

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PROJECT CLIENT AND CLIENT'S AGENT

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ABSTRACT

Strategic partnership is an emerging project delivery method characterized by long-term collaboration in multiple projects. In this paper, we seek to increase the knowledge about strategic partnerships. From a lean perspective, strategic partnerships could be a potential measure towards mitigating inefficiency caused by lacking continuity and previous relationships. Our purpose is to reveal aspects that can help clients and client's agents organize better strategic partnerships. The client's agent is the contracted adviser who takes care of all the functions which the client's project management cannot handle. A literature review and a case study were conducted, where the case study included eight semi-structured interviews. The findings identify several benefits regarding soft factors in a strategic partnership. However, some challenges are also identified, especially by the client. Based on the findings, four measures are suggested to improve strategic partnerships between client and client's agent: Mutually helping the other part get new projects, ensuring competence development, ensuring availability of demanded qualifications, and more focus on the long-term and future perspective of the strategic partnership.

KEYWORDS

Lean construction, contract and cost management, strategic partnerships, client's agent.

INTRODUCTION

Integration, collaboration, and continuity are highlighted in the Lean Construction literature. This is expressed already in the fundamental literature of the field: Koskela (2000) claimed that projects where the actors have no previous relation will be less efficient by definition. Further, Ballard (2008) claimed that contracts based on relation will increase the likelihood of project success, in theory also decreasing the need for contingency reserves.

While the importance of integration, collaboration, and continuity is clearly stated in the literature, there is still a discrepancy between theory and practice. Even though the conflicting interests of stakeholders in conventional construction projects have been on the agenda for years, the subject is still relevant (Lahdenperä, 2012) and traditional contracts are often a source of opportunism and distrust between the actors (Kadefors, 2004). The profit of one actor, either measured in value or monetary terms, often comes at the expense of another actor's profit.

To face this challenge, new project delivery methods intending to increase the collaboration and integration between the actors have emerged. Commonly known examples of such project delivery methods are alliancing, integrated project delivery, early contractor involvement, and

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different approaches to partnering (Engebø et al., 2020b; Paulsen et al., 2022). A key characteristic of relation-based project delivery methods is that they are based on trust (Lahdenperä, 2012) and mutual commitment between the actors (Walker & Lloyd-Walker, 2012).

A particular collaborative project delivery method that could be used to achieve integration, collaboration, continuity, and, importantly, long-term relations between actors, is strategic partnerships. Strategic partnerships can be defined as “a long-term collaboration between a client and a delivery team on a collective project portfolio.” (Jensen, 2021). This implies that strategic partnerships seek to utilize the benefits from both the collaboration in partnering and the long-term perspective of framework agreements. Koolwijk et al. (2022) used a similar definition, emphasizing that the term “strategic” brings a long-term perspective. Strategic partnerships are practiced either through a contract for multiple projects, a contract for a given period, or an agreement where success in one project will lead to new partnering projects (Koolwijk et al., 2022; Paulsen et al., 2023).

Koolwijk et al. (2022) noted that despite the potential of strategic partnerships in the construction industry, this project delivery method has not been adopted in the same magnitude as in other industries. They call for more case studies of the dynamics within strategic partnerships to obtain more generalizable results. Our searches indicate that most literature concerns strategic partnerships between clients and contractors, and that there is a need for more generalizable knowledge. Ferstad et al. (2023) concluded that more research is needed on strategic partnerships in other relations than between client and contractors. Bygballe et al. (2010) similarly concluded that there is a need for studies “from the view of different actors over time”. Paulsen et al. (2023) also pointed to a demand for more research regarding strategic partnerships, especially case studies investigating the effects: “There is still a lack of proof of how well strategic partnership is working in practice. [...] Therefore, more case studies and interdisciplinary research are needed to further clarify improvements.”

This paper builds on the above-mentioned literature by scrutinizing a particular strategic partnership between a client and a contracted client's agent. These actors were chosen as client's agent should have different interests and business model than a contractor (Berg et al., 2021). Further, no previous research on this specific relation was identified. The term client's agent describes a contracted adviser who takes care of functions which the client's project management does not have the capacity to carry out. In Norway, this role is often denoted as *byggherreombud* (Rådgivende Ingeniørers Forening, 2018). The client's agent is henceforth referred to as agent.

The study was conducted to increase the knowledge about strategic partnerships, and hopefully contribute to a broader understanding, which in turn may contribute to establishment of more generalizable knowledge about the subject. The purpose of the paper is to reveal aspects that can help clients and client's agents organize better strategic partnerships, contributing to the delivery of more efficient and effective projects. The purpose was investigated through the following two research questions:

- RQ1: How does strategic partnership affect the relationship between client and client's agent?
- RQ2: What are the resulting effects of this relationship?

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN LITERATURE

Collaborative project delivery models are emerging in the construction industry due to their many advantages (Lahdenperä, 2012). There are however plenty of collaborative project delivery methods used in the industry: Tadayon et al. (2018) mentioned 15 different definitions, while Engebø et al. (2020a) mentioned ten different approaches before basing the article on five

umbrella terms. Engebø et al. (2020a) also underlined that collaborative project delivery methods cannot be discretely categorized: The magnitude of, and approach to, collaboration in different project delivery methods rather represents a continuous spectre. Ørke et al. (2023) found that the perception of value, and the motivation of value generation, depends on perspective. Engebø et al. (2020b) highlighted that alignment of these factors is crucial for both trust and good collaboration in a construction project.

Even though partnering is a frequently used term, there is no unified definition of partnering, or what such project delivery methods involve (Nyström, 2005). There seems to be a pool of approaches that may be used, meaning that two partnering projects may be quite different, though both are defined as partnering projects. This challenge was addressed by Nyström (2005), who used Wittgenstein's family-resemblance concept to state that even though there are not necessarily any defining common features between the different partnering approaches, they have overlapping similarities. The lacking unified definitions is a weakness of the literature: Varying terms and variations within the same term complicates comparison and linking knowledge from different sources.

In the lean construction literature, collaborative project delivery models are often referred to as either integrated project delivery (IPD) or Lean Project Delivery System (LPDS). Mesa et al. (2019) made a comprehensive review of IPD and LPDS and found that they utilize many of the same perspectives with regard to project organization. To achieve integration among key project participants, both project delivery methods seek to involve key participants in the early stages and form an integrated project team that works together in an environment of collaboration, open communication, and mutual respect and trust.

A common denominator for many collaborative project delivery models is that they are project-specific and not concerned with a long-term perspective. As stated by Beach et al. (2005); most collaboration efforts never reach the strategic level but are sustained for the specific project and focused on short-term benefits. The strategic perspective implies a long-term commitment between organizations across several projects. In their review, Bygballe et al. (2010) highlighted both the importance of a long-term orientation and the difficulties that this poses in practice. Furthermore, Sundquist et al. (2018) stated that succeeding in relationship development and adopting a strategic perspective, rather than a project perspective, requires a shift from competitive bidding in single projects to collaboration across a series of projects. Further, decentralization of authority to the project level needs to be supplemented with increased centralized decision-making to achieve strategic perspective. It is however a weakness within the literature that interpretations of the term strategic seem to differ slightly.

In scrutiny of the limited occurrence of strategic partnerships, Sundquist et al. (2018) found that existing literature pointed to two causes: One being implementation challenges, and the other being lacking knowledge of how strategic partnerships come into being. Berg et al. (2021), on the other hand, concluded that the archetypical roles in the industry cause friction when they are to collaborate in strategic partnerships, due to conflicting business models.

PHASES

In the construction industry, projects are often divided into phases, where the phases depend on the project and the project model of the client (Volden & Andersen, 2018). Samset and Volden (2014), among others, separate between two phases: front-end phase and implementation phase. The cost of changes is lowest in the front-end, continuously increasing as the project develops. Oppositely, the flexibility for changes is at its highest in the front-end, continuously decreasing throughout the project (Olsson & Magnussen, 2007; Samset, 2010).

For this paper, it will only be relevant to separate projects into the front-end phase and the implementation phase, as these are the two phases the interviewees relate to, from their industry perspective. Separating into more phases would not reflect the interviewees' perception of the construction process.

TRUST

According to Lahdenperä (2012), trust is the basis for every relation-based contract. This is supported by Zaheer and Harris (2005), who claimed that across fields of study, there is a common belief that project delivery methods based on relation are dependent on trust. They also claim that trust, especially on organizational level, improves both performance and behaviour. Importantly, Zaheer and Harris (2005) also noted that trust has a time perspective: The benefit from building or showing trust will be gained at some unknown point of time in the future.

KNOWLEDGE GAP

We have found a relatively limited amount of literature on strategic partnerships in construction industry compared to other industries and compared to other collaborative project delivery methods. When searching for “strategic partnership”, the vast majority of literature originated from other industries. The identified literature from the construction industry is asking for further research (Bygballe et al., 2010). Strategic partnerships may be practiced between different actors, and much of current literature focuses on partnering between client and contractor (Bygballe et al., 2010). Through the literature review, there has not been identified literature about strategic partnerships focusing on such partnerships between client and client's agent. By examining such a case, we intend to fill this knowledge gap and contribute to a broader understanding of strategic partnerships.

METHOD

The study has been conducted with a bilateral approach. A literature review was executed to get an overview of the existing literature and to reveal knowledge gaps. Fellows and Liu (2022) highlight literature review as appropriate for getting an overview, while Wee and Bannister (2016) support that a literature review is a suitable method for revealing knowledge gaps. To obtain empirical insights into strategic partnerships between client and client's agent, one in-depth case study was conducted. Fellows and Liu (2022) confirm the suitability of case studies, and Flyvbjerg (2006) claims that even if such studies are highly specific, they are of great value for scientific development. Further, he emphasizes that the importance of cases as exemplars should not be underestimated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was conducted with two approaches: database search and backward snowballing. The database search was conducted in Scopus and with no defined time range. Searches included a range of terms considered somehow similar. For example, (TITLE-ABS-KEY)-string with “strategic partnership” has, using “AND”, been combined with terms such as “sponsor”, “owners' delegate”, “client's agent”, and similar. These searches returned no literature. However, “strategic partnership” AND “trust” returned nine articles within subject of Construction. The relevance of these nine were evaluated based on the abstract. Two articles were considered relevant and included in the study. The database search was supplemented with snowballing based on the results from the database search and literature the authors knew from before. Jalali and Wohlin (2012) support snowballing as a legitimate method, concluding that snowballing gives the same conclusions and answers as structured literature searches.

CASE STUDY

The case chosen is the company Stafr Consulting AS, henceforth referred to as Stafr. Stafr is an affiliated company in the company group Base Gruppen AS. The examined strategic partnership is between Stafr and two other affiliated companies under Base Gruppen AS: Base

Bolig AS and Base Property AS, henceforth referred to as Base. As Base Bolig and Property are real estate developers, Stafr works as the client’s agent in projects where Base is the client.

To study the case, a document study and semi-structured interviews was conducted. Table 1 displays the key characteristics of the two methods.

Table 1: Overview of methods for case study.

Document study	Semi-structured interviews	
Available data	Project archives and invoicing system	8 interviewees
Source	Contracts, minutes, and project descriptions	Project managers, 4 from Base and 4 from Stafr
Purpose	Overall insight	In-depth insight

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to answer the research questions. An interview guide was developed where questions were categorized into three categories. As the paper builds on the work by Ferstad et al. (2023) and Paulsen et al. (2022), the interview guide used the same categories as them: Contract, organization, and relationship. The categories chosen were perceived to represent three major themes of project delivery methods. The duration of the interviews was between 45 and 90 minutes. Five interviews were conducted in person, while three interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams due to the localization or availability of the interviewee. The interviewees were chosen based on a judgement of which individuals in the case that could share knowledge. Client’s project managers and client’s agents were, in number, equally represented. Combined with the different roles of the interviewees, this was done to pursue a balanced perspective. These considerations were supplemented and confirmed by the question in the interviews that asked for relevant interviewees: All of the interviewees either proposed interviewees within this sample or confirmed the suitability of the sample. All interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed. Interviews were then analyzed to extract relevant findings that answered the research questions.

FINDINGS

Here we present the findings concerning the case study. The findings focus on how the relationship between client and client’s agent is affected by strategic partnerships and the potential effects of this. The results are sorted using the categories from the interviews: Contract, organization, and relationship.

HOW THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP IS PRACTICED

Contract

The interviewees describe an informal contracting process, where the agent is involved in the project in the front-end phase. Due to the close relationship, Base often mentions possible projects to Stafr before they are even decided, and Stafr assists Base in their due diligence and decision process. When Base decides on the project, the collaboration is formalized through a standard contract. However, a characteristic of this strategic partnership was that the contract was given little importance: Some of the interviewees stated no knowledge about the contracts. It is reported that both companies use the same contracts within the strategic partnership as they

use with other actors. The interviewees from the client side also emphasize the importance of Stafr being competitive regarding price and competence.

Another characteristic concerned decision-making and authority. Beyond the definitions in the contract, referring to Norwegian Standard (Standard Norge, 2008, 2011), the roles and responsibilities are mostly defined based on relation on project level, or through continuing the practice, i.e. common understanding, from previous common projects. There is no formal decision mandate or threshold value for what decisions the agent can decide: In some cases, the agent knows his authority by experience from the relation, but in most cases, the client and agent collaborate so closely that the client is involved in every decision, eliminating the need for specifying the agent's mandate.

Organization

Compared to a conventional agent, the interviewees report that Stafr is involved in front-end phase, even before the acquisition or in the consideration of a new project, and that their tasks often are extended. All the interviewees categorically answered that it is beneficial that Stafr is involved as early as possible. In addition, the interviewees express that in the strategic partnership, the agents often exceed their defined role, both in time and assignments, in a manner that benefits the project and relieves the client.

Stafr's performance is not measured using any parameters or indicators: Base is rather evaluating their own satisfaction via gut feeling. The organization and cooperation are annually formally evaluated, however, this evaluation reportedly only involves the companies' managing individuals, while other employees, i.e. project managers, are reportedly not present in these evaluation meetings. Beyond the annual evaluation, there seems to be a consensus that issues are being addressed when they pop up, and this is reported as a satisfying practice. However, some report that the feedback given within the strategic partnership is of the same character as would be given to any supplier or contractor.

Relation

The interviewees seem unable to decide whether the relations are mostly on a personal or organizational level, but some express that they believe it would be beneficial if the relations were more organizational, so that the strategic partnership was less reliant on personal relations.

The responses are also lacking direction when it comes to individual preferences: All interviewees emphasize the importance of competence and experience, but many also emphasize that personal relation is crucial too. It however seems like relation is a benefit, while competence is a must.

Spontaneous and informal meetings or settings are also an aspect of the strategic partnership, forming for instance if the employees meet in the hallway, or have an informal chat before or after a meeting. In such settings, where there is no agenda, other subjects are brought up, both personal and work-related.

POSITIVE EFFECTS

In the interviews, several positive effects of strategic partnerships between client and agent are reported.

Firstly, when the client and client's agent have a relation from previous projects, the interviewees experience that the agent has a better basis for acting according to the client's wishes and interests. As a result, the agent is also sometimes given increased freedom to do so.

The importance of continuity is emphasized. It is described that the early involvement of the agent that is practiced in the strategic partnership is highly beneficial: Not only does the agent's competence and experience benefit the project from the start, but the agent also does a better job when it knows the history of the project. For Stafr, early involvement is also an efficient way to secure new projects, on which their business depends.

The performance of the agents is not systematically measured. This allows the agents to allocate their efforts to where they find it most beneficial for the project, rather than chasing good performance according to a score on specific indicators.

Regarding spontaneous and informal meetings, the interviewees have varied experiences. Some signify this as an essential part of the collaboration, while others feel that there is little time for such settings. However, all of those who recognize the existence of spontaneous and informal meetings, seem to agree that these benefit the project. Bringing up subjects when there is no agenda increases the mutual overall insight in the projects, and offers a setting for discussing matters that are precepted not sufficiently important or mature for formal, planned meetings. In addition, the informal chats are reported to be more personal, improving the relationship and extending the mutual knowledge of non-work-related subjects.

Except for annual evaluation meetings among the managements of the companies, little formal evaluation of the collaboration in the strategic partnership is reported. However, informal feedback is continuously being exchanged throughout the projects. In order to pursue optimal collaboration, the interviewees emphasize the importance of being able to both give and receive constructive feedback. Further, some of the interviewees explain that since the collaboration can be improved from project to project, learning from previous collaboration, collaboration is better within the strategic partnership than in single project relations.

Another positive effect for both client and agent, is the strategic partnership's effect on work efficiency. Due to the interorganizational relation, there are direct decision and communication lines. This is not only beneficial for the individual's time use, but also for the time the organization uses to process the decision, so that the decision may be carried out faster. Further, when the same employees work together on several parallel projects due to the strategic partnership, some describe that they have status meetings for multiple projects, saving time compared to having separate status meetings for every project. Working together on parallel projects also increases the overall interaction, benefitting communication about the project: If the client makes a phone call asking a question about one project, the agent may use the opportunity to inform about a matter on another project. As a result, time is saved, and information is transferred faster. Lastly, communication is simplified, and efficiency is increased due to the shared history: Challenges and problems can more easily be explained and handled when referring to similar cases in preceding common projects.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

The role of the interviewee seems to highly correlate with which negative effects of the strategic partnerships that are highlighted.

For Stafr, there is one significant drawback: Due to their commonly known close relation with Base, other real estate developers that consider Base as a competitor, have expressed scepticism regarding using Stafr. Some have explicitly expressed that they will not use Stafr because of the relation, whilst others have demanded proof of a Chinese wall between Stafr and Base. This scepticism is reportedly due to: 1) fear that a contribution to Stafr's revenues will benefit Base, or 2) that information will flow towards Base, to Base's benefit.

The interviewees from the client side however describe several challenges regarding strategic partnerships. Firstly, the client's project managers feel that they lose the flexibility to freely choose agent. They express dissatisfaction with not being able to freely choose the most qualified agent in the market, as the management in Base Gruppen to some extent demands the use of Stafr. As a result, several of the interviewees describe the strategic partnership as a "forced marriage".

Secondly, a lot of strategic partnerships and framework agreements complicate collaboration projects with other companies, i.e. multiple owner projects, for the client. This challenge is emphasized by one interviewee, who had thorough considerations regarding

strategic partnerships. He states: "We can't drag a lot of framework agreements and strategic partnerships along if we are to develop projects together with others. Then, they won't choose us".

Thirdly, when Base ties closely to one company, i.e. the strategic partnership with Stafr, their network and range is restrained. When dealing with more companies, more and more diverse experience and competence is shared with Base than Stafr can supply. This effect is increased by Stafr's relatively small size. In addition, before the strategic partnership, companies delivering services to Base hinted Base about project opportunities, hoping that they would be hired if the project was initiated. The client interviewee reporting this problem did not experience that Stafr fulfilled this: He states that the strategic partnership gives Base "fewer tentacles". On the contrary, an interviewee from Stafr highlights this as an advantage of the strategic partnership: He claims that Base and Stafr mutually hint each other about projects, mutually increasing the market position of both companies. However, these two interviewees, reporting contrary perceptions, have not worked together. This last point indicates individual practices; there is no defined practice for this in the strategic partnership.

DISCUSSION

All interviewees, both from Base and Stafr, reported that though relation and trust between client and agent are important, the decisive factor is the individual's competence. The benefits regarding relation in strategic partnerships are well described. However, considering that competence is the decisive factor, the companies in the strategic partnership should probably not solely aim to benefit from the relation. If adequate competence is not present, well-developed trust and relations will not have significant value. As a result, the development of competence, and availability of demanded competence, should not be overlooked in the strategic partnership. It is also natural to assume that the right competence contributes to successful projects, and that individuals who have delivered successful projects together have a better basis for mutual trust and relation. Trusting an individual as an agent may consequently be a result of the individual's previously demonstrated competence.

There is without doubt different perspectives on both the positive and negative effects of strategic partnerships. However, in our study the clients seem to have more hesitations than the agents. A possible explanation is that the agent's increased safety for assignments directly comes at the expense of the client's flexibility to freely choose agent in the open market. The latter is the most emphasized drawback reported by the interviewees representing the client side.

The combination of a good relationship, and spontaneous and informal meetings, seems to lower the threshold for, and ease, communication, be it "stupid questions" or "bad gut feelings". Considering the increasing cost of changes and decreasing flexibility throughout a project (Olsson & Magnussen, 2007; Samset, 2010), one could assume that this lowered threshold for communication increases value and reduces cost, as opportunities and challenges are brought up at an earlier stage.

The early involvement increases the agent's understanding of the client's project value, both helping to develop this in the front-end phase, and looking after this in the implementation phase. This should enhance customer value and effectiveness. This is in accordance with fundamental principles of LPDS, as Ballard (2008), stated: "The job of the project delivery team is not only to provide what the customer wants, but to first help the customer decide what they want. Consequently, it is necessary to understand customer purpose and constraints." Further, this shifts the role of the client's agent in the project team away from the archetypical engineer role, as defined by Berg et al. (2021).

The divergent perceptions regarding whether the strategic partnership contributes to new projects, is an interesting finding. The interviewees reporting divergent perceptions, represent different groupings within the strategic partnership: One comes from Stafr/Base Bolig and one

comes from Stafr/Base Property. The divergent reports may indicate that there are no overall guidelines aiming for the companies in the strategic partnership to mutually take advantage of each other in order to get new projects. Rather, it seems like it depends on the individuals collaborating whether this benefit is exploited. A concluding remark regarding this, is that one would assume that if Stafr positively contributed to new, profitable projects for Base, and vice versa, such a favour would also positively influence the relationship.

It seems that most of the interviewees recognize the positive effects resulting from having worked together in the past, in accordance with Koskela (2000), but have thought less of the possibilities of strategic partnerships regarding the future. This does not only appear from which benefits they emphasize: The client’s project managers express that they at any point of time want the most competent agent. Only one mentions that this may come at the expense of the extending of competence for the employees in Stafr, and this interviewee also expresses that the agent’s competence in each project is more important than developing competence in Stafr. An interviewed agent in Stafr also remarks that it seems like Base struggles to see the importance and benefits of developing Stafr’s competence: Base is most concerned with what competence is available in the present. These reflections could be considered in relation to the utterance of one of the project managers in Base: Base’ evaluation of Stafr does not differ from the evaluation of other companies. This is counter-intuitive, as one would expect that the long-term aspect of strategic partnerships would influence evaluation.

The relatively low use of strategic partnerships in the construction industry, may have several causes. Firstly, it might be perceived risky to try new project delivery methods, shifting away from the well-known and archetypical roles described by Berg et al. (2021). Secondly, companies lacking a common ownership, like the one in the studied case, might not get the push to enter such a relationship. This supports the statement of Sundquist et al. (2018), that the initiation of partnerships are not sufficiently illuminated. Lastly, the disadvantages, listed in Table 3, may discourage especially clients from initiating strategic partnerships. However, the four recommendations in bullet points in Conclusions, might mitigate this reluctance.

Implementing these recommendations should require little use of resources and no substantial changes, and hence be very feasible. These recommendations may also, importantly, be implemented without increasing the perception that Base and Stafr is the same organization.

The findings regarding the benefit of the soft factors are congruent with the lean literature. For instance, continuity enhances efficiency and facilitates for continuous improvement., in accordance with Koskela (2000). Thus does this paper not only support the current knowledge, but it confirms its application also for strategic partnerships. However, by also pointing out disadvantages following the increased relationship and continuity, the paper contributes to the nuance of the existing knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper set out to increase the knowledge about strategic partnerships. The two research questions, and the most important findings are displayed in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 2: Main findings for RQ1

RQ1: How does strategic partnership affect the relationship between client and client’s agent?	
Simple and insignificant contracts	No formal mandate
Early involvement	No measuring using indicators
Evaluation: Running informal and annual formal	Both personal and organizational level relation
Competence is crucial	Spontaneous and informal meetings

Table 3: Main findings for RQ2. C indicates client, whilst CA indicates client’s agent.

RQ2: What are the resulting effects of this relationship?	
Positive effects	Negative effects
Better mutual understanding, especially regarding interests and purposes	CA: Lost assignments due to too close a relation
Increased continuity	C: Lost flexibility when choosing client’s agent
Increased efficiency regarding time and communication	C: Complicating multiple owner projects
Lowered threshold for communication	C: Restrained network/range
Taking advantage of CA’s competence in the front-end phase	
CA’s extended mandate and role relieves C	

The overall purpose of answering the research questions was trying to reveal aspects that could be improved, and thereby contribute to better strategic partnerships between client and client’s agent in the future. Based on our findings and the following discussion, we suggest the following actionable and practical recommendations:

- **Mutually helping the other part get new projects:** Being on the lookout for new projects for the other part, both within the strategic partnership, and also outside. This would involve that Base suggests using Stafr to for instance tenants and other estate developers, while Stafr hints Base when project opportunities occur, for instance, possible plots or partners for multiple owner projects.
- **Ensuring competence development:** Ensuring mutual sharing of competence and experience, compensating for the decreased network for input.
- **Ensuring availability of demanded qualifications:** Clear dialogue between the companies regarding what competence the client demands, in order to counter the lost possibility to freely choose the most qualified actor in the market.
- **More focus on the long-term and future perspective of the strategic partnership:** More effort to enhance the strategic partnership, focusing on the future. The companies should aim not only to take advantage of the past-part of the long-term relationship. One of the main factors of strategic partnerships is the knowledge that the parts are to work together in the future, hence they should accommodate for taking advantages in the future. This also implies that evaluation within the strategic partnership should differ from evaluation with other actors.

The study is limited to only one case, with eight interviewees, all in the same strategic partnership. As a result, little can be said about the generalizability of the results. Strategic partnerships between actors with different roles, or where there is no common owner, may experience different positive and negative effects. However, the benefits concerning relation, trust, continuity, etc. mirror the findings in the literature, especially within the field of lean construction. In a lean perspective, strategic partnerships might be one approach to enhance or ensure such soft factors.

Strategic partnerships with different actors or ownership structures should be researched further. Quantitative information about the effect would also be highly valuable.

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