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The invisible micro-practices of strategists in social sustainability work

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Abstract

Social sustainability has not previously been studied as a practice and is an understudied area with collaboration as an important practice. However, what constructs collaboration from a micro-level perspective is unclear. This paper looks at how collaboration is constructed by strategists' micro-practices informed by tacit knowledge. Through 25 interviews and 17 hours of observations, 10 micro-practices that constitute “strong collaborations” are identified and presented in a model. The study also shows how the micro-practices are informed by the strategists' socio-cultural and semantic knowledge to do the sensemaking and sensegiving necessary for building strong collaborations. The study contributes to the strategy-as-practice perspective as it shows novel micro-practices that constitute a new way of collaborating as a strategic direction for social sustainability.

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), introduced 2015 by the United Nations within the 2030 Agenda, have been widely accepted as an important course of action for the global society. The public sector has a unique opportunity to demonstrate leadership by creating policies, strategies, programs, and actions for strategic direction to achieve the SDGs. However, despite the interconnectedness of economic, environmental, and social sustainability, there is still no consensus on the precise definition of social sustainability (Cope et al., 2022). It remains an understudied concept compared to its economic and environmental counterparts (ibid) and according to Brorström (2015, p. 26), sustainability is a vague concept that 'is powerful because no one opposes it'. Within management and organization studies, sustainability research predominantly focuses on frameworks and thereby 'overlooking the specific actions, practices, and strategies implemented by organizations' (Dzhengiz & Hockerts, 2022, p. 515). Common theorizations conceptualize sustainability as a wicked problem and a grand challenge, because of the social and complex nature of the problem. This requires collaboration (Ferraro et al., 2015; Grint, 2008) and sustainability champions (i.e., action-oriented enthusiasts, driven by personal commitment rather than financial motivations) (Grint, 2008; Mantere, 2005).

Significant wicked problems within sustainability include socio economic problems (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b) and community development (Eden and Huxham, 2001). City organizations, despite their specialization in distinct functions and roles, must address sustainability goals that transcend organizational boundaries (Kanon, 2020) because these problems are multiscale (Perey, 2014). The works of Brorström show that many complex questions about how a city should look in the future are dealt with in boundary crossing collaborations (e.g., Brorström & Ernitz, 2019). Collaboration is a key element and a growing phenomenon (Klein, 2020) in the transition towards more sustainable societies (Kanon, 2020; Lozano 2007) that requires involvement of organizations in different sectors (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a).

Collaboration is often defined as the "process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (Gray, 1989, p. 5). In the Swedish context of this study, two terms are distinguished: "samarbete" which translates roughly to collaboration between parties for a specific project and "samverkan," which encompasses a broader scope involving multiple organizations, sectors, roles, and within public administration, different units (Socialstyrelsen, 2008). Research on collaboration is characterized by many different disciplines, sectoral focuses, research paradigms, and theoretical perspectives (Huxham, 2003). Consequently, various terminological interpretations of collaboration have emerged, including "collaboration", "joint action", "cross-sector partnerships" and "inter-organizational relations". In this study, the chosen definition aligns with Gray's (1989) definition, with a specific emphasis on the diversity of organizations and sectors and a less project-specific nature.

The primary motive for collaboration is to attain collaborative advantage, which refers to the synergistic effects that cannot be achieved by individual organizations acting alone

(Huxham, 2003). However, the actual outcomes of collaboration are frequently underwhelming, characterized by weaker results, slow progress, tensions among collaborating organizations, and meetings that fail to translate into action (ibid). Historically, collaboration has predominantly been structured in the form of projects (Sandoff et al., 2015) and could be viewed as part of "Projectification", a logic associated with New Public Management, that has spread to public organization and administration (Fred et al., 2019). In recent years, there has been an explosion of projects within sustainability (Fred, 2018) but doubts exist about the extent to which the intended results have been achieved (Wenhold, 2021). Instead, a reproduction of bureaucracy, too limited time and funding are some of the disadvantages that have appeared (Jakobsen, 2022; Fred 2020).

The public sector (i.e., tax-financed organizations serving the city's public) plays a crucial role in sustainability within the city by creating collaboration between city organizations, private entities, and NGOs to achieve the sustainable development goals (Krantz, 2022; Rossi et al., 2022). However, recent research indicates that while city organizations aspire to holistically operationalize the SDGs, they often face challenges at the local level (ibid) despite the fact that collaboration for sustainability is an important strategic direction (Samra-Fredericks, 2003). In combination with the concept of "strategifying" that aims to expand which practices that could be considered strategic (Gond et al., 2018; Brorström & Styhre, 2023), this study will take a Strategy-as-practice (SAP) perspective that recognizes strategy as fundamentally "something that people do" (Whittington, 2006). Social sustainability has not yet been studied as a practice built on the daily micro-level actions of the practitioners and while collaboration is a key practice within social sustainability very few attempts have been made to uncover this phenomenon (Silva & Figuiredo, 2017). Hence, this study will take a closer look at social sustainability as a practice and study the micro-level activities in collaboration of practitioners in the name of social sustainability (Silva & Figuiredo, 2017; (Whittington, 2006). By studying how practitioners construct collaboration with micro-level activities, a deeper understanding can be gained of the constituents of collaboration. Since collaboration is a significant part of the strategy for addressing grand challenges, knowledge is therefore also created about how a major part strategy is constructed bottom-up from a micro-level perspective. To understand strategy and how it is constructed through strategic activity, the reciprocal relationship between action and interpretation must be taken into account (Weick et al., 2005). This study will investigate what kind of knowledge practitioners in social sustainability use when they collaborate and thereby do the sensemaking and sensegiving necessary to build collaboration. Knowledge is enacted in and reciprocally constitutive with practitioners' practices (Orlikowski, 2002) and it is through the knowledge used in practice that sensemaking and sensegiving emerge (Rouleau, 2005). Therefore, a sensemaking lens within SAP is used in this study to better understand strategic activity within collaboration and the underlying meanings of actions through the use of knowledge.

A limited number of scholars have investigated the different practices that constitute collaboration (e.g., Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Tello-Rozas et al., 2015; Cirella & Murphy, 2022) and some have begun to shift the attention to the practitioners (e.g., Ollila & Yström, 2022; Selsky & Parker, 2005). However, a closer exploration of the practitioners' micro-practices that construct collaboration from a micro-level perspective and the knowledge they

use has not yet been done. This has consequently resulted in the following research question: what are the micro-practices of strategists in collaboration to achieve social sustainability, and what knowledge do they use?

To answer the research question by filling the research gaps of studying collaboration in social sustainability as a practice and understand what constructs the empirical phenomenon, this study uses the case of Tynnered, a vulnerable area in the City of Gothenburg. In this area a lot of collaboration to achieve social sustainability takes place every day and a diversified set of actors are represented. The area is known for achieving and doing a lot in collaboration, which makes the case particularly interesting to study. Therefore, the chosen delimitation of this study is the collaborations that goes on in the geographical area of Tynnered. Moreover, instead of turning to classic strategizing activities by top managers, the intent of this study is to gain insights into the mundane, often invisible, doings of the everyday practitioners that don't get much attention, but arguably plays an important role in strategy creation. Thereby, the hope is to add to current academic conversations within strategy-as-practice from a sensemaking lens and put micro-practices in collaboration to achieve social sustainability as a constituent part of this field by shedding new light on this understudied empirical phenomenon.

Theoretical framework

Strategy-as-practice

In the last decade, research has nearly tripled in the number of publications within the SAP perspective. As a research field, SAP is interested in studying strategy as something that people do rather than something an organization has (Kohtamäki et al., 2021). The SAP perspective is particularly interested in the people who work with and make strategy on a daily basis, the strategists. Recent SAP research has begun to shift the interest from strategizing (i.e., the making/craft of strategy by actors) to "strategifying", expanding the boundaries of what is considered strategic by actor's micro-level activity (Mintzberg, 1987; Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Gond et al., 2018). Accordingly, the use of the word strategist in this study is not with the traditional strategic planner of the top management in mind, rather it is the persons (middle managers) that perform strategy in their everyday practices.

There is an emerging emphasis on the strategist, rather than solely focusing on praxis, within SAP, especially within the sensemaking and discursive clusters, which are gaining traction (Kohtamäki et al., 2022). According to Weick et al. (2005), strategies are made and remade through an ongoing process of thinking and feeling. There is a continuous interaction between action and interpretation of situations where activity relies fundamentally upon actors' subjective interpretation (Glynn & Watkiss, 2020). Therefore, to understand what people really do in practice, the meaning behind actions and their relation to strategy, the process of sensemaking and sensegiving that give rise to the actions, is essential to understand (Weick et al., 2005; Kohtamäki et al., 2022).

Sensemaking is an ongoing, socially constructed process that occurs when there is a need to explain something, influenced by socio-cultural surroundings (Turner et al., 2023). It involves practices like communication, storytelling, and narratives to organize information and knowledge, aiming for positive outcomes. Sensegiving, on the other hand, is described by Gioia

& Chittipeddi (1991), as the process of influencing someone else's sensemaking to create understanding. The concepts are interdependent and complementary. Sensemaking focuses on understanding and interpreting a situation, while sensegiving aims to influence the outcome (Rouleau, 2005; Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

Knowledge

Sensemaking and sensegiving are not only results from rational processes. Rouleau's (2005) much cited work on middle managers highlights the connection between actors' practical experience and unconscious processes that lead to the emergence of sensemaking and sensegiving. Practical experience is a type of knowledge, and it is through the use of knowledge in practice that the workings of sensemaking and sensegiving can be seen (Rouleau, 2005). In fact, knowledge is enacted in and reciprocally constitutive with people's practices (Orlikowski, 2002).

There are several types of knowledge, and a common division is between explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be expressed and verbalized in words. It is knowledge that people themselves are aware of that they have. Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is knowledge that is difficult or impossible to express or verbalize (Newell, 2015). The distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge can be illustrated by the example of riding a bike. The explicit knowledge of what to do ("know-what") may seem to be self-evident, such as sitting on the saddle, holding the handles and pedalling. The "know-how", on the other hand, to keep the balance and thereby actually know how to ride a bike is not something that can be expressed or verbalized. It is tacit knowledge (Newell, 2015; Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). According to Tsoukas (2002) "tacit knowledge cannot be "captured", "translated", or "converted" but only displayed and manifested, in what we do". Knowing and doing are inseparably linked and it is through the concept of practical knowledge that the interaction between knowing, and action is captured (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). Tacit knowledge is according to Rouleau (2005) as important to sensemaking and sensegiving as explicit, conscious knowledge and described as "what we know without explicitly knowing we know it" (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008, p. 2). In other words, tacit knowledge is only manifested and demonstrated through the practices that people do and thereby intimately linked with micro-practices (ibid). Rouleau & Balogun (2008) show that the underlying micro-practices inherent to knowing agents (Orlikowski, 2002) are revealed through tacit knowledge, rather than middle managers' explicit perceptions of change and their roles within it. Middle managers use a wide range of practical skills gained from experience. Some of the examples that Rouleau (2005) provides are creative and emotional capabilities, professional and social competences, self-knowledge, communication skills, and sociological analysis, all of which can be placed under the umbrella of knowledge. According to Castillo (2002) there are four types of tacit knowledge: nonepistle, sagacious, socio-cultural and semantic. Nonepistle tacit knowledge can be described as "gut feeling" and be illustrated by Dodge in Weick (1993) analysis of The Mann Gulch Disaster, were Dodge, in the spirit of Weick´s idea of "bricolage", build a "backfire" that saved his life in the disaster. Dodge couldn't explain how and why he did that. He had neither heard of or read about building a fire and jumping into the burned area, which implies nonepistle tacit knowledge (Castillo, 2002). Sagacious refers to the knowledge of seeing a situation that is and then analyse it at first glance. This tacit knowledge is connected

to “wisdom” (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008; Castillo, 2002). While both nonepiste (“gut feeling”) and sagacious (“wisdom”) are important conceptualizations of knowledge, they are in principle impossible to “capture” in practice (Tsoukas, 2002; Castillo, 2002) and have relatively less implications on SAP (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). Therefore, this study has chosen to focus on the latter two types of tacit knowledge: socio-cultural and semantic knowledge. Rouleau & Balogun (2008) explores how socio-cultural and semantic knowledge are used to develop a certain set of micro-practices involving actions and words to deliver the desired meanings and responses in a specific context with a specific person/group of people. The context itself is argued to have a reciprocal relationship with the individuals that act within and shape it through their practical knowledge (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008).

Socio-cultural knowledge

Socio-cultural knowledge refers to the understanding of taken for granted rules and norms that are shaped by social and cultural factors within a particular context, ultimately influencing the practices and behaviours within that context (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). The socio-cultural context is particularly interesting for sensemaking and sensegiving when considering the organizational interface. Actors skilfully utilize their socio-cultural knowledge as symbolic resources in order to legitimize their actions and persuade others when collaborating with external actors, implicitly referencing the numerous contradictory social structures they are a part of (Rouleau, 2005). In one of their identified micro-practices “Enrolling networks”, Rouleau & Balogun (2008) refer to the ability to mobilize people around them in order to make sense of it and build an alliance. By using their knowledge of who to contact, by which means to reach them and who has the mandate to influence things, they automatically set up occasions to meet (ibid). Rouleau & Balogun (2008) argue that the skills, actions and performance of strategists and the connection to the context is therefore interesting to further explore within strategy-as-practice research. Skilled managers can draw upon their knowledge of the organisational context and co-workers in order to influence those around them and make them adopt their point of view (ibid). By reading signals from the context, knowing who to talk to and how, middle managers show how their socio-cultural knowledge enables them to distinguish a favourable from an unfavourable situation.

Semantic knowledge

Semantic knowledge refers to verbally expressible knowledge that, through specific symbolism, does not require any explanation in a particular community. It encompasses the implicitly understood meanings of words, actions, and other phenomena (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). Despite the recognized performative power of language, the exploration of its role in sensemaking has been largely neglected in research (Balogun et al., 2014). “Talk in all its forms” is one of the most important resources to construct, make sense of, and communicate strategy (Balogun et al., 2014) and by utilizing specific linguistic skills, such as the use of metaphors and analogies, strategists are able to persuade and convince others (Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Gioia, 1986). Similarly, Rouleau & Balogun (2008) show how middle managers mobilize people for their cause by adjusting their language to a certain economic language that characterized their interlocutors. Metaphors and analogies are archetypes of tropes in general that constructs social and organizational reality (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980),

performative (Brorström, 2018) and helps to gain legitimacy (Balogun et al., 2014). Moreover, Rouleau (2005) argues that managers use these skills to avoid having to explain many of the words that form a given message because the core of the message is contained in the full implicit meaning of abstract expressions that managers refer to. According to Cunliffe (2002), managers are seen as authors of organizational realities that through their conversations create shared meanings of their context and actively mobilize others to act and talk in different ways. Understanding the effects of their mundane discursive micro-practices is important for the strategist's ability to navigate the complexities of strategizing and adds to their practical skills (Whittington et al., 2019). Thus, strategists can create meaning by using the 'right' words (e.g., Rouleau, 2000) that fit into the social codes of a particular collaboration context.

In summary, SAP is interested in expanding the practices considered as strategic in general and the sensemaking cluster focuses on the practitioners and how they construct micro-practices in particular. Strategists realize their sensemaking and sensegiving roles and thereby construct micro-practices through their practical (tacit) knowledge. More specifically the socio-cultural (contextual, taken for granted ways of doing things) and their semantic (use of language and terminology) knowledge.

Research methodology

This research is based on the ontological and epistemological foundation of a socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and that people in organizations are knowledgeable reflexive agents who know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions (Schutz, 1967). The research question of this study is best answered by conducting a qualitative study as it provides in-depth insights (Silverman, 2020). Qualitative methods are especially useful when a social phenomenon, characterized by unconscious and tacit elements is examined (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Rouleau, 2005). Having said that, the following research design and methodological strategies are based on the inductive nature of grounded theory inspired studies that assume an openness and flexibility of the methodology. This has implied that strategies have been shaped and adjusted as the research progresses to collect the most interesting and relevant material for the study purpose (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 1996).

Research setting

This is a single case study research of the City of Gothenburg and the geographical area of Tynnered, southwest of the city core. Gothenburg is a city with 600,000 inhabitants and the city organization employs more than 55,000 people on a daily basis. Today, Tynnered has approximately 28,000 inhabitants and is on the police's list of vulnerable areas in Gothenburg. A vulnerable area is a geographically defined area identified and defined by the police. It is characterized by a low socio-economic status and experiences a significant influence from criminal activities, which in turn affects the local community. Vulnerable areas are found throughout the country of Sweden, a total of 61, and in Gothenburg, there are 8 of which Tynnered is one of them. The biggest challenges in Tynnered today, when it comes to social sustainability, are related to children and young people where few young people leave school with passing grades, are eligible for high school and have an active and meaningful spare time.

Just under 50% of all students graduate with full grades and eligibility in Tynnered compared to the city average of 83%. In addition, there are also challenges with unemployment. The number of unemployed is approximately 10% compared to 6-7% among the residents as a whole in Gothenburg. These challenges, among others, contribute to the low socio-economic character of the area and the impact of criminals on the community, making the area a vulnerable area according to the police.

In the City of Gothenburg and in Tynnered, there is a lot of collaboration going on to tackle challenges around social sustainability. There are many actors from both civil society, private companies and municipal organizations who together form local forces to contribute to area development and remove Tynnered from the Police's list of vulnerable areas. In 2020, it was decided in the budget by the highest political governing body in the city, the city council, that in 2025 there should be no especially vulnerable areas on the Police's list in Gothenburg. This goal and ambition from the politicians also meant that all of the city's committees and administrations were tasked with seeing how they could contribute to steering this goal. Upon reaching this juncture, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of a municipal housing company stepped in, interjected and signified their willingness to take ownership by expressing, "we shall take responsibility for that task". Three months later, in the fall of 2020, the municipal housing company developed a strategy for development areas. Parallel to this event, a collaboration initiative was started in Tynnered called Destination Tynnered. Destination Tynnered includes both municipal and private actors who have come together around the commitment to social sustainability. The collaboration includes three main actors: a municipal housing group, a private car company and a private housing company. This collaboration is its own organization with a steering group, professional roles and financial- and organisational structures that in turn collaborates with the municipal schools, administration offices and local forces from civil society. Destination Tynnered was founded in 2021 and works in three areas: school & leisure, jobs, and city development which in turn has concrete goals and activities in collaboration with other actors. The initiative aims to develop the area and take Tynnered off the police list of vulnerable areas.

Accessibility and choice of case

To access the people working with social sustainability in Tynnered on a strategic level and get a city-wide perspective on how Gothenburg City works, the researchers of this study have collaborated with the platform The () Space. The () Space is an organization that has the task of bridging and acting as an intermediary between academia and the business world regarding sustainability. During the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023, The () Space has facilitated and supported the researchers with contacts, which over a period of 6 months has given the researchers unique access to strategists within the City of Gothenburg organization, housing companies, private companies, civil society namely all the strategist that on a daily basis work specifically with collaboration to achieve social sustainability in Tynnered. The collaboration with The () Space has provided rich and detailed data with great potential for the discovery of things that have not been studied before. The theoretical guidance and the revelatory power of the case, namely the high potential for developing new insight into an understudied phenomenon (Yin, 2009; Langley & Abdallah, 2011) paired with the access to the richness of

data and opportunity to interact with and observe strategists collaborating motivate the choice of Gothenburg City and Tynnered as a case for this study (Silverman, 2020). In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, sustainability work is something that is close to the researchers' hearts, affects us all and happens constantly right in front of us. The fact that sustainability work is often perceived as messy, complex, and difficult to understand are also part of the driving forces that led to a boldness from the researcher to take on this challenge even though this work is at a master's degree level.

The people (informants) who have been interviewed and observed for this study (see figure 1) are all part in one way or another of the machinery that collaborates to achieve social sustainability within the City of Gothenburg and the Tynnered area. Informants have different roles and belong to different organizations, but they all share to some extent the same tasks related to collaboration. For instance, the municipal housing company collaborates with local actors from civil society where the police and the city of Gothenburg are also involved as long-term actors. The various persons have regular meetings in collaboration forums, workshops, network events, meetings and dialogues. Together, they form the forces that advance social sustainability work in the vulnerable area of Tynnered. Except from championing social sustainability (doing more than is expected from their role) (Mantere, 2005) and sharing their commitment to social sustainability, the informants move through different vertical levels within organizations. One day the informants may be in contact with the top management and another day in the daily operations of the organization. Often when visiting informants, the informant's office was placed right in the middle of the daily activities where, for example, janitors and tenants service shared the same workspace. In addition to moving vertically within the organizations, the informants also move horizontally between different organizations one day having contact with the city of Gothenburg, politicians or the police and other days with people from civil society, teachers or children in schools.

To describe this multifaceted role the informants of this study have, the academy has different names. For instance, boundary spanners or middle managers perhaps come closest. Boundary spanners are actors engaged in activities that transcend traditional boundaries, including organizations, sectors, professions and policies (Kennedy, 2012). On the other hand, the middle manager is someone who has a cross-border role that is also adopted cross-functionally, moves at different levels within the organization and in addition interpret strategies and are responsible for implementing them in the organization (Balogun, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Despite the various academic concepts described, this study simply uses "the strategists" to name the informants and the strategic practitioners regarding social sustainability work in the city that have given qualitative data for this study. This term encompasses partly both the characteristics of boundary spanners and the strategic responsibilities of middle managers interpreting, carrying out and performing strategic change. Capturing and bringing out the accounts of "the strategists", who may not normally be seen as strategic, also places this study within the stream of research that focuses on practitioners and what they do (Whittington, 1996) as well as new streams of research that expands the term strategic by strategifying activity (Gond et al., 2018). In the same way as this stream of research adopts a point of view that success or failure in strategic change depends on how managers interpret and enact the new orientation in their interactions with others (Rouleau, 2005), this

study argues that the strategist is absolutely decisive for how well the strategic direction with collaboration regarding complex issues such as social sustainability will succeed or not.

Data collection

The qualitative data in this study has been collected at a time when collaboration to achieve social sustainability in the Destination Tynnered initiative has been ongoing for approximately two years. However, all actors have collaborated on these issues before for several years, but at the time of writing (spring 2023) the accounts of the strategists represent the idea and ambition that the strategists have right now about collaboration and how they want it done.

The data collection has taken place at the same time as the analysis of the data and has been shaped and developed during the study. Based on the assumption of a socially constructed reality that is experienced and filtered through the eyes of knowledgeable agents, the heart of the data collection has been in interaction with the informants through semi-structured interviews carried out in multiple rounds and at multiple levels and positions (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). This means that the researchers have been able to analyse and reflect upon the data and come back with new questions on emergent themes, but also gain a broad (as comprehensive as possible) perspective on the social sustainability work that is going on as sustainability issues extend both vertically and horizontally through different organizations and between different people and organizations. When it comes to the sampling strategy, since social sustainability is a multi-scale problem, it has been important for the researchers to get a wide distribution in the data collection to obtain a representative basis for the social sustainability work that is going on. The interaction with the informants began with navigating scooping interviews at a higher hierarchical level at the City Management Office in the City of Gothenburg. Using the social network of the informant the initial interviews used a snowball sampling technique where the interviewees were asked "given what we are interested in and what we have talked about, who do you recommend us to talk to?". This happened in parallel with a purposive sampling where the researchers' scheduled interviews with people at different strategic levels purposively based on the research problem (Silverman, 2020).

An assumption made in this study is that by getting strategists within collaboration in social sustainability to talk about what they do in collaboration (detailed and specific how they do things), this will also capture the knowledge they use to do the specific actions within the existing given context. In total 25 semi-structured interviews have been conducted to allow the informants to engage and think freely without being guided too much by predefined questions and allowing emergent topics to reveal valuable insights. 18 of the interviews took place in situ at the respondent's daily workplace and seven interviews were conducted digitally. The interviews were between 45-90 minutes in duration, recorded and transcribed. To make the informants feel as comfortable and get as detailed accounts as possible of strategic activities (Kohtamäki et al., 2022), the interviews were held in Swedish. During the interviews, both researchers were present and one of the researchers had the role of leading the interview by asking questions, while the other researcher took notes. By taking this interview strategy, an insider-outsider perspective could be established so that the risk of adapting the views of the informants was mitigated (the risk of "going native") (Gioia et al., 2013).

An additional concern with interviews is that they may not provide all the necessary data, particularly when exploring tacit knowledge held by the informants themselves. Consequently, field observations have been carried out on seven occasions and with a total amount of 17 hours. This has allowed the researchers to see things that the informants were unaware of that they were doing when interacting with others, potentially the tacit knowledge. In exchange of the informant's time, the researchers were required to some extent to contribute with ideas and knowledge during the field observation occasions to gain access. This type of ideas and knowledge could, for example, be ideas about how the residents of the area could be involved, which was requested at a workshop that took place during an observation occasion. The participation is something that the researchers do not think affected the data negatively but rather positively as an increased trust could be built between the researchers and the strategists. However, the presence of the researchers may have entailed a risk that the data may have been affected. For example, the observation may have had the effect of people thinking a little more about what and how they say things and how they behave when knowing they are being observed.

As an example of the inductive nature of grounded theory inspired studies and the flexibility of the methodology that follows (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 1996), the focus of this research has been changed along the way. Consequently, the interview guide was modified and an example of this is that during the first ten interviews, a typical question was "Can you take us through the various steps it takes to go from a decision to reality regarding a social sustainability strategy?". In the later part of the research, when valuable insights had emerged, the focus was changed to the present and then a typical question could instead be "Can you describe a time when you collaborated and describe what you did then in as much detail as possible?". As a final part of the study, niche interviews have taken place where the focus has been on knowledge that the informants use in their daily practice. A total of three rounds of interviews were conducted, all three influenced and shaped by the emergent interest and focus of the study along the process of the research.

Lastly, to understand the context better, additional secondary material was collected mostly in the form of governmental steering documents (budget, programs), and strategy documents. By using multiple sources, the combination of interviews and field observations strengthen the case (Gioia et al., 2013) and an overview of the data sources for the study can be seen in table 1 below (Cloutier & Ravasi, 2021).

Table 1. An overview of the data sources.

Data category	**Organization**	**Description**	**Number**
Interviews (role)			
Deputy Mayor	The City of Gothenburg	Trusted politician who was chairman of the municipal council that got through the sentence in the budget about the goal of no especially vulnerable areas in Gothenburg by 2025 (see findings section)	1
Planning Manager	The City of Gothenburg	Managers from the City Management Office who, at a central level, works with developing programs, strategies,	5

		change management, follow-up, advice, and support to the relevant committees	
Development Manager	The City of Gothenburg	Social administration and services representative and practitioners who work with collaboration at the operational level	2
Development Manager	Municipal Housing Company	Strategist at a higher organizational level who is responsible for collaboration to work	5
Marketing & Business Developer	Municipal Housing Company	Strategist who works with marketing and business development within his housing company but who is also project manager for Destination Tynnered	1
Consultant	Municipal Housing Company	Consultant who worked for a municipal housing company and was responsible for formalizing the collaboration among housing companies regarding physical security	1
Researcher	Research Institute	Researcher who was responsible for the research circle (see observations in the table) with the aim of creating a systematic model for work with social sustainability	1
Parish Pastor	Civil Society	Middle Manager at one of the larger churches in the area who has an active part in collaboration with other actors	2
Operations Manager	Civil Society	Manager from an actor with activities and its own private school in the vulnerable area of interest	1
Consultant	Civil Society	Expert in children's rights issues who works for an idea-driven organization that has many activities in schools with children and young people, principals, teachers and officials	2
Municipal Police	The Police	Police officer with many years of experience from strategic collaboration with the municipality and local presence in vulnerable areas	1
Relationship Manager	Private Company	Representative from a privately owned housing company who has several years of experience from working in vulnerable areas and in collaboration with the city	1
Talent Management Specialist	Private Company	Representative from a large private car company that collaborates in the area regarding social sustainability	2
Field observations (activity)			
Research Circle	All above-mentioned	An activity that brought together the various actors in Destination Tynnered to reflect, workshop, and develop the work	15h (five occasions)
Breakfast Meeting	All above-mentioned	A meeting where various actors active in the vulnerable area were invited and presented their work regarding social sustainability	2h (two occasions)
Total			25 interviews, 17h field observation

Data analysis

The data analysis began at the same time as the data collection with a first step of coding after transcription to discover new concepts depending on where the informants lead the interviews. Coding is the link between collected data and developing an emergent theory to explain the

data and this study has built the analysis from the ground up by shaping the data collection as the research progress (Charmaz, 1996). Since the research rests and builds on the notion of people in organizations as knowledgeable agents, meaning that people in organizations know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions and actions (Gioia et al., 2013), the starting point of generating theory was the analysis of qualitative data. The purpose of the analysis was to discover what the informants do in practice when they collaborate and what knowledge they are using while doing it. Consequently, a systematic inductive approach to concept development has been chosen to give rigor and robustness to the study at the same time.

The data analysis stages are explained in table 2 and take place iteratively with constant moving back and forth between codes and data and with emergent ideas leading to additional data collection as the research progresses (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). First, the researchers engaged holistically with the transcribed data in an open coding "stage" and developed in vivo codes staying with the words of the informants guided by the point of departure of the research and the initial research question of how a sustainability strategy translated into practice. From the open coding process of the ten first interviews, 123 different codes were generated. Secondly, first order codes were developed by distilling the meanings of the open codes from the ten first interviews into phrasal descriptors using informant centric words, still guided by the initial research question (Gioia et al., 2013). This stage provided closeness to the participants perspectives and the 123 open codes were distilled into 34 first order codes expressed in phrasal descriptors. Thirdly, second order concepts were developed. This is the point where the research turns from an inductive to abductive research by consulting the literature to develop concepts (Gioia et al., 2013). By concept in this research, a less well-specified notion capturing qualities that describe or explain a phenomenon of theoretical interest is meant. This is also the stage when the researchers view themselves as knowledgeable agents who can think on several levels at the same time (informant centric first order and second order concepts situated at a higher level of abstraction) (Gioia et al., 2013). It is by using this toolkit of axial coding from the grounded theory toolbox (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that the first order informant centric codes are linked into second order concepts expressed in the "language of academia" and guided by the question of "what is really going on here?". After having conducted ten interviews, 15 second order concepts were developed and patterns with new insights emerged. In line with the emergent nature of discovering grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the interview guide was revised, and the research question modified from how a sustainability strategy is translated into practice into the final research questions of what are the micro-practices of strategists in collaboration to achieve social sustainability, and what knowledge do they use? From this point the research moved into a new focus which allowed for more data collection and additional interviews niched on the new research focus (Gioia et al., 2013).

The analytical process continued with a new iteration of coding after transcribing the subsequent interviews but now with a direct analysis of first order codes given the new research focus of micro-practices. After conducting 19 interviews, a division of the collected material was carried out into what the researchers considered to be "doings" and another category that encompassed meanings, expressions, and tools. This became the basis for an analytical activity

among the two researchers where the codes were printed and cut out, sorted and categorized into 15 different named families.

At this stage, 35 first order codes expressed in phrasal descriptors were developed which were then compared with already existing first order codes from the ten first interviews. After comparison and first order analysis, a final number of 28 first order codes were developed. The analysis then continued with another round of second order analysis where 15 second order concepts were developed and after comparison with the already existing second order concepts a final number of 10 second order concepts were developed. At this stage, the empirical material was considered for what Glaser & Strauss (1967) term theoretical saturation as no new activities emerged in the interviewing and the data became repetitive. At this stage the possibility to distil the second order concepts further into overarching second order aggregate dimensions were investigated. The aggregated dimensions connect the empirical findings with the conversations of academia in management & organizational studies and provides a "10 000-meter view" of the findings. In total, three aggregated dimensions were developed.

The data analysis stages are explained in table 2 and take place iteratively with constant moving back and forth between codes and data and with emergent ideas leading to additional data collection as the research progresses (Langley & Abdallah, 2011).

Table 2. Stages of the analytical process.

Stage	**Analytical Activities**	**Output**
Holistically engagement with the transcribed data to generate initial insights	Open coding in vivo using informant centric terms	1. A list 123 open codes
Distilling the meaning of the open codes into phrasal descriptors	Developing first order codes	2. 34 first order codes
Consulting the literature and searching for higher aggregated dimensions	Developing second order concepts	3. A list of initially 15 second order concepts
Identifying emergent interest and new research focus	Returning to the data sorting and re-coding existing interviews with the new research focus	4. A data bank with extracts of transcripts and new codes in line with the new research focus
Identifying micro-practices	Physical analytical activity where the researchers sorted the new codes into named categorize	5. 15 categorized med subordinated codes related to the categories
Distilling the meaning of the open codes into phrasal descriptors	Using the newly formed categories and codes to develop new first order codes and combine them with already existing	6. 28 number of new first order codes in line with the new focus
Consulting the literature and searching for higher aggregated dimensions	Developing new second order concepts that shows the micro-practices of the strategists and the knowledge they are using (the new research focus)	7. 10 micro-practices aggregated into 3 categories
Incorporate data and literature to build a theoretical dynamic model	Describing relationships and knowledge used in the second order concepts. Combining the second order concepts and aggregate dimensions with existing research and literature	8. A visualisation of how strategists construct collaboration through micro-practices doing sensemaking and sensegiving by using different kinds of knowledge.

The result of first order codes, second order concepts and aggregated dimensions from this analytical process are the building blocks of the data structure which can be seen in figure 1 on

the next page. How the researchers arrived at the second order concepts is showed in the data table in Appendix A where underlying empirical material is derived to second-order concepts.

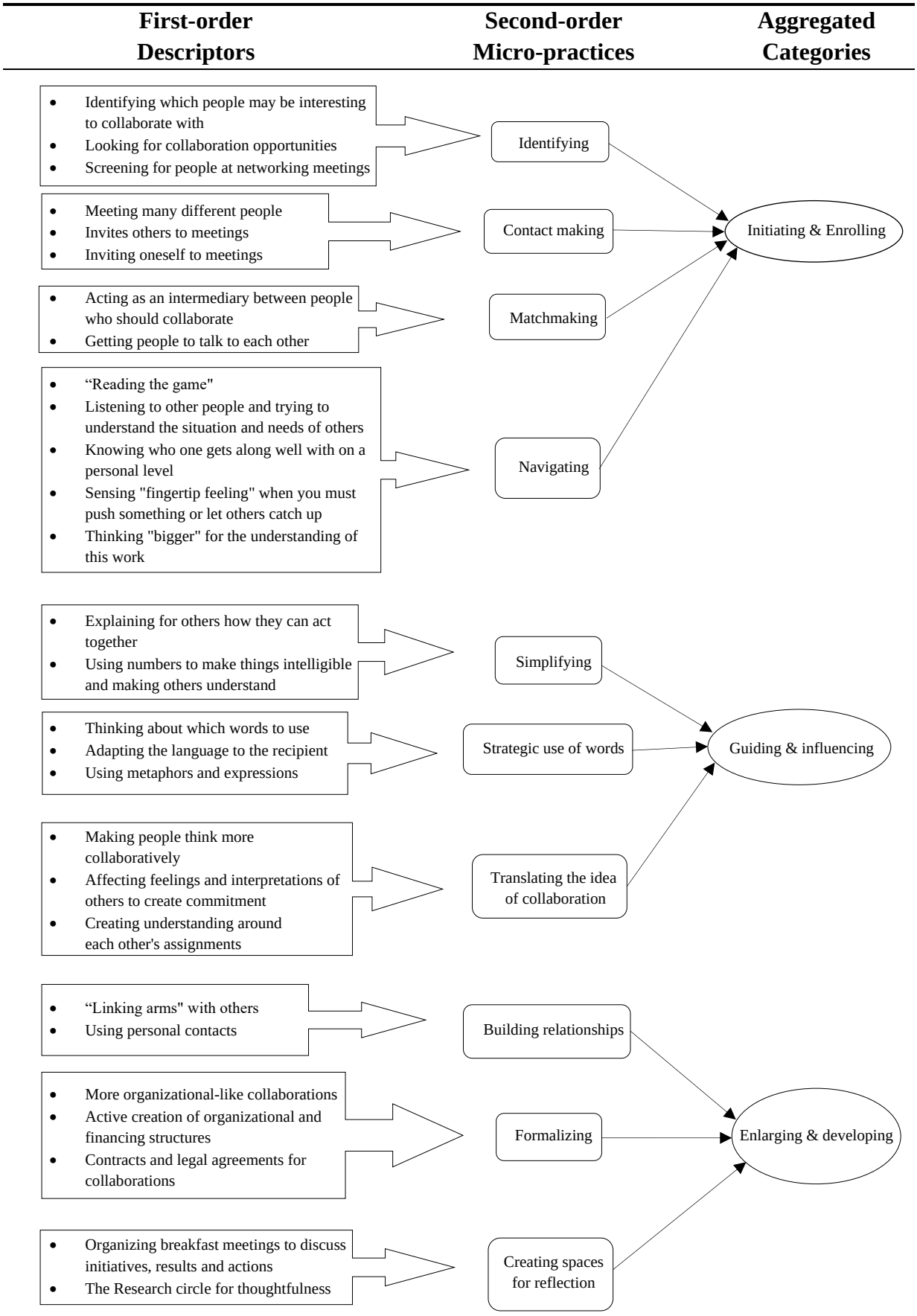

Figure 1. Data structure.

To live up to the Swedish Research Council (2020) ethical principles of respect, honesty, responsibility, and reliability in good research practice, some ethical safeguards have been deployed in this study (Silverman, 2020). All participation has been voluntary, and anonymity has been guaranteed, meaning that informants have not been mentioned by name or specific organisational name but instead by role and the type of organization they belong to. In addition to voluntariness and anonymity, following Silverman (2020) the purpose of the study has always been informed before the data collection and how the researchers intend to use the material afterwards. The findings of the study have also undergone a "member-check" getting feedback from the strategists on emergent interpretations, which the researchers believe increases the trustworthiness and ethical dimensions of the study according to good research practice (Langley & Abdallah, 2011; Swedish Research Council, 2020). While the interview findings may entail subjective portrayals (Czarniawska, 2014) and interpretations (Silverman, 2020), the conducted observations are believed to counteract this risk. Moreover, the researcher's independence from any particular organization, as non-interns with no vested interests beyond data collection, has facilitated a more unbiased and critical examination. The field observations have served as a viable substitute to establish closeness to the organizations (Silverman, 2020) and resemble a natural collaboration partner during the observations. A limitation with this study is that it has only been carried out on a specific case in a limited area during a limited period of time. In this way, the study has gained depth in the insights, but by comparing with other cases, further insights could be drawn. A limitation is also that since practices are situated in time and space (Jarzabkowski, 2004), the results of this study are only tied to this context.

Findings

The landscape of social sustainability work in the city of Gothenburg

Through a politically govern organization, whose most important overarching governing document is its budget, the city council makes decisions on substantive issues that form the basis of the various strategic directions in the city. These directions and goals are then formalized in either a direct assignment to the city's committees and companies or in a governing document called a program. The program is developed by the city management office and is a strategic city-wide planning document which, after preparation and approval, goes out to committees and companies in the city for operationalisation. Governance via programs is the city's way of designing strategies addressing many different topics and makes Gothenburg differ from other cities that are more often governed by overall visions. When asking the deputy mayor (who was chairman of the city council when the collaboration initiative Destination Tynnered was started) about how an idea becomes a reality in the city, the deputy mayor explained:

> "It is not enough to have a vision. The vision must also be concretized and there are different ways to get things done in Gothenburg. Either you call the head of administration and ask them, give concrete assignments or you can work with goals. In a city with 50,000 employees, you can't run around and talk to every man. You have to try to work more overarching and set the direction and ambitions for the whole city. That's how we work with the budget as an overarching steering document for the entire city and programs addressing specific matters."

(Deputy Mayor, The City of Gothenburg)

An increase in number of programs has overwhelmed the city with an excess of strategic documents that often remain as just documents, despite their political ambition and goals. In response, efforts have been made to streamline the use of these documents. The city management office has assumed a new role, actively implementing strategies across city administrations rather than simply distributing programs. This expanded role has made planning managers more involved, as they now provide presentations and offer availability for questions and concerns. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of each administration to take action and turn the programs into tangible realities. At the same strategic city level, a planning manager from the city management office outlined the approach taken by the city to tackle the issue of excessive governing documents:

> "To get action of strategies, we have started an initiative aimed at reviewing all our programs, merging, and consolidating the number of programs. The city management office has also been given a new change management role, which will now include the implementation of programs."

(Planning Manager, The City of Gothenburg)

Although the translation from an idea, ambition, direction, and goal from the politicians to practice goes through a program or a direct mission and may seem as a straightforward, linear process, that is not the entire truth.

For some people and organizations that already do a lot of things to achieve social sustainability, the city's program plays a minor role. This shows that in the contextual environment of Gothenburg, things happen completely independently of what the city has decided on. When we interviewed one of the actors from a private company that has been active in Tynnered for 20 years and collaborated with the city for the same amount of time, she expressed that they do not have a particularly large contact with the city at all. They have their own strategy regarding relationship management in Tynnered. Regarding governing document from the city, she said the following which shows the role the city's program has for certain important actors:

> “What program are you talking about? When you say program it's like a big question mark to me, what does that mean?”

(Relationship Manager, Private Company)

The importance of collaboration

Questions about social sustainability run across the entire city's geographical areas, and there are different local conditions that must be considered in different geographical areas. Actors operating in Tynnered, include schools, the social administration, the police and a variety of other actors. For the implementation of programs and the work around social sustainability, collaboration between actors is needed. As the number of programs targeted to achieve social sustainability increases, voices have begun to rise from the different administrations, pointing to a need for more collaboration between the administrations to effectively work with these matters. A planning manager at the city management office who has worked for a long time

with these issues and has a lot of contact with various administrations expressed the following about the motive behind the collaboration:

> "With more actors taking joint responsibility, resources can also be shared and combined, and a better result achieved."
>
> (Planning Manager, The City of Gothenburg)

> "I can't bear to collaborate with someone who doesn't want to collaborate. Collaboration should be 1 + 1 is not 2 but it is 3. Otherwise, I could have done it myself. So, find organizations that want the same thing and that have or can in any case have the same target area that you should be heading in the same direction so that it benefits my business."
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

However, a significant amount of independent work is already taking place at the local level, separate from the City of Gothenburg's programs, adding another dimension to social sustainability practices. In line with the city's leadership philosophy, individual companies and boards have the autonomy to determine and decide the implementation of programs based on their first-hand knowledge and proximity to the actual practices. Collaboration across different levels, including the city's companies, administrations, and civil society, is crucial to achieve the goals of social sustainability. Collaboration, therefore, forms a substantial portion of the daily activities and responsibilities of strategists. The strategists are often included in several different collaboration platforms such as a newly formed BID-agreement (Business Improvement District-agreement) and the Destination Tynnered initiative. Strategists feel that it is difficult to get an overview of the city organization and understand how things are connected. They express that "the city feels big, distant and complex" and that it takes a long time to make decisions and act. The collaborative work has also led to a number of negative personal experiences where stress and the feeling of inadequacy are emotions expressed. High ambitions with collaborative initiatives contribute to even more stress. There are also experiences of "reinventing the wheel" and confusion about various governing documents circulating in the city. This is what a development manager for a housing company that collaborates with the city in various programs said about the city:

> "The rumour on the floor about the city of Gothenburg is that it is large, many different administrations and it is difficult to understand who does what, who makes decisions, which documents to deal with and that there is reorganization all the time. It is also stressful with all the high ambitions, for example that we are going to be a Knowledge Center here in Tynnered for sustainable development."
>
> (Municipal Housing Company, Municipal Housing Company)

A strategist's micro-practices and knowledge in collaboration to achieve social sustainability

Collaborative micro-practices in social sustainability work relate primarily to three categories that shape the collaboration: (1) Initiating & enrolling, (2) Guiding & influencing and, (3) Enlarging & developing. These categories are clusters of ten micro-practices that have emerged in the systematic and inductive analysis of the empirical data showcased in figure 1 in the

method section. Below is a description of what the micro-practices are and what kind of knowledge the strategists draw from when doing the micro-practices.

Initiating & Enrolling

The first category is called Initiating & enrolling, and consists of the following micro-practices: *Identifying, Contact making, Matchmaking and Navigating*. These micro-practices help the strategists to initiate new collaborations and enrol members into it.

Identifying involves doings that aims to investigate which people are needed for the collaboration and finding new possible partners at networking events. For example, the strategists go to many different meetings and get-togethers, events where they try to find collaboration partners.

> "I try to identify, are we in the same area with the same target audience? OK, well, then we need to talk. If it is not the same area but maybe, we are using the same methods or workways? Yes, okay, then we need to talk. I'm quite open to conversations in general and when I spot something interesting, I'm quite quick "hi, oh you work with that!? OK, we need to talk"
>
> (Operations Manager, Civil Society)

The next micro-practice, *Contact making*, accounts for the different tactics the strategists are using to get in touch with the identified collaboration partners. It comprises actions that builds on meeting many people in different networking events and meetings, followed by an invitation of possible collaboration partners to a meeting for discussing common interests. A typical order for the contact making is to first research the other person or organization followed by crafting a well-constructed email pitching in the collaboration. After that, a telephone call asking for a physical meeting.

> "We find these people who work with rehab from the region and then we figure the collaboration out. How are we going to invite and attract them? It must be attractive. We look at their goals and core mission. How can we argue that they should be with us? Then we write an email first, where we explain the importance of the fact that we might be able to find benefits by collaborating with each other and try to highlight the benefits that they could get with it. Here we need to broaden the picture. Then we make a phone call and try to book a first meeting. Then we asked if they wanted to join and continue working together? The purpose is to meet and talk about what we encounter in the population, but also perhaps find a common denominator to collaborate around."
>
> (Development Manager, The City of Gothenburg)

Matchmaking is the third of the micro-practices in the category of initiating & enrolling. Matchmaking is when the strategists analyse a new contact and identifies possible collaboration opportunities with a third party. They simply bring two people together just as it sounds. Reasons for matchmaking include the identification of a certain skill, experience, new opportunities or ideas. It involves making people talk to each other and sometimes requires keeping private contacts at the back of one's mind. One of the strategists from a private company gave the account:

> "Half of my job is about matchmaking, connecting actors and connecting businesses. Connect people. Sometimes the question might be how you do something and what you need for it. It may have something directly to do with my tasks, but I can contribute to finding ways forward by

> connecting people with others in the whole city." (Talent Management Specialist, Private Company)

Lastly in initiating & enrolling is the micro-practice of *navigating.* Unlike the previous three, *navigating* is a micro-practice that takes place in parallel throughout time but with more presence at the beginning of a collaboration. *Navigating* involves more internal doings compared to the previous micro-practices. These doings are things that the strategists do to help them navigate in new environments and new encounters. The strategists try to apply an open mindset to not miss out on opportunities for collaborations and listening carefully to understand the situation and needs of others. It is strategic in the sense that they must "read the game" and sense when to go forward with their own plan or let other initiatives catch up. The strategists must think bigger to better understand what can be done in complex social issues and to not focus too much on their own assignments. A representative from one of the key actors - a municipal housing company described:

> "We need to zoom out and think more as a unified organization, not just about our line assignments, but think bigger. It is important that we pull in the same direction. I think there is a balance between on the one hand pushing and forcing because we can do that, but it is a delicate balance between pushing to force and thus also creating a lot of conflict. We don't want to stir people up , especially since these issues that are not our core mission and I think this kind of requires a sense of the fingertip because when should we push and when do we need to let the others catch up?"
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

Knowledge in initiating & enrolling

When the strategists do micro-practices in initiating & enrolling, they have a broad understanding of the city, local area and key actors. Strategists make use of this contextual knowledge to find people and organizations that have similar goals by understanding other organizations' and peoples' missions, goals, strategies and needs. They know that a mutually shared idea of collaboration is fundamental.

> "The basis for collaboration is that we create a common picture of the situation linked to the needs that exist in the area and identify what role everyone has in this."
>
> (Development Manager, The City of Gothenburg)

Strategists know how to get things done in a certain context and who makes the decisions. They know that you have to adopt your strategy to the context to initiate collaboration and that different organizations and people have different goals and priorities. That knowledge shapes their micro-practices to initiate and enrol members into collaboration. An example that illustrates this is the example of the shopping carts. In this example, there was a problem that the security hosts in a housing area reported on, namely littering of shopping carts which served as a need for collaboration. The strategist in this example knew that in order to enrol the 9 identified store owners that the shopping carts could come from, she needed to draw from her knowledge about the different organizations' goals and priorities. Instead of contacting the store owners and complaining that their shopping carts were in her area, the strategist tried to find

the arguments and understanding of the other organizations. It almost initially was interpreted as if she could help the stores owners both get the shopping carts back and save money. The strategist asked what the store owners would need to collaborate in this issue and to get a long-term perspective, the strategist built up a small network with contact persons and the various store owners who had agreed that they meet once a year for an hour to follow up on this work.

> "You can't just come and say to the store owners what to do, we have to create incentives for them, so they want to collaborate around this issue […] A shopping cart costs a lot, so I asked if they had problems with them disappearing? […] I made them think that I could help them save money […] They needed a contact person, then we built up a small network consisting of the 9 store owners and contact persons who had agreed to meet once a year for an hour to follow up on the work. "
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

The shopping carts example is an example of an initiation & enrolling that not only demonstrates what the strategist were doing, the micro-practices, but also how it was done through the use of knowledge.

Guiding & influencing

The second category comprises the micro-practices of *Simplifying, Strategic use of words,* and *Translating the idea of collaboration.* Together, all three share the aim of influencing, shaping, and guiding other people to take actions needed to build the collaboration.

Simplifying, encompasses different types of efforts to make collaborating partners or potential partners to understand the collaboration better. It is done by explaining and simplifying (often with the use of numbers) a seemingly complex issue with the goal of reaching a shared understanding to act together more easily.

> "If you start calculating it that way, you realize that this is not complex. It is difficult at most […] working with simplifications such as this makes it understandable for more people what it is that can be achieved."
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

There is also an ongoing tactic of matching the understanding of each other's assignments and core missions. A particular way of doing this was to adapt the language when speaking with certain occupational groups to influence them:

> "On Monday, we had a meeting with social workers who work with livelihood support. We adapt in the sense that we try to find language that matches the way they are."
>
> (Parish Pastor, Civil Society)

How the strategists choose to name things is a similar important semantic aspect. The micro-practice of *Strategic use of words* is paramount in communication within collaboration. For example, one strategist observed in a meeting, expressed:

> "We can't use the word mapping, it sounds like we have bad intentions! Instead let's use the word identifying".
>
> (Talent Management Specialist, Private Company)

Another example from an interview is:

> “We don't call Destination Tynnered a project, it connotes that it is time-bound and short term”.
>
> (Marketing & Business Developer, Municipal Housing Company)

From a city perspective, the framing of the strategies as programs at the city administration is part of a similar reasoning albeit not intentionally. Naming their strategies as programs is not something that has been decided, it is something that has emerged since the beginning of 2000's to create legitimacy and seriousness. There seems to be a common strategy to avoid using the word project from different actors.

Another example of how important the choice of words seems to be in the field and the values that each word brings is from one of the most long-term actors from civil society:

> “We had a meeting with a home for the elderly near us that is run by a private operator and when we meet, we hear that they use the word customers when they talk about the elderly. They even said that "to us they are just CUSTOMERS". This is their home. What happened to the relationship!? It is devastating and very diminishing of people. We got really upset actually and spoke to the owner and said you have to change this.”
>
> (Parish Pastor, Civil Society)

The use of metaphors and expressions is also widespread. It seems that a reason is that it helps the strategists create an understanding of an issue in a time saving and simplifying manner. For example, by using the expression “let’s not reinvent the wheel” in a sentence, they both use an expression that is widely accepted in the group and in addition they tend to refer to the same expression later in a discussion simply by saying “the wheel”. The following metaphors and expressions have been recurring and frequently used in interactions with others within the collaboration: “get action of strategy”, “get spin on”, “ear to the rail”, “open the right doors”, “link arms”, “keep the same pace”, “don't run on the same balls” and “don't overlap each other”.

The micro-practice *Translating the idea of collaboration* refers to the strategists' efforts to influence feelings and interpretations of others to create commitment. Particularly to make others think bigger and more in terms of collaboration. However, some strategists express that it is best if each organization devotes itself to its core business and does not wander in too much into others work. One strategist said:

> "We must not step on each other's toes, but we must move in step in the same direction. I am very dedicated to showing how others can contribute through their actions and try to bring them onboard the journey."
>
> (Marketing & Business Developer, Municipal Housing Company)

It seems important to convey a sense that collaboration regarding social sustainability is doable and that everyone benefits from it. As the above quote might indicate, the act of selling seems to play a big part in the micro-practice of *translating the idea of collaboration.* One of the Development Managers said:

> “I would still say that I spend most of my time selling. Like, the idea of a possibility, the idea of a future, the idea of how it could be. To make others understand that it is doable. And also, kind of create a feeling that this will be possible and then it will be fun and then you are prepared to invest energy. Call it manipulative persuasion if you wish.”
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

Knowledge in guiding & influencing

When it comes to guide and influence someone, the knowledge of how to have conversations, listen, take in different perspectives and change perspectives permeates the strategists' micro-practices. The strategists put themselves in other person's situations and understand how they see things and what their needs and challenges are. This is the basis for the guiding and influencing that then takes place. An example that illustrates the knowledge that the strategists use when guiding & influencing is the coffee-, youngster-, Pentecostal church- and housing company-example.

One of the housing companies one day received a question from the Pentecostal church if they were allowed to serve coffee in the housing areas. The Pentecostal church wanted to start walking in the areas and hang out with the tenants, get to know the neighbours and see if they together with the housing company could contribute to the area. The Pentecostal Church made good contact with the children and young people. The youths turned out to be so-called "at-risk youth", young people who risked becoming criminals, something that the church had no experience of dealing with. The strategist had to take on a role as a guide providing the church support on how to handle conflicts and risk- and protective factors for young people. This was a sensitive situation as the strategist did not want to "rap their knuckles" so it required good communication finding a consensus on what the collaboration should lead to and what the content of the collaboration should be. Today, the housing company has recurring collaboration meetings with the Pentecostal church regarding this topic and has adopted a guiding role in the collaboration.

> "The Pentecostal Church were of course welcome to serve coffee in our area […] but they had no experience at all in dealing with these kinds of youngsters […] This was quite a sensitive situation because we didn't want to come and rap their knuckles pointing out how bad they were, but instead really try to provide the support and guidance that was needed while highlighting the positives and that we were really proud of this collaboration and that we think they were really good at what they did."
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

The knowledge of words, language and numbers also play a central role to guide & influence others in collaboration. The strategists have knowledge about how to frame things for a specific audience, e.g., what words and metaphors to use to make things comprehensible. This "know-how" of how to communicate in a specific contextual and organizational environment to make things understandable is evident in the next example. One of the municipal housing development managers, who collaborates a lot with the police, security managers and public health scientists, said that it was like "she needed a dictionary" of which words the different parties used when they talked about something, even though, in her mind, it was about the same thing. They were talking about the same thing but had different words for it. The strategist often felt that she needed to guide the conversations and take a role where she adapted the language so that everyone could understand and thereby create a common agreed upon meaning and picture of the collaboration.

> "[…] When a security manager from the police uses the word risk, they have a definition for it, and when a public health scientist then starts talking about public health risks and protective factors, it means

> something completely different. I seriously needed a glossary of what words were used so I could bridge the different parties to create a common agreed upon image […] If I forget a word when I'm going to speak and they know, they lose trust damn fast…"
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

Enlarging & developing

The third and last category is comprised of micro-practices that aim to develop the collaboration in different aspects. Essentially, the goal seems to be a collaboration that is (perceived as) larger, more legitimate, more structured and spans over a longer time period. This category is made up of the micro-practices *Building relationships, Formalizing* and *Creating spaces for reflection.*

Building relationships is an important part of this category. In the same way as the micro-practice of *navigating* in the *initiating & enrolling* category, the micro-practice of *building relationships* is something that happens continuously over time. The collaborations seem to be a property of the relationship:

> "Our area police have extra contact with the school, they are not involved in school teaching, but you have contact in such a way that you go there, enter the schoolyard, talk to young people, seek contact. Partly to build relationships, but perhaps also to get some information that may be important to the police. Of course, we also talk to the staff at the school, from the teacher up to the principal, as we are the ones who have continuous contact."
>
> (Municipal Police, The Police)

The strategists expressed that successful collaboration leads to, and is dependent on, strong relationships that lasts for long time periods. They emphasize the importance of actors that have been around for a long time that both have certain knowledge about issues or the geographical area and can create legitimacy that they want to be associated with and "link arms with". These relationships sometimes last for decades and are commonly drawn upon whenever new ideas for collaboration emerge. Accordingly, the strategists contact them to engage in collaboration or as an important intermediary to get in touch with other actors that are considered interesting. Thus, in relationship building, the set of contacts that the strategists have built up with their experience plays an essential role:

> "I have contact with various people who have worked in Gothenburg for a long time. You kind of know people and you have a good feeling for, and an idea of how things could work out and who you can contact"
>
> (Planning Manager, The City of Gothenburg)

> "I know who to contact because that's what happens when you collect contacts. Then they are sort of in the back of one's mind."
>
> (Operations Manager, Civil Society)

Formalizing consists of different efforts to create organizational, legal, and financial structures for collaboration. It is evident that collaborations are much more formal and organization-like today than before, as the trend of collaborating for sustainability is growing in society according to the strategists. This is a shift that can be seen in the field that the collaboration that previously was mostly informal or project specific today has become more formalized. For

instance, the BID is a formalized collaboration where a separate organization is formed that is owned by property owners who choose to join. A fee is paid which is determined by how many apartments the property owner has and the aim is that the property owners shall take joint responsibility for safety issues in the area. A board exists and formal legal agreements. The fact that Destination Tynnered has its own organizational structure with a steering group, project manager, project groups and communication plan, activity plan and formal agreements that closely resembles a business-like own organization also testifies to the formalization that goes on. In addition, the municipality funds different initiatives and engages more with legal agreements than before.

> "Many of our collaborations are formal, which means that you have to think on the agreements […] Other collaborations are, however, a challenge when there are external actors outside the city of Gothenburg involved. You can never decide that someone should be part of the collaboration if there are no legal agreement, so there must be a joint understanding. However, you can always "informally formalize" in the group where there is no agreement with, for example, a list of actions to get a joint understanding. "

(Development Manager, The City of Gothenburg)

The last micro-practice in this category of *enlarging & developing* is *Creating spaces for reflection.* This practice represents organizing meetings with others, such as a breakfast meeting with other like-minded actors that operates in the area, where they talk and discuss their work, along with Destination Tynnered´s monthly meetings with a research circle that allows for reflection and thoughtful discussions. One manager put it this way about these occasions:

> "The research circle creates thoughtfulness. They ask questions, they see what we need that we don't see ourselves. So, they can raise the discussion and create time for reflection, and time to think and to some extent problematize."

(Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

Knowledge in Enlarging & Developing

In this last category of micro-practices, Enlarging & Developing, strategists draw from their knowledge and experience of collaboration that they have accumulated over the years. Personal commitment and long-termism have been emphasized as very important personal qualities and watchwords.

> "If you have worked for a long time with questions like this, as I have done year after year, you end up with 250 contacts with good people to contact. You build relationships with continuity, but I didn't know it would be as decisive when I started as it is today. Commitment over time is what I call it, and it is the personal commitment that keeps you working on these issues."

(Talent Management Specialist, Private Company)

It also seems that the strategists have learned from previous collaboration and have started to make collaboration more formal and organized. Formalized collaborations such as Destination Tynnered and BID, come with a need for clear knowledge about how to make legal agreements, as well as business knowledge that the strategists draw from when organizing and leading

collaboration. Moreover, it was expressed that agreements and formal communication sends different signals, which is interpreted as that they know much about the receivers of a message, as well as the effects of the language they use. Some strategists emphasised the use of agendas and action plans as means to "informally formalize" a newly started collaboration to make the others agree on coming to regular meetings. This was an approach they had been experimenting with for a long time in order to learn which methods were most effective. The reflection aspect within this category reveals that strategists actively engage in their own development and the improvement of the forum, indicating their recognition of the continual enhancement of the collaboration on a strategic level. This understanding of the value of reflection appears to stem from experience.

> "The BID is a good example of formalized collaboration, but generally you need to be able to write agreements. You have to be able to know what things are worth and what happens if someone breaks an agreement and how to follow up on it. You can signal a lot with your agreements. For instance, when we formalize activities in our target areas in Destination Tynnered we have children's groups where we can signal our values of having 50% boys and 50% girls in our agreements [...] Collaboration has often been perceived as messy, so now we have drawn up an organizational sketch from the start and there are steering groups that provide input from different directions…"
>
> (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)

To summarize the findings, the landscape of social sustainability work in the city of Gothenburg is complex. The city distinguishes itself from others by emphasizing substantive issues through programs rather than overarching visions. Consequently, practices related to social sustainability heavily revolve around collaboration. Collaboration is constructed by the knowledgeable strategists through 10 micro-practices summarized in the three categories *Initiating & Enrolling, Guiding & Influencing* and *Enlarging & Developing*. Together, these categories explain how collaboration starts, is shaped and expands by the strategists' use of knowledge.

Discussion

Figure 2 illustrates the findings of the study in a processual model hereby named "Strong collaboration." This model encompasses three categories: *Initiating & Enrolling, Guiding & Influencing,* and *Enlarging & Developing.* These categories comprise a diverse and intricate set of micro-practices employed by strategists to achieve complex social sustainability goals. The model demonstrates how these categories can be viewed as recurring sequences of micro-practices that interact with socio-cultural and semantic knowledge. Researchers studying collaborations can utilize this model to enhance their understanding of collaboration, as the cumulative effects of these practices may contribute to significant accomplishments.

Collaboration is always embedded and takes place in a socio-cultural environment that forms the context for the strategist's work. In the contextual environment, there are contextual factors such as legislation, politics, leadership philosophies, organizational cultures, people with different experiences and skills, organizations' strategies, development ideas, organizations' main missions, governing documents, goals and sometimes even national guidelines to consider. This contextual environment affects a strategist's doings in such a way

that it forms a framework to relate to at the same time that the strategist's doings in turn also affect the contextual environment in a reciprocal relationship. The contextual environment can be seen as the overall rectangle in figure 2 that forms the playing field for collaboration and social sustainability work.

Given that the collaboration is embedded in a socio-cultural context, the collaboration consists of people whose tasks are largely made up of precisely collaborating with other organizations and people. This is the strategic practitioner (the strategists) who can be seen in the rectangle in figure 2 that is within the rectangle of collaboration. These are people who, according to some, are described as strategic champions, but who regardless of labelling make things happen in reality, often taking more responsibility than what is formally described in their job descriptions. They are, so to speak, "the machinery" of social sustainability and the cogwheel that revolves collaboration. The strategists do formal practices such as having meetings, following overall strategic documents, reporting to superiors, and giving presentations, but they also do things that are not captured within the formal practices and that are essential to building strong and long-term collaboration. These are the micro-practices that are found in the smaller rectangles in figure 2 and describe the often "invisible" things that the strategists accomplish to make collaboration happen. When the strategists do the micro-practices, they use socio-cultural and semantic knowledge.

The micro-practices do not have a specific mutual order except that the category initiating & enrolling usually takes place first. In reality, strategists make use of their knowledge simultaneously when doing the micro-practices but at the same time, the doings also lead to the strategists gaining new knowledge, which is illustrated by the two arrows between knowledge and micro-practices in the figure 2. It is difficult to distinctly delineate certain micro-practices from others since in a dynamic reality, everything happens almost all at the same time. For example, guiding & influencing can arguably take place already directly at the initiation of a collaboration which shows that there is an underlying dynamic and a reciprocal relationship between knowledge used and wat the strategists do (Orlikowski, 2002). The strategists sometimes need to work on several things at the same time and be able to master different forms of knowledge, on several different occasions and sometimes at the same time. All micro-practices and the knowledge that the strategists use contribute to the goal and output “Strong collaborations”, a concept that encompasses the new form of collaboration for social sustainability, which is represented in the rectangle on the right in figure 2 and represents the output of the micro-practices.

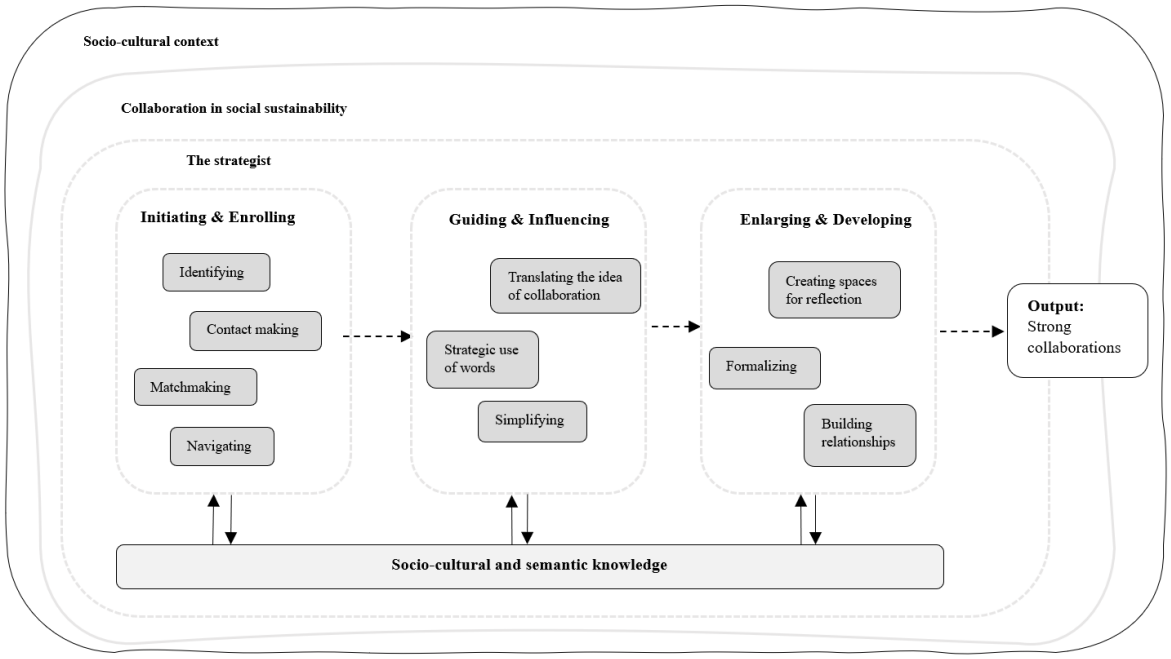

Figure 2. A processual model of a strategist's micro-practices that construct strong collaboration for social sustainability.

Micro-practices constructing collaboration for social sustainability

The findings confirm that collaboration is indeed one of the most important macro-practices that the strategist´s in this study engages with in the name of sustainability (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b). By opening up what people do when they collaborate regarding social sustainability, it is possible to theorize about the intangible and understand how micro-level activity, through the structuration process, can become established doings within collaboration in social sustainability (Giddens, 1984; Kohtamäki et al., 2022). This adds to Silva & Figuiredo's (2017) call for sustainability research that looks at practice built from the daily actions that affect the collaboration and ultimately sustainability as a strategic imperative. From an SAP perspective, this construction of collaboration can be viewed as constructed by practices.

Furthermore, it is found that collaborating for the cause of social sustainability is characterized by sustainability champions who work hard for the greater good (Grint, 2008). In principle, all the strategists that have been interviewed and observed in this study show characteristics of Mantere's (2005) definition of strategic champions or sustainability champions who keep up and drive the work forward with a certain passion, often doing more and taking on more responsibility than is expected and found in job descriptions. This is something that differ from collaborating around other issues (e.g., Cirella & Murphy, 2022).

Knowledge

Initiating & enrolling

Looking at the identified categories of micro-practices, it is perhaps not so surprising that the first category *Initiating & enrolling* show how collaboration starts. This is similar to previous studies (e.g., Tello-Rozas et al., 2015; Cirella & Murphy, 2022), that have investigated collaboration practices, adding another context to the extant literature on collaboration practices. However, by zooming in on the micro level as have been made in this study, more detailed and practitioner centric descriptions is hereby presented, adding to sensemaking within

SAP. The practices illustrated within this category show that the kind of knowledge that characterizes it is both explicit knowledge about the task, what expertise, issue at hand and type of organization that need to be enrolled, but more interestingly that they use forms of tacit knowledge. By understanding other organizations' and peoples' missions, goals, strategies and needs, they show that they have socio-cultural knowledge (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). Another example of how they show socio-cultural knowledge is illustrated in the example of the shopping carts, in which they know that to make contact with different organizations, they must take into consideration the different goals and priorities of the many stores. It also shows that they know how to adjust their language in order to persuade others, which is interpreted as a form of semantic knowledge (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). It shows resemblance with Rouleau & Balogun's (2008) named micro-practice "Enrolling networks" in the way they know who to contact, and by which means to do so in order to mobilize them, however, in a way these practices are perhaps not as automatic and tacit as Rouleau & Balogun (2008) found. Some respondents seemed more aware of what they were doing since they could verbalize it (Castillo, 2002), whereas others did not seem to be able to express that they had any certain knowledge but instead gave hints by expressing that they had experience in networking, or that they had "been doing this for a long time" that made them know how to act. Nevertheless, both socio-cultural knowledge in the form of knowing about the context and the actors that are drawn into their collaboration, and semantic knowledge in the form of knowing how to talk to others in order to enrol them, is present in *Initiating & Enrolling*. This confirms that the types of knowledge are interrelated and connects through practice (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008).

Guiding & Influencing

The category of *Guiding & Influencing* shows how the strategists draw upon their knowledge of how to influence others. They combine socio-cultural and semantic knowledge in order to make things pedagogical in a specific contextual and organizational environment. Especially the doings referred to as "selling" by the strategists, show connection to Samra-Fredericks (2003) and Gioia (1986) reasoning's about how specific linguistic skills are used to persuade and convince others. In the example of the inexperienced church representative that served coffee, it was apparent that the other strategist knew that this would not go well because of the sociocultural knowledge about the church's working methods and inexperience (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). This led to a guidance by highlighting the positive things and not "rap their knuckles", indicating a strategic use of words as a form of semantic knowledge (ibid). Indeed, semantic knowledge is prominent in constructing this category and how the strategists do sensegiving to influence others sensemaking (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) and bring meaning to the strategic direction of collaboration. The strategists carefully chose which words to use depending on the context and their interlocutors and adapts their language (Rouleau, 2005). Moreover, the use of metaphors is a way to gain legitimacy (Balogun et al., 2014) since they show for their interlocutors, their socio-cultural knowledge about organizational/management concepts by using expressions and metaphors as a specific part of semantic knowledge in order to create understanding in a pedagogical way. Another example of how legitimacy is evident in the use of words, is the one with the glossary, which was expressed as crucial to not lose the trust by saying the wrong words.

Similar to how Brorström (2018) has shown how numbers can be performative, this study has found that the use of certain words, expressions and metaphors is clearly something that have similar effects, because the interlocutors interpret and act upon the message that is embedded in them. Arguably, this fits well with Weick et al. (2005) notion of that strategies, in this case strategies that regards collaboration, constantly are made and remade through an ongoing process of thinking, interpretations and a reciprocal relationship with action. In addition, it is also evident that this type of knowledge is necessary to understand and use metaphors for effective (time saving) and impactful (implications on actions) communication and thus adding yet an empirical setting for the reasonings of Rouleau (2005). The use of metaphors has also arguably been found as a way to both create an understanding for oneself but also a powerful tool to influence someone else's sensemaking through sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Enlarging & Developing

The third category *Enlarging & Developing* describes how certain general knowledge about the society, its history, and organizational knowledge plays a big part in the strategists driving forces to expand and facilitate their collaboration through practices that makes it stronger, more formal and more robust. It is interpreted as a form of socio-cultural knowledge that is inextricably linked to these practices. Without this knowledge, there would not be any attempts in doing the micro-practices aimed at formalizing the collaboration (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008).

Previous studies have found that collaboration is characterized by "projectification" as a part of the societal New Public Management trend (Fred, 2019). However, in the micro-practice formalization, the strategists seem to draw upon their socio-cultural knowledge about society and management and consciously construct micro-practices in the opposite direction. They seemingly automatically (Rouleau & Balogun 2008) counter these mechanisms by "de-projectifying" their collaboration. Most notable in the expression "This is not a project!". Similarly, they seek legitimacy and want to build trust by building as strong and long-term relationships as they can. This shows that they have a socio-cultural knowledge to identify this need and to be able to draw upon their informal contacts that they store in the back of their heads (Howells et al., 2012). In addition, they use their semantic knowledge to build these relationships. Thus, the strategists are interpreted as knowledgeable agents (Giddens, 1984) that seem to have understood and acted on the difficulties that historically have existed with collaboration.

The findings related to this category also challenge the common view that collaboration, once it is initiated, stabilizes and functions as a sustained collaboration (Cirella & Murphy, 2022). Instead, this study shows that the micro practices, when taken all together, form a process whereby collaboration is growing through unstable forces and simultaneously structured to a more formal collaboration. This is interpreted as a shift in the direction of the phenomenon of collaboration through a conscious effort by the strategists to counteract the historical dysfunctional collaboration efforts, simultaneously answering the growing societal trend of more collaborative solutions to the inherent wickedness of social sustainability

problems (Grint, 2008; Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a). Contrary to Huxham (2003), the collaboration actually seems to achieve collaborative advantage, at least based on the account from the strategists interviewed and observed in this study. Perhaps this is connected to the micro-practice formalizing in combination with the reflective spaces they create as a reaction to the downsides of projects. The result of this stronger and more formal collaboration is that collaboration becomes something else. When the collaboration has legal documents, long term funding, a steering group and an organization-like structure, is it still a collaboration or a new organization?

Moreover, the fact that the strategists highlight the importance of and use personal contacts that they have accumulated over the years can, on one hand, be a sign of what Castillo (2002) calls a nonepistle tacit knowledge, a "gut feeling" where the strategists simply for some reason they can't explain, just know that this contact may become important in the future. This can be strengthened by the fact that the strategists explicitly said that they did not know that personal contacts would play such a crucial role in their earlier years. On the other hand, apart from the "gut feeling" to save contacts, it is perhaps more likely that when the strategists develop collaboration by building relationships with the help of personal contacts, they make use of their socio-cultural knowledge (Rouleau, 2005; Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). Hence, the strategists know what is important in the city, how the city works and who to contact to get things done.

Again, we argue that strategists are knowledgeable agents that use socio-cultural knowledge about historical examples of collaboration to know what has been done before in collaboration and act accordingly. Collaboration has been experienced as messy and with the help of socio-cultural knowledge, the strategists have understood the importance of having a mutual picture, a clear organizational structure and organizational outline (formalization) from the beginning of the collaboration. Arguably, this indicates a socio-cultural knowledge where they have learned about what works in that context. How they do things on the other hand, is through their use of semantic knowledge. They know the importance of communicating the right words with the right associated meanings. "This is not a project" is, as previously mentioned, a common phrase, but the strategists are also actively choosing the language used in contracts because of what it signals which indicates a semantic knowledge. For example, the fact that there is formally written that it should be 50% boys and 50% girls at activities signals values. In other words, performativity in the choice of words and language is actively taken into account (Balogun et al., 2014; Brorström, 2018).

Lastly, the fact that some strategists emphasize the use of agendas and action plans to informally formalize collaboration when there is no binding agreement also shows that strategists have a semantic knowledge of the performativity that certain things have. In line with Brorström (2018) insights on numbers performativity, action lists and agendas seem to be performative in the context of collaboration as they create a serious impression and gather everyone around a picture of what needs to be done also in already initiated and ongoing collaboration. This witness of a semantic knowledge in action that through formalization builds collaboration by the strategists.

Strong collaboration as new strategic direction

A powerful shift witnessed through understanding of the constructive "workings" and a strategist's micro-level activities in the collaboration field leads into the big discussion about what strategy is and how these people really are doing strategy here through their knowledge. The concept of strategifying highlights the importance of expanding what is considered strategic beyond organizational boundaries (Brorström & Styhre, 2023), particularly for issues lacking clear ownership and that no organization can solve by themselves (Huxham, 2003). Wicked problems such as social sustainability (Grint, 2008) emphasise a pressing need for strategifying work to redefine boundaries and foster shared responsibilities among organizations (Brorström & Styhre, 2023). Thus, the novel concept of *Strong collaborations* in this article provides a new way of thinking about collaborations and its implications for strategy.

What has previously been considered strategic and necessary knowledge for, say, a municipal housing company, we argue for with the empirics as a basis is expanding. Not only do the strategists need to master different forms of knowledge at the same time. The major key actors in collaboration, including the major housing companies, are also developing new knowledge within their own organization, which indicates that the concept of what is considered strategic knowledge is changing through these strategifying activities (Gond et al., 2018; Brorström & Styhre, 2023). Not only do strategist need knowledge about the social issues (e.g., children's rights, school system, job market), more importantly, the strategists need to develop a set of practical skills and knowledge through experience (Rouleau & Balogun, 2008). The strategists construct the reality of the organizations, by shaping the collaboration as a structure within it (Silva & Figuiredo, 2017). Thus, the micro is connected with the macro in a structuration process (Kohtamäki et al., 2022). In line with Weick's et al. (2005) notion that strategies are made and remade, collaborations are made and remade through an ongoing process of knowledge and practice. This confirms Rouleau & Balogun's (2008) reasoning about practical knowledge as an important element of how individuals shape their context, in this case the collaboration. Thus, an overall contribution to SAP and sensemaking literature is presented.

The knowledge underlying many practices is derived from past experiences and accumulates through collaborative actions. Socio-cultural knowledge is not acquired through a single event, but rather developed through extensive collaboration. The strategists emphasize the importance of continuity and long-term personal engagement. These accounts are as close as one can get to capturing practical knowledge through interviews, due to its tacit nature (Tsoukas, 2005). One could argue that verbalized knowledge is also explicit knowledge (Castillo, 2002). While Tsoukas insist that the best way to understand tacit knowledge is to become an "apprentice", Rouleau & Balogun (2008) argues that observation and action research is time consuming. Nevertheless, the observations made in this study have been of utmost importance as it has allowed the researchers to actually see how the strategists act rather than just the accounts. Together, this has created understanding about the empirical phenomenon of a strategist's doings in collaborating to achieve social sustainability.

Conclusion

The research question of this study was: What are the micro-practices of strategists in collaboration to achieve social sustainability, and what knowledge do they use? First, the strategists construct collaboration at a micro-level by using 10 micro-practices through socio-cultural- and semantic knowledge to do the necessary sensemaking and sensegiving to build strong collaborations. Second, among the strategists there is a growing trend of collaborating as a practice in social sustainability work underpinned by the fact that collaboration is an increasingly large part of their tasks. Last and foremost, contrary to prior research, this study shows a shift how collaboration initiatives are growing in scale and becoming more formalized than before.

This study identified 10 micro practices that shape collaboration within social sustainability work in a city. The overall categorisation Initiating & Enrolling consists of the micro-practices *Identifying, Contact making* and *Matchmaking.* Guiding & influencing comprises the micro-practices *Simplifying, Strategic use of words* and *Translating the idea of collaboration.* And finally, the overall category Enlarging & developing is made up of the micro-practices *Building relationships, Formalizing* and *Creating spaces for reflection.*

This contributes to the ongoing conversation about what collaboration is and how it is a possible pathway for social sustainability. Through a set of micro-practices, based on the knowledge of the strategists within the collaboration, the collaboration is shaped by the strategists and performed in daily actions. Contrary to prior research, this study shows how collaboration is constantly growing in scale and structured to a more formal collaboration. This is interpreted as a shift in the direction of the phenomenon of collaboration through a conscious effort by the strategists to counteract the historical dysfunctional collaboration efforts. This study also opens up and creates an understanding of what strategic practitioners actually do when collaborating in social sustainability work that often is manifested in tacit knowledge.

The uniqueness of this study is that it shifts the focus to the mundane practices of the practitioners and its effect on the overall strategy and is thus a contribution to SAP and sensemaking literature.

Implications & future research

The implications for research of the growing trend of collaborating are that collaborations need more attention when studying social sustainability. The conclusion that strategists construct collaboration with micro-practices through the use of socio-cultural- and semantic knowledge means for researchers that a greater focus should be directed at small actions of everyday life shaping collaborations and the knowledge used by practitioners to understand strategic activity better.

The discovery of how a collaboration initiative is growing in scale and becoming more formalized than before means that this new direction of organizing collaborations must be studied further and has implications on several different fields of research.

The implications for practitioners are that the practical knowledge needed to build strong collaborations has been discovered. Moreover, collaboration initiatives such as this study has examined can show new knowledge about how collaboration should and could be organized and implemented. For practitioners that wishes to work with social sustainability, collaborating needs to be recognized as an important mean and practice.

Suggested future research is to, by ethnographical research methods, follow strategists' work closely over time to understand how they interact with others through their knowledge and thereby construct collaboration. To understand the micro-doings of strategists in a more comprehensive way, other contexts would need to be studied, for example strategists within environmental sustainability. This study's model "Strong collaborations" can also be used in other contexts in related fields.

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Appendix A

Table 3. Data table.

Second order Micro-practices	Selected quotes on first order descriptors
Identifying Find people and organizations that may be relevant to collaborate with	*Identifying which people may be interesting to collaborate with, looking for collaboration opportunities, screening for people at networking meetings* I try to identify, are we in the same area with the same target audience? OK, well, then we need to talk. Is it not the same area but maybe the same methods or something else? Yes, then we need to talk, so I'm quite open to conversations in general and then I'm quite quick, hi, oh you work with that!? OK, we need to talk. (Operations Manager, Civil Society) We find these people who work with rehab from the region and then we figure this out with collaboration. How then are we supposed to invite and attract them? It must be attractive, and then we looked at their goals and requirements. How can we argue that they should be with us? Then we wrote an email first, where we mentioned the importance of the fact that we might be able to find profits by cooperating with each other and profits that they could get with it. Here we need to broaden the picture. Then we called and booked a first meeting where we showed a picture. We looked at what we found in their goals and in their organization that we thought fit well and then we asked if they wanted to join and continue living together? The purpose is to meet to talk about what encounters we encounter in the population, but also perhaps find a common denominator to collaborate around. (Development Manager, The City of Gothenburg)
Contact making Create contact with identified actors and arrange a meeting	*Meeting many different people, invites others to meetings, inviting oneself to meetings* I just exchange contact details and then I call for a meeting, and then it could be the start of something, or it could just be a good meeting and a new contact. It doesn't have to lead to anything. (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company) I invited myself to their arena and I think there is something about that. It also helped that I had nothing. I had this initiative and that one, but I didn't have an office that was just mine and that is why you find yourself constantly reaching out to others. (Consultant, Civil Society)
Matchmaking Act as an intermediary and bring together two parties who can benefit from each other and collaborate	*Acting as an intermediary between people who should collaborate, getting people to talk to each other* “Half of my job is about matchmaking, connecting actors and connecting businesses. Connect people. Because sometimes the question is how do you do something? It may have something directly to do with my tasks, but I can contribute to finding ways forward by connecting people with other in the whole city. (Talent Management Specialist, Private Company)
Navigating To constantly relate to, sense and adjust one's strategy, tactics and actions according to the context in which the collaboration takes place	*“Reading the game", listening to other people and trying to understand the situation and needs of others, knowing who one gets along well with on a personal level, sensing "fingertip feeling" when you must push something or let others catch up, thinking "bigger" for the understanding of this work* It's about getting to know actors. We must have a fairly open approach and start asking ourselves: OK who is this and then you have to try to start reading the game. At the same time, we have to remember what it is we are supposed to do and not be seduced by someone else's wishes. It is all the time listening in and then going back home, being in a meeting and listening in and going back home and asking what do we do now? It´s like an investigation but at the same time we also want get recognition by being so that’s why we need to be curious about many. (Operations Manager, Civil Society) I spend a lot of time, just listening to a lot of people to understand their needs and challenges. And then I think, how can we do this together or next to each other? But

	it's hard and it's challenging. Not everyone has that time. You may have demands on yourself regardless of the employment and where you are. (Consultant, Civil Society) "I think the balance between on the one hand pushing and forcing because we can do that, but it is a delicate balance between pushing to force and thus also creating a lot of conflict. We don't want to stir people up especially since these issues that are not our core issues and then I think this kind of requires a sense of the fingertip because when should we push and when do we need to let the others catch up?" (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)
Simplifying Make things comprehensible to others so they can understand that collaboration is necessary, possible and gives the best results for all involved	*Explaining for others how they can act together, using numbers to make things intelligible and making others understand* If you start calculating it that way, you realize that this is not complex. It is difficult at most […] working with simplifications such as this makes it understandable for more people what it is that can be achieved. (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company) I want to try to get away from and demystify this "Championing" thing. It's clear that you need sustainability or strategic champions, but it's a bit mystifying this relationship and champions as if it were some kind of magic. Of course, you need some kind of talent, but if we take a property manager for example. Admittedly, you also need some kind of talent for that, but there is quite clear to you what is included in the work. That is the very basic idea here with the research circle, that you can professionalize this "thing" with social sustainability and area development and make it clear, a bit like a job description. Systematize the work so that there is a model for how to work with social sustainability and some sort of toolbox for it. That's what we're trying to accomplish here. (Researcher, Research Institute)
Strategic use of words Uses certain words and metaphors as a tool to avoid evoking the wrong associations and make things understandable	*Thinking about which words to use, adapting the language to the recipient, using metaphors and expressions* On Monday, we had a meeting with social workers who work with livelihood support. We adapt in the sense that we try to find language that matches the way they are. (Parish Pastor, Civil Society) We don't call Destination Tynnered a project, it connotes that it is time-bound and short term. (Marketing & Business Developer, Municipal Housing Company) We had a meeting with a home for the elderly near us that is run by a private operator and when we meet, we hear that they use the word customers when they talk about the elderly. They even said that "to us they are just CUSTOMERS". This is their home. What happened to the relationship!? It is devastating and very diminishing of people. We got really upset actually and spoke to the owner and said you have to change this. (Parish Pastor, Civil Society) We can't use the word mapping, it sounds like we have bad intentions! Instead let's use the word identifying. (Talent Management Specialist, Private Company)
Translating the idea of collaboration Translates for one´s self and for others what collaboration means, the role of different actors and the benefits of it	*Making people think more collaboratively, affecting feelings and interpretations of others to create commitment, creating understanding around each other's assignments* I am very dedicated to showing how others can contribute through their actions and try to bring them onboard the journey. (Marketing & Business Developer, Municipal Housing Company) I would still say that I spend most of my time selling. Like, the idea of a possibility, the idea of a future, the idea of how it could be. To make others understand that it is

	doable. And also, kind of create a feeling that this will be possible and then it will be fun and then you are prepared to invest energy. (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company) I sell all the time. Why property owners should work together, and it doesn't take much persuasion for everyone to understand the logic and that there is a lot of property owners can do that creates an enormous amount of value. Everyone benefits from this, it's not something burdensome. (Consultant, Municipal Housing Company)
Building relationships Addresses people instead of organizations and tries to build a long-term strong relationship	*"Linking arms" with others, using personal contacts* Our area police have extra contact with the school, they are not involved in school teaching, but you have contact in such a way that you go there, enter the schoolyard, talk to young people, seek contact. Partly to build relationships, but perhaps also to get some information that may be important to the police. Of course, we also talk to the staff at the school, from the pedagogue up to the principal, as we are the ones who have the continuous contact. (Municipal Police, The Police) I have contact with various people who have worked in Gothenburg for a long time. You kind of know people and you have a good feeling for and an idea of how things could work out and who you can contact. (Planning Manager, The City of Gothenburg) I know who to contact because that's what happens when you collect contacts. Then they are sort of in the back of one's mind. (Operations Manager, Civil Society) If you have worked on the issue for a long time, your credibility increases. (Consultant, Municipal Housing Company)
Formalizing Make collaboration more formal through various agreements, financing structures and organizational structures	*More organizational-like collaborations, active creation of organizational and financing structures, contracts and legal agreements for collaborations* It is a kind of structure that we tried to create that can sort of last and that we can hang a lot of other collaborations on. (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)
Creating spaces for reflection Creates spaces where local forces within collaboration can come together and talk, reflect and discuss	*Organizing breakfast meetings to discuss initiatives, results and actions, the Research circle for thoughtfulness* The research circle creates thoughtfulness. They ask questions, they see what we need that we don't see ourselves. So, they can raise the discussion and create time for reflection, and time to think and to some extent problematize. (Development Manager, Municipal Housing Company)