity of qualitative research projects. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) Trustworthiness consists of
credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Credibility can be understood as the extent at which the findings are believable. Although the reader is the ultimate ruler of credibility, steps have been taken in order to ensure maximum credibility. The methodology used for the project stems from two contemporary acclaimed scholars, Eisenhart and Mintzberg, whose methods are proven and have been used multiple times. In addition of the rigorous methods used, using different sources for data collection ensures that the results and data are accurate and reliable. However, as I lack experience in the field, as this work is only a Master’s thesis, the guidance and advices from my thesis supervisor make up for my lack of experience. Furthermore, the sampling of the interviewees, by their position in their respective organization and their role in the project, increases the credibility of the study.

Dependability is based on the fact that whether or not the researcher has taken account of the dynamic conditions within the research project. By describing in details, researching in depth the changes and effects involved, the researcher also examines the reasons behind the studied phenomenon during his work. Consequently, the project is contextualized, and the environment and changes are taken into account and the consequences of those changes are considered. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

The confirmability of the results is also of the highest importance. Some steps have been undertaken in order to ensure the confirmability of the study. The researcher takes a neutral position while examining the phenomenon of strategy formation process. I adopted an objective stance, as well as a skeptic approach, by remaining open-minded and often taking a step back to ensure theoretical sensitivity and my ability to give fair and reliable meaning to the data collected in both the process of gathering and analyzing data. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) A thorough examination of data has been done to ensure the absence of bias. The comparison with existing literature that both supports and denies the findings is also a step taken to confirm the findings. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

The fourth criterion is the transferability of the findings. However, a case study is sometimes hardly generalizable. In this present case study, the context in which the network surrounding the Plan Nord is unique and consequently leads to unique findings. However, it can contribute positively to the existing body of knowledge and the proposed model was kept general enough to exemplify other pluralist collaborative networks. I
realistically perceive the philosophy in the research. My awareness of the limitation presented by the study of a single case with regards to generalizability suggests that the study can be adding to the actual body of knowledge if maintained in context, as I am not claiming that the present research may be generalized to all collaborative networks, but to this one only, although some findings may be generalizable to other pluralist networks, if additional research that confirms the findings to a broader range of networks is made.

The second criterion is authenticity. Authenticity is concerned with the fairness of the study. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) Because some of data are official documents recapitulating the strategy meetings for the Plan Nord, it is believed that the information contained is accurate and factual. Furthermore, the sourcing of information from different sources and the triangulation, in addition of the constant verification and validation with theory from the grounded theory, asserts that the study is authentic. Furthermore, the project attains its objective of providing a better understanding of a phenomenon, which is necessary for ontological authenticity. For the array of reasons explained above, the study is believed to be both trustworthy and authentic.
4 Findings

Because of the dynamic conditions and the need for organizations to strategically align with each other and the environment, a collaborative network was established and the Plan Nord was created. As each partner, prior to the formation of the network to work on the Plan Nord, existed each within its own evolving context and networks, it was a logical and rational decision that the different participants engaged in exchange relationships and therefore create interdependences between themselves in the purpose of realizing their own and common objectives, supported by the expertise and capabilities they and their respective networks each possessed. (Håkansson, 2006) Pooling expertise and capabilities from different industries and domains like forestry, mining, sustainable development, energy and social development, among others, fueled that exchange process suggested by network theory, allowing the generation of competitive advantages, or additional capabilities and synergies, through collaboration and combination of respective capabilities, knowledge and resources. This project was then valuable for both the individual interests of the different participants and the interests of the network. (Dyer & Singh, 1998) Such a network was established in an opportunistic context, as joining their forces was allowing them not only to capture and create economic value, but to face social issues, environmental concerns and increase strategic performance of all its members within the network and their respective industries. (Hardy, et al., 2003)

The process of understanding the network and its orchestration quickly led me to realize that there were several central aspects to such a network. Although I initially intended to study the behaviors conducting to greater power and influence throughout decision making in pluralist networks, research data highlighted that politics within a network is only an aspect of decision making. During data collection and analysis, I became aware of an array of different elements that significantly affect the process of strategy elaboration and conflict resolution among collaborative networks, which led to the elaboration of a model for strategy making within pluralist collaborative network from an interactional perspective. Those important influential aspects are context, governance, contributors and expectations, and they interact together through a dialogue that is catalyzed by success enablers, communication patterns and influential behaviors.

Through dialogue, the members of the network exchanges views, perspectives and
knowledge to reach common grounds and resolve conflicts of interests. Knowledge includes contextual or scientific facts, mutual understanding of each other’s realities, and contributed knowledge during the process either from internal or external participants. This knowledge was then used to make more pragmatic and rational decisions. Communication patterns refer to the array of interactions occurring between the participants, the behavior of the participants and their desires, and the commonly agreed or implicit rules and regulations of the network. Success enablers reflect some conditions for a constructive and cooperative dialogue between the different parties involved. Those observations contributed to the following model of strategy making within collaborative pluralist networks.

Knowledge is passed, acquired and transferred between the members of the network. Knowledge mobility, the ease with which knowledge is transmitted within the network, is therefore an important feature that must be triggered by the network orchestrator. (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) Knowledge mobility is more easily achieved when participants share some sense of identity and purpose with the other members of their collectivity. (Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000) As dialogue and conflict resolution relies partially on transmission of knowledge within the network, the following proposed model addresses how dialoging can lead to nascent inter-organizational strategies.

4.1 A Model of the Strategy Making Process in Collaborative Pluralist Networks

The findings generated by the analysis of the data determined that governance, dialogue and the context needed to be central and directly influential to the strategy making process and the collective agreement and commitment to common visions and objectives. As a result, the proposed model includes these aspects as critical elements of the process, which is also supported by other important factors, such as external factors. The present model exclusively presents two possible outcomes to the process, which is success or failure of designing a common strategy. Those outcomes are presented more in depth, as well as the different elements of the model. The model also allows for an analysis of the relationships and influences that every element has on the others and on the process itself. This section details those findings, the factors influencing the strategy
making process, the relationships between those aspects, and the possible outcomes. The present chapter describes the model and explains the findings, which are supported by a triangulation between research data and existing literature. To further the comprehension of the model, an example is used to walk through and introduce the process and clarify the progress of strategy making. The example used, which was one of the most important and most discussed issue by the participants of the Plan Nord, is the decision on how the members were to protect from industries 50% of the territory covered by the Plan Nord, for conservation purposes. In that example, protecting 50% was an objective agreed on by all members, but the mechanism to choose the protected areas in order to reach the objective created conflict among them.

This example illustrates the process of strategy formation and conflict resolution within the network of the Plan Nord. It is written accordingly to the path prosed by the model. The first part of the model includes the influential factors on the dialogue. They are context, governance, participants and expectations. In the case of the decision to protect 50% of the territory, one could have described the context by highlighting several important aspects. The first one is that environmental concerns were becoming increasingly important at the time; it was becoming a focal societal concern. Therefore, the members and the public, influenced by the media, believed that environmental conservation had to be addressed in order to develop sustainably. There are several weak small ecosystems and animal or vegetal species in Quebec that need some protection to survive.

Moreover, as a significant portion of the area of the Plan Nord was on ancestral land of the First Nations, the different legal agreements and court decisions mentioned above were applicable and were going to shape the balance of power within the dialogue, as the Indigenous people had legal claims in that situation. As also mentioned, that territory presented significant economic potential, due to the minerals, forests and rivers located on the territory. The mining industry was starting to recover and there was great prospect for the territory.

To decide on the protected area, the governance system resembled the governance for the rest of the decisions. The sustainable development working table was attempting to find a consensus and solutions that would satisfy all parties involved. Furthermore, the
issue was raised often during the Partners’ Table’s meetings, and all the organizations were invited to comment, share their opinions and suggest possible solutions. In the network, informal communication was also allowed and encouraged. Consequently, some groups were in contact together between the meetings to attempt to solve their disagreements. The result of it was that in some occurrence, it led to joint propositions that positively impacted the progress of the work. Furthermore, the support for research was asked to conduct some research, since the members agreed that they needed more knowledge to make an informed decision.

All groups were invited to share their respective opinion and suggest potential solutions. However, in the discussion about that issue, the main actors were the environmental groups and the representatives of the industries like mining and forestry. At first, there was some tension between the participants, as their respective positions were significantly different. However, the representatives of these groups were open individuals that were there to find and develop common strategic solutions to that issue. Because of their personalities, they contributed to a respectful, open, trusting and constructive dialogue process, which are dialogue catalysts, later discussed.

The different participants initially had significantly different expectations and interests. The environmental groups like the Canadian Boreal Initiative expected a complete protection of some areas with a prolonged interdiction for economic development, and their interests were to protect the different ecosystems and living species that live on the territory. Oppositely, the representatives of the industries, like forestry and mining, were expecting a more flexible system that would foster economic development, as their own interests were to establish more activity on the territory and exploit the natural resources on the territory to benefit their industries and the province by attracting foreign investment and jobs.

The next section of the model is the dialogue. The important aspects of it are the catalysts, the communication patterns and the influential behaviors. In the dialogue to resolve the conflict, the representatives of the Canadian Boreal Initiative and of the mining industries had significant divergences of opinions. However, their representatives were open-minded and respectful of each other, agreeing on the fact that they would not always agree. They worked together and got to know each other and their respective
realities. Therefore, they built bonds together that helped to create an atmosphere of trust, respect and openness, even when they disagreed. It contributed to reaching common grounds on some issues and then working together from what they had agreed on to gradually compromise on their respective side and working out more complicated issues where their disagreements were more important.

The dialogue catalysts support the communication patterns by providing constructive conditions within the network. During the resolution of this issue through dialogue, the parties were often in communication informally outside regular meetings to discuss and share positions. Those informal encounters yielded joint proposals and contributed to them reaching common grounds and agreeing on certain issues together. Furthermore, the closeness they experienced, as they were attending the Partners’ Table’s meeting sitting one next to each other, were sitting at the same working groups and were in constant communication, brought them closer and that acted as a catalyst for the dialogue.

In order to protect their interests, the members attempted to gain influence within the network. The Canadian Boreal Initiative relied on research and knowledge to make arguments concerning the areas to protect. The organization based its argument on studies on which percentage of a specie’s habitat that can be altered without negatively impacting the specie itself. On the other side, the mining representative proposed a flexible system that would allow swaps between protected areas to allow mining exploration. In fact, that dialogue was one to solve a conflict of priorities.

The model then suggests that an assessment of whether a conflict is taking place or not is made. If no conflict is observed, the path likely leads to a common nascent inter-organizational strategy. Otherwise, more dialogue or actions are needed to resolve the conflict. As previously noted, the interests and expectations of the industries, like forestry and mining, were significantly diverging from those of the environmental groups. Even if at first, even the idea of protecting 50% of the territory from development was contested by the industries, they fairly rapidly agreed that it could be done. The main conflict concerned the mechanism that should be developed in order to protect certain areas while development would be allowed on others. The objective of protecting such an important area of the territory was ambitious. Within the conflict between environmentalists and
industries, the First Nations were also worried that their traditional activities, like hunting and trapping, would be hindered. Such situations in which so many different positions are expressed lead to conflicts, which should be resolved through dialogue.

The model proposes a possible arbitrage by the network orchestrator to solve existing conflicts. Because the different parties involved were not agreeing and committing on a common solution, the government had to make an arbitrage, at least a partial decision. In this case, the government took some decisions, to at least define some strategy. After considering the positions of all the actors, the government decided that it was the most logical decision to implement a gradual strategy that would allow the members to continue the dialogue and gradually agree on more elements of the land conservation strategy that was to be design. That arbitrage allowed for flexibility and gave the network the possibility to adapt to future changing conditions in the future. The reasons for the partial decisions were the awareness of the lack of knowledge about the area to be developed and the fact that the network manager did not want to commit for a long term based on insufficient knowledge.

Over time, the main parties involved reconsidered their position and the ongoing conflict. Newspaper articles stated that the environmentalists were worried about the potential outcomes of the conflict and scared that the conservation plan designed may not fulfill their desires. The organization then voiced its concern to the media. This reassessment is reported in the model when members address and reflect on a possible conflict resolution and the probable outcomes.

The two possible outcomes are reaching agreement on nascent inter-organizational strategies or a possible exit and/or opposition by one or more members. The territory represented a highly complex issue. When the first 5-year plan was designed, a final decision had not been made. The strategy that was agreed on was to proceed gradually. For every square kilometer of area that would be available to development, the same quantity would be designed as protected. To support the implementation, targets were set, as percentage of the total area covered by the Plan Nord that would be protected after each year of the plan. Consequently, some of the strategy was established, but some remained open for adaptation and flexibility. Although the different parties were making progresses, some issues were not agreed on, but the parties, along with the government,
agreed on the fact that a gradual design and implementation of the strategic action plan concerning that issue was the best. The discussion was then planned to resume, which is represented by the return to dialogue and the loop presented in the model.
Figure 2. A model of the strategy making process within pluralist collaborative networks
4.2 Foundations of Dialogue

![Diagram: Dialogue Incidental Factors]

Many factors, during the Plan Nord, had an incidence on how the dialogue was conducted between the different parties and how conflicts were solved. The context, network governance, participants and their expectations seem to be the central aspects influencing the course of the dialogue and are therefore discussed below, along with their subcategories, when necessary.

4.2.1 Context

The context is made up of all the external and internal factors that influence to a variable extent the process of strategy making and relationships between the different participants in the network. It is also an obstacle that many networks face during orchestration, as strategic fit may be hard to reach. (Marguerum, 2002) Collaborating with other entities is one way to improve that strategic alignment. It is therefore an important aspect of the network to understand.

4.2.1.1 Economic, Political and Legal Environments

First, the ongoing political, economic and legal environments form one important aspect of the external factors. The state of the economy and politics contribute to measure how well the potential project is timed with the current ongoing conditions. The context partly dictates the timing of the project, as the initiator needs to attempt to reach a strategic fit with the network. In other word, the network’s external and internal environment must be correctly aligned for the strategy and its implementation to be successful. (Grant, 2010) For the Plan Nord, the mining industry was benefiting from an upbeat, and economically, it was the right time to initiate such a project, as markets were favorable. Furthermore, social and environmental concerns were becoming quite
significant as well, which prompted the creation of a project that would include all these aspects of strategic sustainable development.

“He also supports principles supporting the prevision of a dynamic process to adapt to the evolution of social, economic and environmental realities on the territory, within time and space. For Mr. Poirier, it represents flexibility, to which the mining industry is highly favorable.” - Meeting Minutes from the third meeting, held on May 28th, 2010

In this report of the meeting minutes, Mr. Poirier, the President of the Association of Mining Exploration in Quebec (AEMQ), states that the project must not only comply with the context, but also constantly adapt to it to reach the best results possible. Mintzberg argues that the strategy formulation process may be over-managed and that the network must remain flexible for the creation of patterns naturally instead of constantly forcing the process. (Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985)

4.2.1.2 History

Internally, the history of the territory and between the different participants of the network also affects the relationships and the decisions taken, as well as the level of cooperation between some participants:

“Well, there is a history outside of the Plan Nord. The Côte Nord (CN) is wary of the Saguenay/Lac-St-Jean (SLSJ). […] Back in the days, because the SLSJ is relatively industrialized, many firms took a significant market share in the CN. There was a lot of tension created (between the two regions) because of that.” - Marc Dubé, SLSJ Regional Conference of Elected Officers

As supported by the academia, history impacts the relationships and interactions between partners. Relationships are based on the shared history together. (Jap & Anderson, 2007) Participants consider the common history between them and as a result, there is no fresh start. (Anderson & Weitz, 1992) Research supports that the past encounters between the two regions participating in the network impeded their relationship and level of trust and collaboration during the process.

4.2.1.3 Parallel Processes, Interactions and Negotiations

As some members shared a common history, they are often involved in a
multitude of other networks. Those networks may indirectly influence the process of strategy making. Some participants may already be engaged in parallel associations in distinct networks. Those relationships may already have created a cooperative or uncooperative relationship between the concerned participants. Similarly, parallel negotiations between participants can impede the development of the project, as some conflicts may arise and participants are not able to keep the two situations mutually exclusive from each other. In this case, the government was engaged in negotiations with some groups of First Nations concerning the territorial and governance rights of these groups within the Province of Quebec. During the process of the Plan Nord, some First Nations, unsatisfied of the current state of negotiations with the government concerning their territorial rights, decided to contest the project and attempted to make it to abort. Consequently, it is important for the network that participants involved in parallel interactions or negotiations do not let one influence the other negatively.

Mentioning the ongoing negotiations between the First Nations, which have the right of self-determination under Article 3 of the Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Government of Quebec, the Chief of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador said:

“That being said, I think that both are possible. On one side, there could have been an initiative essentially between Quebec and the First Nations, concerning the proposed development by the private sector during the Plan Nord. At the same time, it should not be an excuse to slow down the other, more global, process, and that is part of our critique. We did not want agreements occurring with certain companies, maybe with the Quebec Government, because it usually is an excuse to slow down a process that has been lasting already for too long, at least since the last 35 years.” - Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador

Following that line of thoughts, the presence of the government in the network involved political activity within the senate and the National Assembly. Consequently, some parallel political processes were mandatory in order for the project to move on. Both the network and the parallel political processes for approval of certain decisions needed to move at a similar speed to ensure a better coordination.
Consequently, the different participants rely partially on parallel processes and networks to make up their perception of the actors and their dynamic relationship in the network with which they will have interactions. (Grewal & Dharwadkar, 2002) In the current network, Mr. Charest, former PM of the Province of Quebec, noted, concerning the past history of legal actions, negotiations and confrontations concerning many topics like territorial rights between the First Nations and the Government of Quebec, that he could not bear 400 years of history on his shoulders, but that he could try to build the future constructively with them. Furthermore, the Government of Quebec has been negotiating with the First Nations on similar topics for many decades already.

4.2.1.4 Media and Public Opinion

Also, external pressures can affect the behavior of the different participants within the network. The general opinion of the population, when the government is involved in a project, is fairly influential, as the electors vote for their representatives, and these latter have the duty to represent the interests of the population in decision making. The media can influence their perception of the project, positively and negatively, and therefore are relevant during the process also.

“What I also found hard is to explain the project in which we were getting involved. There were journalists that did not understand what we were doing, which mocked the process and the Plan Nord, notably Antoine Robitaille from Le Devoir, not to name him. “The Plan Nord is only an approach.” No, the Plan Nord is not only an approach. It is an approach, yes, but it is more than that. At the beginning, I remember that I had many challenges to overcome on communication issues. When the plan was announced, people saw that it was serious and that we worked extremely consciously.” - Nathalie Normandeau, former Vice-PM of the Province of Quebec and Responsible Minister of the Plan Nord

The general perception of the Plan Nord was strongly affected by the media. As media possess a significant power of persuasion over the general population, the message that the different media were reporting constituted press that would drive or diminish the general support of the project. (McDonald Ladd & Lenz, 2009) Because of some misunderstandings and potentially a lack of information or clarity, some media affected
the popular support to the Plan Nord, which impeded its progression and was ultimately one of the factors contributing to the loss of the Liberal Party at the 2012 elections, as it was one of the main issues during the electoral campaign. Similarly, all organizations and communities present in the network had stakeholders. Participants were their representatives. Therefore, their actions and involvement in the network was often driven by the external desires of those stakeholders.

Through its support or opposition, the general population may increase or decrease the level of commitment of the members. As media can significantly affect the general opinion, terms used may be important. Hodge and Greve (2010) argue that PPP’s can have two mutually exclusive purposes: being a tool of governance or to be more or less a language game put forward by the establishment to favor the reception by the civil community of the cooperation with the private sector. That said language games aims at suppressing the use of terms like “privatization” and “contracting out” in order to use “warmer and friendlier proposition” that the term “partnership” represents. (Hodge & Greve, 2010)

In brief, strategy making is a contextual process. Entities must align together with their environment to find a strategic fit in the ever-changing dynamic conditions. It is a responsive process in which reactive decisions are made depending on the context and the other significant actors within or outside the network. (Forkmann, et al., 2012) Strategies also have to be forward looking, as they will impact not only future strategies by their consequences, but also the network structure, the environment and the attitude of the members. (Pettigrew, 1977)

4.2.2 Governance

Based on the previously mentioned elements, network management and orchestration have to account for different aspects of the network. The research data shows that managing the knowledge, governance, and relationship management are all important to the well-being of the network. Formal leadership, which may or may not come from the network initiator, affects socialization in several ways, as well as informal leadership.
4.2.2.1 Hierarchy

One of those parameters is the hierarchy of the network. In the case of Plan Nord, the hierarchy seemed to be unclear to many. The special status of the First Nations, which have legal rights in dealings with the government, made the other participants wonder how the balance of power was distributed within the network.

“It is obvious that the nations under some agreements, the Crees, the Naskapis and the Inuits, there exists a more defined relationship between these nations, their institutions and the Government of Quebec, while for some other nations, everything is to be done.” - Ghislain Picard, Chief of the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador

In close networks, like the network studied in this work, the social structure is seen as advantageous, as the direct and indirect ties of the members allow them to not only share knowledge, but also to achieve complementarity in capabilities and to create economies of scale. (Ahuja, 2000)

4.2.2.2 Network Structure

Furthermore, the orchestration is an important factor affecting the network dynamics. During the Plan Nord, different working tables were set up to each discuss different aspects of the project. For example, some of the tables discussed exclusively of mining, forestry, education, or health. Totally, there were 11 tables, and progress reports were done at the Partners’ Table regularly. This way of working seemed to create an efficient working environment, where each table consisted only of experts and specialists of the different groups and organizations represented in the given topic of discussion.

“We created 11 working groups, on which were represented all the First Nations, the different concerned industries, environmental organizations. These 11 groups were co-presided. One member of the table was a co-president of the group, and the other was the relevant deputy minister. The Plan Nord was a bottom-up approach.” – Robert Sauvé, Deputy Minister for the Plan Nord

Over time, the structure of the network is modified by the creation and disappearance of certain links, the entry or exit of members. Consequently, the network position of every entity in the network is constantly evolving, similarly to its influence and power. However, for the members that remain in the network over time, the
interdependence between the different nodes of the network will also gradually evolve, which will likely be translated in a stronger embeddedness and sense of unity between the members. At one point, “the activities undertaken by parties in a relationship cannot, therefore, be connected without any reciprocal involvement of both parties. The establishment and development of interorganizational relationship requires a mutual orientation.” (Håkansson, 2006)

It is important for the network to benefit from network stability, which can be derived not only from continuity and consistency in relations management, governance, but also in terms of network membership. (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) Stability favors trust and reciprocity in the relationships between the different members, which contributes to create positive conditions for dialogue. (Uzzi, 1997)

4.2.2.3 External Support

During the Plan Nord, the network also had external support for accessing knowledge. There was a team, which role was to gather additional data on different issues upon request of the different working tables. Therefore, an external network of experts and scientists were indirectly involved in gaining and sharing knowledge throughout the network. Furthermore, many organizations within the network also had their own structure and associations to gather knowledge, like the Boreal Canadian Initiative that had close ties with the Pew Research Center.

“Government officials started to collect knowledge and build a network of researchers which are experts in Nordic studies. The evaluation of the research institution was done according to the potential contribution of each to the working groups. Since the beginning of the project, a list of 175 researchers of research centers has been constituted. On the 103 approached researchers, 75 are interested in collaborating to the Plan Nord. The officials of the research and development knowledge support network encourage the working groups to determine and communicate their needs in terms of needed knowledge and industries relevant to the territory covered by the project.” - Meeting Minutes from the second meeting, held on March 26th, 2010
4.2.2.4 Network Orchestrator

During the project, many interviewees have claimed that Mrs. Normandeau played a major role in the dynamics by the way she managed and presided the meetings of the Partners’ Table. As some groups and individuals are always more vocals than others, she made a point of including the quieter representatives, in the purpose of including equally every member of the network and insuring that all the participants had a global view of the issues and how every party was impacted. The participants appreciated the effort and believed that the group benefited by such relations management.

“Mrs. Normandeau was a sensible person to consultation. She instituted an obligation to work with the stakeholders. It was appreciated.” – Marc Dubé, SLSJ Regional Conference of Elected Officers

As, during the network’s operations, the interdependence between the actors gradually increased and their relationship over time tended to become continuous rather than sporadic, the maintenance of the network and its long-term success are highly dependent on the interactions between the different organizations forming the network. Those interactions include the members that are part of the network and the third parties outside the network as well that somehow contribute to the performance of the coalition. (Håkansson, 2006) Consequently, the inclusive approach of Mrs. Normandeau for consultation, participation and cooperation created positive interactions within the participants, generating, in turn, constructive communicational patterns.

As the level of uncertainty and trust were high, the network had a more informal form of governance, less hierarchical, as the participants were more bound through a relational contract. This type of governance relies more strongly on informal governing system and emphasizes the relational aspect on the network, and may contribute to a more united network on the long term, even if that unity may take longer to be created. (Ring & Van de Ven, 1992) This self-enforcing governance may be formal, involving equity and economic incentives, or informal, drawing on the relational aspects of the network by promoting trust and by being based on reputation and goodwill, for example. The latter is longer to establish to create synergies, but may cause a deeper commitment of the members on a long-term basis. (Dyer & Singh, 1998)
Considering the possible divergence of opinion between the different actors of the network, as mentioned above, members may not fully want to commit to the strategies adopted by the coalition. For this reason, the governance of the network is important, both in managing the process of making decisions and implementing. Implementing the process gradually and incrementally may facilitate the resolution of problems due to the reluctance of certain members to contribute to the implementation of the strategies, as it makes it easier to identify the possible divergences in interests and objectives, and therefore address them within the network community. (Tishuk, 2012)

4.2.3 Participants

The different groups and organizations making up the network certainly affect the progress of the work as well. All participants are present in the network to be involved in the achievements of common goals. However, they also have their own interests, and each is expected to contribute in some ways to the network. Some may be able to contribute resources, knowledge or man power, for example. These contributions made to the network and their respective involvement influence the dialogue and conflict resolution by establishing some balance of power. Assuredly, participants that have higher at stake, or have more resources to contribute are likely to have a more important influence for a given decision.

Potential participants in the network consider the current context and their respective expectations of the project in order to determine whether or not they should join the network. Because a project like the Plan Nord is costly and time consuming, every participant must consider how much man power, money and time they are willing to put into the network for their participation to be worthy. It is mostly a question investment perspective. The perceived potential benefits that the organization thinks it can benefit from will determine the amount of resources it is willing to invest. In brief, if the organization considers that there is a lot to gain or to defend in the project, it will join the network as it believes it can derive value from the said network in at least one way. (Paquin & Howard-Grenville, 2013) An opposite conclusion would lead the organization to stay aside of the network, or potentially oppose it as also.

Most entities primarily become members of different networks with the intent of creating relational rents, which are “supernormal profits jointly generated in exchange
relationship that cannot be generated by either firm in isolation and can only be created through the joint idiosyncratic contributions of the specific alliance parties.” (Dyer & Singh, 1998) In brief, organizations become members of self-enforced networks because they realize that some other entities possess resources and capabilities that they do not have, and they see the benefits that those resources and capabilities could have on their profitability or longevity.

“We noticed that most First Nations were supporting it because it involved development. There was going to be benefits and they could not pass on such an opportunity.” - André Gaumond, President of Virginia Mines

Certain participants have demands or conditions that need to be initially addressed for them to join and stay in the network. (Olk & Young, 1997) That way, they guarantee that they will receive benefits on their most critical issues through the project. Those conditions need to be supported with valid arguments, and their positions within the project must be strong enough to have that influence. For example, the Crees stated their involvement in the project was conditional to the renegotiation of a new governance structure on the Cree territory, as a parallel process to the Plan Nord. As they are granted by a court decision that the government must consult and receive their approval for any project on their land, the Crees had enough power to set that condition. In the end, the governance structure was renegotiated, the Crees were satisfied, and their involvement in the process was enhanced, and their relationship with the government improved. Another example is the construction of affordable social housing on Inuit territory for the community to join the network.

As each entity is represented by individuals, the representatives of these groups also have important incidence on how the dialogue is carried and negotiations conducted. The representatives of the different groups and organizations can be catalysts or hindrances to group communication and collaboration. For examples, participants have expressed that the personality and approach of their peers considerably affect the group dynamics. Rosas & Camarinha-Matos (2009) came to the same conclusions, mentioning that showing empathy and promptness are two aspects contributing positively to the network dynamics. Furthermore, the pertinence of their interventions and their communication skills can also spur the synergy between the participants and help to agree
on common solutions to the reasons why the network exists.

“I think a lot had to do with trust, respect, and will to work together and come to a certain give and take as to what projects should be on the table.” - Matthew Coone-Come, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees

The representatives have knowledge, technology, or capabilities to contribute to the network. (Rosas & Camarinha-Matos, 2009) The organizations or groups represented within the network may be willing to collaborate and cooperate with the other participants at different levels. An open minded group willing to compromise, listen and consider the other participants’ positions promotes a climate of respect and partnership, which is beneficial to resolve conflicts and reach consensual agreements. (Rosas & Camarinha-Matos, 2009)

The different interviewees mentioned that their respective approaches to the projects and to the other members impact the dialogue and conflict resolution, as personalities may clash or mesh together. Because the dialogue is conducted through personal interactions, the representatives of the different organizations matter in such networks.

4.2.4 Expectations and Individual Interests

The members of the network, from their respective perspective and understanding of the project, entertain expectations as to the potential success of the network, future interactions between the different members, and on the decisions taken. Also, by getting involved in the network, they have interests to protect or to protect during the process.

4.2.4.1 Expectations

The preconceptions and expectations of the different partners in the network are also a relevant element in the process of strategy making, as they affect their attitude the network and its members. The participants first consider the span, importance and extent of the project to draw their expectations of the outcomes. They want to be part of something important and motivating. Therefore the expectations of the projects must be high.

“We had a project of society. Regardless of the government that would have announced such a project, or a government that would have continued in that line
of thoughts, we had a societal project. We had a plan. The Plan Nord was a plan without a plan. We were at elaborating the plan. It failed. It is a shame. Every participant was fantasizing. These participants were heading back in their communities and were saying: “There is some hope for Quebec, to develop a large portion of the province harmoniously.” It made people dream, it is a shame. It’s a shame that there was no continuity. I can only wish that they come back with a project in which people will bite into. They all had their aspirations. Sometimes, they are not compatible, but everyone was biting into it. It was nice to see it.” - Ghislain Poirier, President of the AEMQ

Consequently, potential participants have the desire to be part of a utopian project that will leave a footprint. They expect, by engaging in the project, that they will be part of the evolution of their group or community, or their industry. Expectations are closely related to individual interests, which are discussed later. However, the main difference is that expectations are the consequences the different participants believe that the consequences and impacts of the project will be, negative or positive. The individual interests are what those participants intend to defend, protect or promote during the orchestration of the network. The desire to be part of the network is driven by an alignment of both.

Considering their rights, for some entities like the First Nations, and the existing relationships between the potential participants, the partners assess the project by evaluating the potential benefits, direct and indirect, and the impacts that their respective group may face as the outcomes of the project. The potential direct benefits can be economic, social, or environmental. Indirect expected benefits can present themselves under the forms of extended partnerships with some other participants, or access to new, yet inaccessible networks through networking. Consequently, the expectations of the project itself, its potential benefits and impacts, access to resources, capabilities and knowledge, and how the possible process will be conducted are based on an array of factors, including, but not limited to, history and reputation of the different participants and their track record of how they usually conduct business, the importance and span of the project, and the possible stakes in the project. (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005) However, the participants want to be part of a network that is important, that will contribute to create
value. (Olk & Young, 1997) They expect that the project they undertake will contribute to improve the current status of their respective group or community. If there are higher prospects of tangible benefits, the participants will be willing to invest more resources into the project.

“The Great Council of the Crees wants to obtain tangible benefits from the implementation of the Plan Nord, as it was the case with the Paix des Braves, the 2001 agreement that solved many juridical disagreements between the Crees and Quebec.” – Crees want “tangible benefits”¹, Charles Côté, published in La Presse on December 17th, 2010

The pooling of resources and knowledge can provide the participants with competitive advantages, decreased costs of operation, may create inimitable resources and capabilities. In turn, the for-profit companies may also face reduced competition in their respective sectors. (Gulati, et al., 2000) In the case of the Plan Nord, the companies would likely face reduced competition, as they would have access to significantly more capabilities and infrastructures deriving from the network. All the participants would benefit from more knowledge than their peers within their industries, and potentially have an easier access to financial support from the government, which are all concrete benefits that the participants can expect from a project like the Plan Nord.

4.2.4.2 Individual Interests

Each group, organization or community involved in the network has its own agenda and interests at stake. Each of them joined the network because it had something to gain or to defend. While contributing to the common good of the network, those interests may or may not be aligned with the other perspectives expressed by the other participants of the network. They will then use power and influence to achieve organizational goals through the achievement of the network’s objectives. From a relational perspective, power is the utilization of will, skills and communication to influence other members and the coalition into taking decisions that are beneficial for the organization’s individual interests. (Pettigrew & McNulty, 1995) In the present case, the representatives of the mining industry had diametrically opposed interests with the

¹ From an article published in French, under the original name of Les Cris veulent des “benefices tangibles”
environmentalist organizations. The former wished to promote mining and exploration territories while the latter wanted to protect as much land as possible to protect biodiversity and ecosystems, for example. As a result of all the different interests of the different participants of the network, individual interests significantly impact the decision making process when they are joined, as they may often be contradictory. In the following example, the Crees were concerned that the project’s outcomes could impede their lifestyle.

“In contrary to certain views, Eeyou Istchee is not an unoccupied territory. It is the basis. We are hunters. We are fishermen. We are trappers. We have a Cree traditional economy. We are self-sufficient. To me, to us, it was crucial, how you can find a way that that way of life is compatible with development, of course is a challenge.” - Matthew Coone-Come, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees

As every participant has its own agenda, goals and objectives, every network is politicized. Even if the participants have compatible but not common goals, or common goals but different perspectives on how to achieve them, some conflicts of interest might occur, as everyone attempts to gain different benefits from participating in the network. (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005) Consequently, the network will strive to attain both common and individual goals, which can ultimately lead to conflicts, as the individual interests represented by the different groups may be in opposition, which affects the dialogue and the interactions. Therefore, in the strategy making, policies will be adopted by the coalition, which explains why members will display political behaviors in the purpose of securing their own interests. Politics can be observed as the “exploitation of power in other than purely economic ways.” (Mintzberg, et al., 2009)
4.3 Dialogue

Dialogue is the process in which positions and opinions are exchanged through multiple ways of communication. It is the most important and central element in the model presented to successfully achieve strategy making within a pluralist group. Participants, over time, develop patterns of socializations, which influence the interactions between them. Furthermore, although organizations are the partners, human relations have a significant impact, as factors like motivation and commitment transcend the individual level. (Rosas & Camarinha-Matos, 2009)

The dialogue is used to exchange facts, perceptions, perspectives and opinion and can be beneficial in providing a global, or holistic, vision of the entire project and what it entails at every level and to resolve conflicts. Due to the complexity of stakeholders within strategic pluralist networks, relationship management is an important aspect for the efficiency and success of the project. (Zou, et al., 2014) Thus, the dialogue has three main components: dialogue catalysts, communication patterns and influential behaviors. These mutual exchange interactions allow the participants to progress individually and as
a group throughout the project to reach common ground and decide upon common strategy.

“What I felt, as we discussed earlier, is that they (the partners) started with a grocery list and were able, throughout the months, to reach a more strategic, global state of reflection, when they were self-centered at the beginning. In fact, they were regarding a tree at the beginning, but by the end, they were observing the forest. They were able to look at the global situation.” – Nathalie Normandeau, former Vice-PM of the Province of Quebec and Responsible Minister of the Plan Nord

The elements of the dialogue discussed below, the catalysts, communication patterns and influential behaviors, are important, as they are central in whether the dialogue will result in a conflict or an agreement. They influence the conversations and interactions between the different participants of the network. Not only they are influential in preventing conflicts from happening, but they are also keys in solving the said conflicts, as all conflicts of interests may not be prevented in such pluralist conditions.

4.3.1 Catalysts

Although they represent an organization or a group, the representatives have certain needs that will keep their motivation and involvement levels high during the project. Similarly, if the communities, groups or organizations they represent do not feel the same way, some pressure may be done to oppose or leave the network. In the case of the Plan Nord, many participants expressed that to reach the highest possible involvement of all participants, the partners must feel like they are being truly considered and directly involved in the process. Participation and involvement of the stakeholders in the process creates informational, affective and motivational effects on the observed behaviors. (Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004) There are some key success factors for the dialogue, or catalysts.

During the network’s operations, the interdependence between the actors gradually increases and their relationship over time tends to become continuous rather than sporadic. (Håkansson, 2006) The maintenance of the network and its long-term
success are highly dependent on the interactions between the different organizations forming the network. Those interactions include the members that are part of the network and the third parties outside the network that contribute to the performance of the coalition in one or more ways. (Håkansson, 2006) Consequently, dialogue catalysts contribute a sustained constructive dialogue that will efficiently help managing conflicts and are important in creating a sense of identity within the network.

Although all participants were acting as agents of their organization, personal bonds were created. People learned to know each other, and the project relied increasingly on the bonds and relationships between the participants; hence the need to create a propitious working atmosphere among the network.

“At the beginning, it was tense between the representatives of the mining industry and those of the environmental organizations. Toward the end, it changed because they learned to know each other. It is like any other thing. At the head of organizations, there are human beings with their qualities and weaknesses, their fears. They are human beings; one has to understand it before anything else.” – Nathalie Normandeau, former Vice-PM of the Province of Quebec and Responsible Minister of the Plan Nord

There is also a need to feel like the other representatives are willing to make compromises to reach a common solution. If they feel that some participants do not give anything up in the process, a feeling of inequality may arise. Participants also mentioned that transparency must be felt. It increases the level of trust between participants and between participants and the network manager. A relationship of trust is necessary for a smooth process of negotiations and discussions.

“I believe that if you involve everyone to bake a cake, even if the cake is not as good as it could be, is it possible that everyone will like it because they all participated? However, if we did not participated, it is possible that we are much more critical concerning the cake. I think we have to collaborate and develop a common recipe. You have better odds of success and global adhesion in a project when time comes to implement it.” - Daniel Roy, Director of the Quebec Union of the Métallos

The participants need to feel like they are being part of the network. Research has
also proved that a higher involvement creates a sense of ownership, even if the decisions do not reflect a consensual position, which increases adhesion and commitment. (Tannenbaum & Fred, 1950) Many of them also stated during the interviews not only the need to compromise, but the need to feel like the others are willing to and are compromising as well. Other aspects such as feeling truly considered, trust and transparency, inclusiveness and equity have been noted by several interviewees, which is consistent with the conclusions of Siddiqi et al. after their study on health system governance in developing countries, which is a project resembling the Plan Nord, as the network included both private and public entities and the network was led by public administration. (Siddiqi, et al., 2009) Additionally, participants seek good governance, which includes all the previously mentioned qualities, as well as accountability, resilience and legitimacy. (Lockwood, 2010)

In brief, a certain climate and atmosphere must be instituted and maintained within the network through dialogue catalysts and some elements are crucial to the orchestration of the network in order to develop nascent inter-organizational strategies. These include trust, respect, transparency, inclusiveness and openness. The interviewees mentioned them as conditions for a constructive and positive dialogue between the different parties involved in the process.

4.3.2 Communication Patterns

The presence or absence of the dialogue catalysts impacts communication within the network. The way official and unofficial communication flows through the network and between the participants impacts the collaboration and the efficiency of the group work. Although some official communication is necessary to effectively maintain the network and insure that important information is known by every group, informal communication and negotiations were allowed and encouraged. Such method allowed some of the participants with opposite visions to concert together and present joint propositions to their respective working group. Although impossible to quantify, the amount of informal communication that took place and the extent of its effects are believed to have been greatly helpful in the resolution of many conflicts of interests among the participating parties.

“There was a lot of informal communication and a lot of work within the working
groups. Communication occurred more during working sessions. It was lasting 1, 2 days. People had time to talk together, to get to know each other, to share. Sometimes, a priori opponents even presented common propositions. A proposition written conjointly by the President of the Association for Mining Exploration with a representative of the Pew Foundation saying: “We would like you to agree with this”, it would be embarrassing to refuse. There were 2 opposed worlds that were suggesting a common solutions to approach mining development. In these instances, there were interesting contributions. Some discussions were informal, bilateral or in small groups within working groups. It was taking different forms. I believe that Mrs. Normandeau played an important role in always encouraging honest discussions around the table.” - Robert Sauvé, Deputy Minister of the Plan Nord

The negotiation process is also driven by communication or lack thereof. Bargaining and negotiating are all about communicating: what to communicate, to whom, when and in which way. The pattern of communication between network members therefore impacts the strategy formulation process of the coalition as a unity. Negotiation between parties may be public or private, as it occurred during the Plan Nord. Depending on the form of governance of the network, communication is more or less public to all members, as some of it takes place behind the scene. In networks in which private communication is accepted and normal during the negotiation process, it has been shown that it yields to an unequal payoff between the actors involved. (Bolton, et al., 2003) However, the participants in the Plan Nord have found that informal communication was constructive and benefited the project. This situation may become attractive to members, as they can try to accentuate their power and influence within the network through this type of process. On the other hand, research shows that in networks in which all communication is public, there is more equality, and those networks usually provide a higher value per member in the end. (Bolton, et al., 2003) Consequently, the transparency preached by the government was aimed at countering a possible inequality created by informal communication, by keeping all the participants in the loop concerning all issues. Therefore, communication is not only the language employed by the different members in negotiating and debating ideas. It is also the channels used and how the process is
conducted, which affects the patterns of strategic choices and behavior of the network.

4.3.3 Influential Behaviors

Because of these potentially conflicting individual interests, power and politics always have a central role whenever there are negotiations. In this present network, many influential behaviors were observed and used, although participants avoided using drastic ones. The network behaved heavily according to rationality and pragmatism, even if some network inefficiencies occurred, due to the human factor. Consequently, the main ways that participants expressed influence could be gained was through credibility, expertise, and preparedness. These seemed to convey more support than traditional politics, as they made rational arguments to convince opponents to their ideas.

Controlling the process is a common way to gain influence. (Greene & Elffers, 1998) Some participants expressed that controlling the agenda by putting their own relevant issues of the discussion table was an effective way of making sure their interests were taken care of. Furthermore, proposing solutions to mentioned issues was a way to get in the negotiations, as leading through action is more efficient than through arguments. (Greene & Elffers, 1998) Proposing solutions to raised issues was then an effective and constructive way to have influence and defend interests throughout the process.

Experience in negotiation turned to be an important factor too. The Crees, which have extended negotiating experience with the government, turned into an example that the other First Nations attempted to replicate in the discussions. Their organization and knowledge on how to conduct negotiations motivated and inspired other groups to act similarly, as they observed that the Crees were highly influential during the process.

Finally, some participants created some alliances, but not unilaterally. Alliances were made on a case per case basis. When two groups agreed on a given issues, they were combining their efforts. However, they could be arguing on different issues. Thus, participants focused on creating and constructive and respectful environment that would promote reaching consensus. One participant mentioned that such interaction promoted respect between the members. As, depending on the issue discussed, they could be aligned or opposed, participants remained respectful, because they knew they would possibly defending shared perspectives concerning other issues.
The leadership position of a network member usually is tightly linked to its degree of decisiveness. The decisiveness of a member is represented by the difference between its influential successes and failures. (Grabisch & Rusinowska, 2010)

“It was not easy. Everybody had their own interests. The municipalities had their own agenda. The people involved in education had their own vision of how you can create a workforce. The mining companies, of course, wanted to fast-track some of their projects. They thought the environmentalists were a little too rigorous. The forestry companies were in really bad shape, as you know. It was a real challenge. I think that at the end of the day, if one, we were all looking for solutions. We were all looking for our own projects to be done. I suppose whoever was ready and had cost out the project and was ready to move forward got the upper hand. But if you were just talking about initiating, and you hadn’t done your homework, you feasibility studies, your research and your R&D and cost out, the chances of moving forward were pretty slim. The government, as you know, likes to make announcements, agreements and etc., but there is a lot of work before getting there. Those who were able to have projects and programs and were ready to starts and only needed financial inputs were able to move their files forward.” - Matthew Coone-Come, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees

As explained by Chief Coone-Come, members tried to use their influence to defend their perceived interests by engaging in political games, legitimately or not. One of them is the alliance building, which occurred only on a per case basis in the present studied network, as mentioned by different participants. Within the network, some actors negotiate with other members so that they support their respective interests when decision making time comes. This way, they add on their power by gaining support and can therefore protect their perceived interest more easily. In other words, some coalitions form within the network. (Mintzberg, et al., 2009)

As mentioned, power is a resource, an ability of actors to affect, convince that an actor possesses. Politics refers to how power is used within the network. Influence, meanwhile, takes the relational perspective and is the outcome of the combination of power and politics, in contexts when actors use their power while engaging in political
behavior with fellow members of the network; influence is a social phenomenon.

From those political games emerge leaders within the network. Leaders can also emerge out of an array of circumstances, be it due to their charisma, experience, knowledge, network position, etc. Those leaders often have greater influence and power on the coalition and on the other members of the network. They are looked up to and often act also as a coordinator and model for the other members. Their opinion can influence many actors that are not quite certain of their stance on some issues. Some leaders set the emotional tone of the network, setting the example by their reaction to certain events, for example. (Pescosolido, 2002) Leadership within a network contributes to shape the network structure and internal operations. Leaders are assumed to have the capacity to “make things happen.” (Müller-Seitz, 2012) They can emerge in several different ways, but especially from an interactional perspective, members of the network with a high emotional intelligence may easily emerge from the others to become a reference, as a one of the key leadership function, especially in a network like the Plan Nord that is driven by interactions, is the ability to manage the emotions of the members of the network, mainly with regards to frustration and optimism. (Humphrey, 2002) In the studied network, Nathalie Normandeau mentioned that managing expectations turned out to be challenging at the beginning. Members had high expectations and they needed to remain realistic. Moreover, when tensions were arising, some members used humor during the meetings to decrease the levels of frustration. Network participants that truly listen to the others and show integrity, altruism, respect, honesty (Pielstick, 2000), as well as empathy and support foster a working atmosphere that increases participation, as other members sense inclusion, respect and support. (Wolff, et al., 2002) In the case of the Plan Nord, some of the actors emerged as authentic leaders, like the formal network manager, Nathalie Normandeau, because of her openness and consideration for all the members of the network, which was appreciated within the group.

4.3.4 Conflict

As mentioned, the different key elements of the dialogue influence whether or not conflicts can arise within the network. However, because of the heterogeneity and pluralism within the network, conflicts, minor or major, are likely to arise at some point of the strategy making process even if the key success factors are well managed.
Conflicts of interests occur when different participants share different views, perspectives and opinions. The divergence of positions creates the need for a dialogue in order to resolve the conflict and reach common agreements on strategies to adopt. These conflicts may also arise when participants feel like their interests are not accounted for. From there, it may escalate into tension and there may be a risk of affecting the climate and atmosphere within the dialogue.

“During the first meetings, everything may fall apart. The different interests collide. The ecologists are confronted to the representatives of forestry and mining, the Innus with the Whites, the Crees with the Government. […] The Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, Matthew Coone-Come, judges that his community’s needs are not accounted for. He shows up to meetings accompanied by lawyers and negotiators.” – Behind the scene of the Plan Nord\(^2\), Alec Castonguay, published in l’Actualité on September 15\(^{th}\), 2012

Conflicts may arise, but also may be prevented. Sharing knowledge to discuss and exchange views can contribute to resolve and prevent conflicts, as organizations may gain a better understanding or each other, of the context, and of each other’s challenges. First, knowledge can be hard facts about the context or certain elements of the project. It can also take the form of research intelligence, when the participants decide that more knowledge is necessary to make a particular decision, know-how, new skills and competences. (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005) Furthermore, knowledge can also be an understanding of every stakeholder and participant’s realities and issues within the network or affected by the project or certain ways to operate. Additionally, as the participants are involved in socializing together, knowledge of each other personally becomes critical for positive relationships. It improves the trust level between participants, and supports the development of a global perspective of all the implications that the different decisions to be made for the different groups and stakeholder. Knowledge is therefore important to make rational strategic decision for the greater good of all the participants of the network while minimizing or avoiding negative consequences for the different parties involved.

“Mrs. Suzann Méthot (Sustainable Development) discusses the misunderstanding

\(^{2}\) From an article published in French, under the original name of Dans les coulisses du Plan Nord
of the Northern realities by the partners. According to her, an update on the realities of every region included in the Plan Nord is necessary and would contribute to avoid potential conflicts at the Partners’ Table.” – Meeting Minutes from the third meeting, held on May 28th, 2010

Knowledge sharing has been proven to have a direct relationship with the social interactions like commitment, trust and mutual influence. (Muthusamy & White, 2005) As a result, research supports the data collected in the way that knowledge exchange not only allowed the participants to gain a better and more complete perspective on the project, but also benefited the relationships and interactions between the different partners, which turned to be helpful in conflict solving processes. The different working groups were asked to make presentations in the others, to favor collaboration and meshing between groups that had similar needs or objectives.

4.3.5 Successful Arbitrage

Arbitrage is a procedure through which the leader or manager of the network may solve conflicts among the participants by taking unilateral decisions on the strategy to be implemented, considering the different positions of the participants, the available resources and the priorities. Derived from old French, the word *arbitrage* refers to refereeing and giving a judgment. During the Plan Nord, Mrs. Normandeau and her colleagues had to decide on several instances, like in the forestry sector to protect industrial development, but wanted to avoid it as much as possible. Within the network, arbitrage was perceived as a last resort to make decisions. Discussing decision making, André Gaumond, a representative of the mining industry said:

“It was the majority. Most of the time, it was the majority. There is not always a consensus, but that is to be expected. The government was taking it (the different opinions and suggestions) and was deciding what it thought made the most sense. We were making a document with recommendations, and generally, everyone was agreeing. It was not always written the way we wanted, but it was taking into consideration just about everyone.” – André Gaumond, President of Virginia Mines

Because the arbitrages were accepted fairly well by the different participants of the network, this section is labeled as successful arbitrage. However, as it is later
discussed, potential consequences, outcomes and impacts could be different than the ones proposed in the model, should the arbitrage be contested and opposed by many or most parties involved in the dialogue.

4.3.6 Perceived Possible Conflict Resolution and/or Satisfactory Outcome

Unconsciously or consciously, participants of the network are constantly reassessing their position within the network and the network efficiency, considering the incidental factors on the dialogue, their assessment of the performance of the network, the network ties and their embeddedness, the learning opportunities and other networking alternatives. (Olk & Young, 1997) Provided with perceived better alternatives, some members may migrate to other networks, especially in case of network instability. (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) Following the decision making, some issues might still arise, as the members may not be supportive of the strategies chosen by the network, as they might not be aligning well with their individual objectives. It might be difficult for the coalition to have every member complying with the planned strategy. As the effectiveness of the strategies decided upon is related to the interactive behavior, some targets, incentives and controls must be established in order to maintain a better grip on the orchestration and behavior of the network and its members. (Håkansson, 2006) When decisions are made, participants then assess these decisions and decide whether or not it is worth to remain in the network. They base that decision on their respective satisfaction. That satisfaction occurs on two different levels: performance and membership conditions. (Olk & Young, 1997) If the performance and the decisions taken by the network are satisfying the member, it will likely remain. Also, a member that is highly dependent on the network is likely to remain within the network. In the case of the Plan Nord, smaller communities that do not possess many resources and capabilities had incentives to stay, as the other members would provide more resources than they could. (Olk & Young, 1997)
4.4 Outcomes

In the proposed model, there are two possible outcomes in a collaborative network attempting at designing a common strategy. The first one is a nascent inter-organizational strategy. The second is a potential network exit or opposition by the unsatisfied participants.

4.4.1 Nascent Inter-Organizational Strategy

A nascent inter-organizational strategy is a new, previously nonexistent, plan of action or initiative, decided upon by a multiplayer network in the purpose of attaining the network’s objectives. The Plan Nord was a newly formed network. The network had to establish a vision and objectives before being able to decide on strategies to implement.
Therefore, all of the strategies were emerging from the network and were only at the stage of displaying future potential, as no implementation had been done. For the Plan Nord, a nascent strategy meant that an initiative was decided by the network, a strategy that was to be implemented, without any antecedent.

Even when they are part of a network, participants within a network strive to fulfill their own interests actively. (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) Consequently, the decisions may be challenging to make on a consensual basis, as the diversity of interest and the heterogeneity of the members may create conflicts of interests. The members of the network may encounter conflicts at different stages before reaching a common nascent inter-organizational strategy consensually. The research data showed that frictions may arise at the stages of determining the vision, establishing common objectives or designing the strategic plan. A shared vision emerges when participants within the network hold similar values, needs, beliefs and purposes. (Pielstick, 2000)

“It took two meetings before the vision of the Plan Nord was determined. There were many discussions and many issues were raised concerning which vision should uphold the Plan Nord. Once it was agreed on, the group was welded together and the Partners knew in which direction they were going.” – Christian Dubois, Deputy Minister of the Plan Nord

It is the role of the network orchestrator to act as a relational broker (Obstfeld, 2005) to unite participants, resources and ideas to generate a common quest toward the collective goals. (Capaldo, 2007) Over time, interdependencies and interactions between the different participants and their environment will develop and be defined through the respective needs of reciprocal relationships that each member of the network needs in order to derive value from the network. (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1973) Therefore, the network orchestrator must support the creation of those relationships between the participants to create fruitful collaboration. (Paquin & Howard-Grenville, 2013)

Those relationships and interdependencies are central to the achievement of nascent inter-organizational strategies. As participants get to know each other personally, they arrive at a mutual understanding of their respective positions and challenges, which can create bases for collaboration.

“When you understand better the others’ challenges, I believe that it helps to
eventually bring people closer and to find win-win solutions. Winning from all sides, not only from one.” – **Marc Dubé, SLSJ Regional Conference of Elected Officers**

From there, a sense of common identity can be developed (Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000), which facilitates inter-organization socialization, which in turn, supports the formation of social capital. (Brown & Duguid, 2001) Social capital then facilitates a constructive dialogue and openness among the members of the network.

“Those people, around the table, felt like they were part of the project, that they could make a difference.” – **Nathalie Normandeau, former Vice-PM of the Province of Quebec and Responsible Minister of the Plan Nord**

After agreeing on a common vision and objectives, participants may disagree on the means to undertake to reach the given goals. In this network, preserving some areas from industrial development was a decision that generated many discussions. Before even determining which areas should be protected, the participants had to agree on what industrial development meant, especially in the domain of forestry. Consequently, reaching a common nascent inter-organizational strategy is not always easy when there is no consensus from the start. It gives rise to discussions, tensions and arguments, in which the group unity and identification to the network stands for much in the agreement on common strategies. (Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000)

As already mentioned, an adopted nascent inter-organizational strategy is one that was overtly expressed, supported by the network and included in the strategic action plan. Decisions can be taken consciously or not, and there is not necessarily a clear indicator of when and how a specific decision is taken. Consequently, for the purpose of the work, a decision in this work is considered as a registered collective commitment to action. (Hickson, 1990) Such strategies are attained after the members interact together to solve the possible conflicts and disagreements. A common strategy can be reached through two different ways. The first way to reach a common strategy is through consensus and common agreement, by either avoiding conflict interests on specific issues, or by solving conflicts of interests together by negotiating, exchanging knowledge and communicating.

The second way to design an action plan is through leader intervention. The orchestrator of the network can arbitrate on issues for an array of resources, notably
conflicts, resources and priorities, to decide upon an action that will be undertaken, when the conflicts appear to be unresolvable. In the case of the Plan Nord, arbitrage was a last resort action by the Government of Quebec, as the preferred way was consensual decisions. The government representatives wanted to let the participants decide together what the strategy was going to be as much as possible, to maximize adhesion and support, and to ensure more effective implementation afterward. To maximize such involvement, fairness and procedural justice needed to be displayed by the network orchestrator. (Dhanaraj & Parkhe, 2006) During the Plan Nord, the participants appreciated the bilateral communication they could have with the government, which increased their respective commitment. (Kim & Mauborgne, 1998)

4.4.2 Possible Exit and/or Opposition

Members usually stay within their network according to its perceived performance and some membership conditions. (Olk & Young, 1997) When no common strategy can be reached, participants may feel like their interests are not taken enough into account. In the case where a conflict of interest persists, they may also feel that there is no way to solve the conflict. In both cases, participants may reconsider their participation in the network, as they may believe that they have nothing to gain from participating in it. They may also choose to oppose the network and the project when they feel their rights and interests are overlooked. Although not clearly observed during the study, participants may part ways with the network if they are not satisfied. The Inuits represent an example.

In the case of this present network, the Inuits had a moment of hesitation. After initially adhering to the project, their representative was criticized by its population because, according to the citizens, he did not consult them enough. Thereafter, the Inuit leader changed stance, and his adhesion and commitment decreased a bit:

“The questioning that followed was often derived more from internal difficulties within the community than from conflicts with the government. For these communities, it is easier to blame the government than to recognize internal issues. The Inuits are a good example. We worked with them; they signed; they were present at the launching. Pita Aatami was there. Thereafter, he was criticized by his peers for not consulting them sufficiently before adhering. We sincerely did
what we could, but it became an issue of internal politics. From there ensued some reconciliation and we tried acting to help them to come back to a more formal adhesion. We only partly succeeded. The first had to solve their internal issues.” - Jean Charest, former Prime Minister of Quebec

Many factors may probe a participant to leave the network. The degree of embeddedness of an entity in comparison with the other members may push that firm to make a strategic move, possibly leaving the network, in the case that its interests are not represented well enough, the performance of the network is not satisfactory or if better alliances would be possible outside the network for that given entity. The lock-in and lock-out effect is one of the main possible impediments to a member of a network. (Gulati, et al., 2000) The ties with some organizations may prevent collaboration with others. Therefore, a company must assess the benefits and opportunities of entering the network, and must constantly reassess its membership within the coalition. The alternatives may be more beneficial to a participant. Also, the member may believe that prospects of reaching its individual interests may be better in another network. (Uzzi, 1997)
5 Discussion

The findings and the proposed model raise some points that should be further discussed, and contain some areas that could benefit from further research. Some interesting aspects are pointed out by the findings and should be further addressed. This chapter presents an improved model from the one already presented that could be tested to more accurately depict the process of strategy formation within collaborative pluralist networks. It is also relevant to point out some potential differences between the network studied and other pluralist collaborative networks.
5.1 Proposed Improved Model for Strategy Formation

Dialogue
- Catalysts
- Communication Patterns
- Influential Behaviors

Conflict?
- Yes
- No

Arbitrage?
- Yes
- No

Perceived possible resolution/satisfactory outcome?
- Yes
- No

Possible exit and/or opposition

Nascent Interorganizational Strategy

Figure 6. Potential Model that Further Research Could Support
5.1.1 Failure of Arbitrage

In the present study of the Plan Nord, no clear occurrence of a participant leaving the network, or remaining in it but being an opponent to its progression has been observed. However, in the case of a failed arbitrage, which would lead to one or many participants being strongly unsatisfied with the network, it could be expected that such event could occur. Here is a proposed reviewed model that could be confirmed or infirmed with further research and that offers additional hypotheses concerning the relationships between the incidental factors on the dialogue during the process.

As arbitrage should not automatically be successful, the possibility of a failed arbitrage, a highly unsatisfying decision, should generate expectations that the unsatisfied members of the network shall react to the decision and act upon it. Because its arguments did not convince the network manager at first, an actor could be tempted by opposing the decision by either leaving the network or remaining in it and becoming a hindrance for the progression of the strategy making and to the other network members. Further studies on more networks could investigate that possibility.

Moreover, the initial proposed model suggests only a one-direction influence between the incidental factors on the dialogue. However, I believe that further research could possibly demonstrate that not only the dialogue impacts these factors, such as the way the network is governed, the participants, their contributions and expectations and the context, but that these factors influence each other as well, as they are expected to be linked together and interdependent at some level. Also, the arrow drawn from possible exit and/or opposition leading to the dialogue indicates that it would be expected that dissatisfied members of the network could possibly impede the dialogue process. First, an opposing unsatisfied network member could generate a negative atmosphere within the network by lacking openness. Additionally, an exit by one or more member could signify that some potentially core resources to the network would not be available, which could undermine the dialogue and strategy implementation. This potential phenomenon would need to be verified through more investigation and research.

5.2 Potential Differences with Other Collaborative Networks

In all fairness, potential differences with other pluralist collaborative networks of
organizations should be discussed. The first aspect is that networks may differ depending on cultural differences. The second aspect is the possible differences between a PPP and other traditional collaborative networks. Every network is unique, thus orchestration of each one has to be adapted to an array of factors. As much as those pluralist collaborative networks share many similar aspects, some differences must be explored.

5.2.1 Cultural Factors

Although I should not verse extensively in this area, as the present topic only addresses it indirectly, I believe it is worthy of mention, as the proposed model and process of reaching common nascent inter-organizational strategy may be altered or different based on cultural impacts. Cultural differences may impact the network dynamics and human interactions. I believe that cultural aspects could modify the dynamics of dialogue and interactions. The first one is the general culture of the participants of the network. Depending of where the network is geographically located, different nations and regions have different ways to resolve conflicts and conduct business together. For example, if such a network was set up in China and the government was participating, one could expect that the network would not display a hierarchy as flat as the one studied here. The government would expectedly have significantly more power. Culturally, conflicts are solved differently around the world also. In general, some nations are more or less vocal, straight to the point or direct. Therefore, one could expect that in some networks, participants try to avoid confrontation as much as possible. Also, in networks where participants are from quieter cultures that do not do much small talk, it could be expected that because of it, representatives do not develop bonds as tight, which could affect the trust relationships among the network.

Moreover, the individual participants and organizations within the network shall develop an internal culture over time that should be very unique to that specific group. The system of governance would also influence the dynamics and culture among networks, by establishing what is right and wrong, what is allowed or not. In brief, depending on a multitude of factors, each network will develop its own culture and identity that will affect the network dynamics, potentially emphasizing more or less different success key factors in the dialogue for conflict resolution.
5.2.2 Traditional Pluralist Collaborative Networks v. PPP’s

Some differences should also be pointed out concerning some differences that may exist between traditional pluralist networks and PPP’s, as PPP’s include and are orchestrated by the public sector. It should be noted that any government, especially in democratic countries, has the duty to strive for the greater good of all the population. In those countries, not only the government needs to aim for collective benefits for the whole population, but has to represent the majority of electors that have provided its representatives with power. From this perspective, it may seem fairly similar to any for-profit organization. Such organizations have boards and shareholders that have some power on the actions of the company and on the strategies it will adopt. However, the major shareholders in organizations are not as numerous as a whole population. Additionally, major shareholders are usually more literate and informed about all the issues, activities and implications of different decisions that could be taken. They know about the companies, the industries and are usually experienced business people.

Oppositely, a general population is not as knowledgeable about such technical issues, often lacks general perspective, and people are highly influenced by media. Media usually have an allegiance for certain political parties, and therefore the information and perspectives presented may be slightly biased. Governments also have to cope with that aspect when they consider how to manage the network and which strategies should be adopted. As they are elected officials, not pleasing the population would be costly, as it could prevent them from being reelected. As a result, they may face a dilemma, a conflict of interest while designing strategies. Some strategies and decisions could be made for the collective good, but misinformation and general ignorance can have population opposing such projects, due to a lack of understanding or long term view. Officials then face a conflict of interest. Sometimes, they have to choose between acting for the greater good and risking not to be reelected, or complying with the population to insure their reelection despite knowing that they are not deciding upon or implementing the most optimal strategies.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

There are different interesting aspects in this network that could be further studied and benefit knowledge about collaborative pluralist networks. Formation of networks and
impacts of discontinuity should be further investigated, in addition of potential research that could validate or refute the proposed improved model accounting for failed arbitrage.

5.3.1 Formation of Networks

This research focused on how the network of Plan Nord was behaving and interacting in the quest of resolving conflicts and reaching common grounds to design common strategies, once it was formed. However, the initiator of the project has the duty of creating and establishing the network. In this case, most of the relevant stakeholders were conveyed to the discussion. However, some stakeholders, like unions were not invited, and a choice had to be made concerning the representative of every industry and sector. Consequently, the process of the selection of network participants could be further investigated. How many parties should be included and which ones are central questions that would affect the future dynamics and interactions within the network. Motives of inviting certain organizations and not others could be plenty. Past history, potential contribution, legitimacy, cultural characteristics are all elements that could matter in the choice of participants. As the composition of the network directly affects its dynamics, this aspect could be further investigated.

5.3.2 Discontinuity of Projects

A greatly interesting feature of this network is that the government was overturned shortly after the implementation of the strategic plan had begun. The plan has been discontinued and there was a probable pause of about two years, as the Liberal Party has been reelected recently. As continuity and consistency has been noted to be important both for the progress of strategy making and for the relationships between the participants, the fact that the project shall be revived in the near future would offer the opportunity to study how discontinuity has affected the network and its dynamics, and which impacts it would have on its implementation. Would the dynamics and culture within the network change? Would new issues and conflicts between participants arise? Did the participants remain in close collaboration and communication during this pause? Research answering questions about the impacts of the lack of continuity of the Plan Nord when the project resumes could significantly contribute to current knowledge.
6 Conclusion

As suggested by the opening quote in which Mintzberg states that anywhere diversity and ambiguity coexist, politics will arise. The process to reach common inter-organizational strategies is a challenging, but rewarding path. The process to attain such consensual decisions, as exemplified by the Plan Nord, is filled with minor or major disagreements that could impede the design of a common strategic plan. Conflicts may arise in different situations, such as when the participants of the network must define a common vision, common objectives, or agree on the means and mechanisms to achieve the objectives successfully. Conflicts may also stem in personality conflicts between the network members. The first step in managing the interactions between the participants is to acknowledge that conflict may, and probably will, arise in pluralist conditions.

Accepting that conflicts will arise and being upfront about it allow the network orchestrators and networks members to better cope with and manage them, and to minimize their negative impacts. Conflict reduction, not necessarily avoidance, is one of the keys to facilitate the definition of nascent strategies in pluralist conditions. The understanding of such implications will allow for better common strategies in which the participants will be able to derive value for themselves while fulfilling the network’s goals. Accordingly, one could suppose that implementation of the agreed-on strategies may be eased as well and participants of the network can possibly develop extended partnerships between each other that will outlast the project, as they may realize the benefits of the relational rents that can be generated through cooperation.

In this thesis, I proposed a model of strategy making within pluralist collaborative networks in a context of PPP. The proposed model highlights certain aspects that are central to successful strategy making among such networks. The interactional approach of this work relies on the fact that organizations must be aligned with others within a dynamic environment, and must engage in network strategy to collaborate together and derive synergic value from their network. Although some of the proposed aspects may be considered as obvious by some, their relationships in between each other and their role and place in the general process are contributions that allow a better understanding of strategy formation in pluralist conditions and open the possibilities to further study these types of projects to improve their dynamics. Consequently, the understanding of their
implications for strategy making is important.

However, the findings are largely applicable to any other collaborative network, especially innovation networks, in which participants must collaborate to innovate and create new technologies or processes, for example, as the case studied is representative of the challenges that could be experienced by pluralist other networks, due to the high diversity among the network. The Plan Nord, by the variety of the organizations represented, highlights those marked challenges. The proposed model suggests that key success factors for dialogue like trust and respect are necessary for positive interactions, socialization and negotiation. The presence of these catalysts is created by the participants and external factors, such as respective expectations and interests of the members, the context and environment of the network, and mode of governance and degree of implication and decisiveness of the network manager.

Although strategy making in pluralist collaborative networks is a process of cognition, learning, politics and adaptability, it is also one of human interactions. The issues discussed and the settings do not take away that human beings are deciding upon strategies to implement and are interacting together to reach them. Relationships are central to the process of strategy making among pluralist collaborative networks. Humans are at the forefront of it, interacting with each other, and those relationships developed between the members of the network over time strongly influence the success of strategy making within the network. Humans, with their qualities, weaknesses, expectations and fears are at the center of any decision making process in a pluralist collaborative network, and their interactions are decisive on the strategies adopted and on the dynamics of the development and negotiations of strategies. The climate and atmosphere within the network are determined by how these interactions are conducted. Conditions to foster respect, trust, cooperation, collaboration and open and honest communication should be instituted to increase the success rate of those networks and drive the network dynamics. Such conditions are derived directly from the members within the network and their respective attitude toward the project and the others, but the network manager also has a major role to play. Communication patterns, habits and unwritten rules are defined formally by the network manager and informally by the participants in the network.

Managers must be aware that optimal conditions for strategy making in pluralist
networks are not universal, because each network is unique, by its combination of members, culture, differences in orchestration and communication patterns. Consequently, orchestrators must consider that they cannot impose a specific form of governance on the network. To generate a common group identity that all members will relate to, they might need to let go of some formal authority to allow a common identity and culture to emerge from within the network. Such a process may take time, as the relational contract in which network participants enter may need some time before coming to fruition. Trust and personal bonds take time to develop, and network orchestrators should be flexible and patient in such process. They should be open to letting patterns emerge in a bottom-up process, and be ready to hold a bidirectional conversation with the members to optimize the orchestration of such strategic networks.

From the perspective of the members, the findings imply that they must join the network in a certain state of mind. Pluralist collaborative networks empower members, and the latter should embrace the opportunity to be able to make a difference. To do so, they must be patient as well, as they must be part of the processes of identity formation and the development of group dynamics. The findings of this research suggest that potential network participants must be open to others and be personally willing to engage in more personal relationships. Also, before even joining the network, they have to be aware that all their wishes and desires most likely will not be completely fulfilled, as the network’s objectives may not be fully aligned with theirs. They have to join the network willing to compromise and to adopt a general perspective, to avoid a position bias. As a result, conflicts may be better managed by both the orchestrators and the participants.

In a collaborative and cooperative atmosphere, involving all the members equally and accounting for all their perspectives decreases the position bias of every member of the network and therefore support the gain of a general and global view of the network, the perception of all issues by all the participants, and the collective resolution of conflict to compromise and achieve consensus. Consensual agreements are important for adhesion and commitment to the continuation of the network and the implementation of the strategies decided upon. Consequently, procedural justice and fairness should decrease position bias and increase network commitment, as long as there is consistency in governance and equity in decision making. From such conditions, trust and respect can
emerge between the participants over time, and common identity can be created.

Organizations in the network all have their own agendas, expectations and interests to defend. Therefore, they seek to obtain tangible benefits while attempting to reach the network’s objectives, as they are not always aligned. Consequently, members engage in political behaviors to ensure that they can obtain these benefits and fulfill their objectives. Controlling the agenda, proposing suggestions and joining forces all are ways that were used within the network for that purpose. Also, personalities of the different participants influence the defense of their respective interests and their interactions. Experienced individuals in negotiations and experts within their fields have an easier time being perceived as credible. Influence and power are negotiated, evolving and based on perceptions within networks. Whether an individual or an organization is credible or not, if it is perceived as such, it possesses influence. Therefore, it opens up possibilities for the network to not behave efficiently, as human reactions and emotions are perceptions are not always rational.

The expectations, interests and interactions are also influenced by the context in which the network exists. The different economic, legal and political information available is involved in shaping and defining their expectations and interactions, which are expected to evolve accordingly over the process of strategy making. As those human interactions are influenced by the context, network management must also be adapted to the context to reach a better strategic fit.

Network management and governance must also adapt to the ongoing conditions to create a more efficient and cooperative network, in order to achieve better results. Therefore, there are two main aspects that drive network management: governance and relations management. Governance is the frame within which the network will operate, while relation management relates to how the humans and their interactions are managed and accounted for by the network manager.

Governance has important implications in how a particular network is orchestrated, information flow and coordination activities. The network manager has the duty to keep every network member informed about the activities and the meetings in general, as well as the expected timeline of the project. The orchestrator has to insure that relevant knowledge is shared among the network. Furthermore, continuity has been
mentioned as an important theme during the interviews, and the network should be maintained over a longer term to achieve better results. Representatives then have the time to get to know each other and develop relationships, which increases trust and understanding within the network. The network needs support in its external activities to progress. In this special context, work has to be done at the National Assembly to politically support the progress of the network. Also, setting up a network to be able to created needed knowledge for the dialogue was important within the network.

The network manager also has to define and communicate clearly the objectives and a frame for the network operations. Furthermore, defining the hierarchy and the network position that every member has is important not to create confusion. In the network of the Plan Nord, this issue was relevant because of the legal context affecting the negotiations with the First Nations. Situations in which all members are supposed to be equals may create some confusion when the balance of power changes. Concerning legal negotiations, keeping parallel processes aside from the actual network’s activities. Insuring that those discussions do not impede the process of the network, while still moving forward, can significantly improve the situation within the network, as those negotiations may strengthens some relationships within the network.

The network orchestrator also has to make final decisions and arbitrages at times when conflicts cannot be resolved by the members internally. In brief, the implications of the proposed model on the strategy making process is that rational decision making to develop a common strategic action plan is likely to be affected by irrational behaviors, as the human factor is central to the process. Hence, the need of a network leader that will establish ground rules and institute a framework in which the members of the network will pursue their dialogue to reach ideally consensual, common nascent inter-organizational strategies and resolve the conflicts of interests arising during the process. Furthermore, as the pluralist network is heterogeneous by definition, which is beneficial to avoid group thinking and enhance creative solutions, the selection of members of the network could potentially be significant, as the network manager may want to choose participants that will contribute positively in creating a positive working atmosphere.

The governance style and network management chosen by the network manager greatly influence the process of strategy making as well as its strategic output. Creating a
structure that allows for adaptability, learning and cooperation are necessary to increase the chances of success of such networks. Coordination between the participants and the information shared and the level of control over the communication process affect the degree of socialization and the perceptions of the network, project and other peers by the members of the network. Continuity and support provided by the network manager are also shown to be important to keep the project moving forward and to maintain the relationships and interactions in a positive and constructive way between the different members of the network.

Finally, there is much research opportunities to further investigate strategy formation in pluralist collaborative networks, to better understanding them in order to be able to develop better framework to increase the success of such cooperative processes, as they will likely be increasingly common in the future, as the prospects of creating relational rents, synergies and creating additional benefits for the network members through cooperation rather than competition is promising. Pooling resources, shifting risk and increasing management efficiency are all potential benefits that could occur increasingly and expand if further research was conducted on such network to increase the understanding of their dynamics of strategy making. As organizations must constantly strive for a better fit and alignment with other entities and their environment, network strategy is highly important to allow adaptation to dynamic conditions, and human interactions are central to more effective strategy making.

Much is still left to learn on pluralist collaborative networks, but value can be derived from deepened studies, as such process can benefit from efficiency enhancements that shall become increasingly critical in the future, as competition between organizations is becoming fiercer. As a response to competitive conditions, cooperation and collaboration are keys to successful strategy making, as long as interactions between entities and their representatives can be better understood and managed. The future of most organizations does not only depend on the strategy to adopt within a competitive multiplayer network, but also on multiplayer strategies in collaborative conditions.
7 Acknowledgements

Over the course of this work, many people have given me support, advice and collaborated with me. I hereby wish to acknowledge their contributions, as such a project would not have been possible without their help. First to Saku Mantere, who was my supervisor and allowed me to learn from his experience and advices over the course of this research. Furthermore, all the interviewees and people from different organizations inherent to the Plan Nord that offered me their time, stories, documents and experience in the project were of valuable help, as they enabled me to access a significant amount of research data and allowed me to reach a thorough understanding of the network. Moreover, I appreciated the time my peer students have devoted in discussing my work with me to point out possible improvements. Lastly, I am grateful of Hanken School of Economics and its staff, from which I enjoyed and benefited from valuable learning opportunities over the past two years.
8 Works Cited


# Appendices

## Appendix A: Members of the Partners’ Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denis Blais</td>
<td>Access to the Territory</td>
<td>Ministry of Transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janita Gagnon</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Manicouagan Fisheries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maggie Emudluk</td>
<td>Inuits</td>
<td>Kativik Regional Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julien Boudreau</td>
<td>Côte Nord Administrative Region</td>
<td>Côte Nord Administrative Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georges Bouchard</td>
<td>Saguenay- Lac-St-Jean Administrative Region</td>
<td>Saguenay- Lac-St-Jean Administrative Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gérald Lemoyne</td>
<td>North-of-Quebec Administrative Region</td>
<td>North-of-Quebec Administrative Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Coone-Come</td>
<td>Aboriginal Communities</td>
<td>Grand Council of the Crees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Iseroff</td>
<td>Aboriginal Communities</td>
<td>Grand Council of the Crees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzann Méthot</td>
<td>Sustainable Development</td>
<td>Canadian Boreal Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyne Laporte-Joly</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>James Bay's School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stéphane Bertrand</td>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>World Energy Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Nadeau</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Canadian Society for Nature and Parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman Ouellette</td>
<td>Wildlife</td>
<td>Quebec Outfitters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc Gilbert</td>
<td>Forestry</td>
<td>BOISACO (Timber Producer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Cacchione</td>
<td>Hydroelectricity</td>
<td>Hydro Quebec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>François Bellefleur</td>
<td>Culture and Aboriginal Communities</td>
<td>Nutakuan Innus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifford Moar</td>
<td>Aboriginal Communities</td>
<td>Mashteuiash Innus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle Delorme</td>
<td>Workforce</td>
<td>Côte Nord Regional Council of Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghislain Poirier</td>
<td>Mining Exploration</td>
<td>Association of Mining Exploration of Quebec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alain Cauchon</td>
<td>Mining Exploitation</td>
<td>ArcelorMittal Mines Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Einish</td>
<td>Aboriginal Communities</td>
<td>Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa Chemaganish</td>
<td>Aboriginal Communities</td>
<td>Society for the Naskapis’ Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcel Darveau</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Laval University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Moorhouse</td>
<td>Health and Habitation</td>
<td>Makivik Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pita Aatami</td>
<td>Aboriginal Communities</td>
<td>Makivik Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean Chartier</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>James Bay's Regional Tourism Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.2 Appendix B: Structure of the Network of the Plan Nord
## 9.3 Appendix C: Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Follow-Up Questions</th>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Can you talk to me about your personal background?</td>
<td>If anything relevant to the project</td>
<td>Establishing the conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the Project</td>
<td>What made the project so innovative and new?</td>
<td>About adhesion to the project</td>
<td>Gathering the impressions of the project as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants and Expectations</td>
<td>What was your role in the Plan Nord?</td>
<td>If necessary precisions needed</td>
<td>Gathering information about the diversity and interests at stake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Which organization were you representing?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What interests and expectations did you and your organization have?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance and Orchestration</td>
<td>Can you walk me through the process of making a decision in the network?</td>
<td>About specific phases when new information was discovered</td>
<td>Gathering information about the governance of the network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can you describe me the operations of the network?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalysts</td>
<td>How did the relationships between the participants evolved during the elaboration of the Plan Nord?</td>
<td>What caused the evolution?</td>
<td>Gathering information about the most important elements in a constructive dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Patterns</td>
<td>How was the strategic communication managed?</td>
<td>What was their respective influence?</td>
<td>To gain perspective on the communication patterns and their influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How much informal communication were you aware of?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influential Behaviors</td>
<td>Who were the most influential participants?</td>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>To gather information on what makes a member influential and which strategies and effective in influencing others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What strategies did participants use to defend their interests?</td>
<td>Was it effective?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>