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Exploring the syncretic dynamics involved in dyadic business-NGO partnerships

Abstract

This paper articulates a framework that clarifies (hitherto unexplored) aspects of the dynamics involved in dyadic partnerships between businesses and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). At its core lies the proposition that businesses and NGOs operate with heterogeneous idea systems that are institutionalized in the definition of their organizational identities, missions, and values statements, and theoretically conceived of as institutional logics, worldviews, paradigms, and cultures. The meeting of these idea systems is subject to processes of 'syncretism' that critically influence the potential of business-NGOs partnerships to meet the normative expectations placed on them. The 'business in society' literature has however remained relatively inexplicit in terms of explaining what these processes might be. Drawing therefore on the literature on syncretism and the precepts of analogical reasoning, this study derives four main syncretic processes that determine the valence of business-NGO partnerships towards either congruity or dissent: borrowing, blending, bridging, and breaking. While there is a potential for negative outcomes stemming from the first two processes, and in the fourth, bridging is highlighted as a promising, yet demanding, syncretic way for eliminating fundamental tensions between disparate idea systems. The article concludes with a research agenda, together with an outline of theoretical implications.

Keywords

Business-NGO partnerships, stakeholder relationships, sustainable development, syncretism.

Introduction

Businesses and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are traditionally framed by organization and 'business in society' scholars as (ideologically) discrepant institutions that are paradoxically able to partner, dialogue, and influence one another (e.g., Burchell & Cook, 2013; den Hond, de Bakker, & Doh, 2015; Van Huijstee & Glasbergen, 2010). The United Nations (UN, 2016) emphasized the importance of opting for cross-sector partnerships referring to it as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included in its Agenda 2030 – itself the product of long negotiations between multiple private and public institutions invested with the ambition of 'co-generating' ideas that have the potential to take on what Colquitt and George (2011, p. 432) called *"a grand challenge"*. The reference to the idea of a grand challenge in this context characterises a complex (sustainability) problem that focuses on conventional business or market-based approaches have failed to resolve partly because they (limitedly) rely on the micro-economic assumptions of perfect information and independent, omniscient, and costless decision-making ability (e.g., Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007; Gladwin, 2011; Martinez, Peattie, & Vazquez-Brust, 2021).

An important stream of literature on business strategy and the environment has emerged in recent years that endorse this view and pledge for a distinctively better alignment of business activities with sustainability demands (e.g., García-Sánchez, Rodríguez-Ariza, Aibar-Guzmán, & Aibar-Guzmán, 2020; Mustafa, Lodh, Nandy, & Kumar, 2022; Ogbeibu, Jabbour, Gaskin, Senadjki, & Hughes, 2021). One overarching goal that appears to have united scholars in this area (and that motivates the present work) is that of advancing towards a more inclusive conception of business organizations as open to, and aware of, the external world, capable of seizing technological and environmental opportunities for more sustainable pathways to industry development, and organized to respond more efficiently and effectively to stakeholder

concerns, needs, and expectations (e.g., Mukhuty, Upadhyay, & Rothwell, 2022; M. Sharma, Kumar, Luthra, Joshi, & Upadhyay, 2022; Srivastava et al., 2022).

It is in this spirit that documented cases of dyadic business-NGO partnerships[1] have proliferated in both academic and practitioner-based literature as evidence that these initiatives are an effective way of addressing the shortcomings of conventional business approaches (e.g., Burchell & Cook, 2013; Gualandris & Pagell, 2015; Idemudia, 2017). According to Harangozó and Zilahy (2015), partnership represents a coalition that confronts perspectives to produce ground-breaking ideas (guiding principles or codes of practice) to help society tackle grand challenges. As societies have evolved towards sounder collective ideologies and cultures (Ostrom, 2000) and have become increasingly ripe for the engagement of businesses in (less conventional) initiatives aimed at solving societal problems (Scherer, Palazzo, & Matten, 2014), the development of more sustainable business practices has often been associated in the literature with actions related to corporate social responsibility (e.g., Grigore et al., 2021), business model innovation (e.g., Aagaard & Lodsgård, 2018), social entrepreneurship (e.g., Mitzinneck & Besharov, 2019), and corporate philanthropy (e.g., Boodoo, Henriques, & Husted, 2021) that assign centrality value to NGOs relationships.

Some observers have however raised concerns about the tendencies of NGOs to be exploited as a source of economic value for the company (e.g., J. Peloza, 2006; John Peloza & Shang, 2011) and, by extension, of business-NGO partnerships to serve as a proxy to a neo-liberal and global economic order that limits their potential to address a grand challenge. Actors entrapped in this context may be led on towards their most immediate (and least common) performance objectives (e.g., Reed & Reed, 2008; Richter, 2004) – e.g., businesses using NGOs partnerships to improve their social legitimacy and reputation towards (sustainability

[1] Ethical trading initiatives, A&S, NTFP, Fair coop, Greenpeace, the Fairtrade foundation and the worldwide fund can be cited as examples of NGOs that helped business organizations improve their social and environmental performance in areas such as labour practices, local communities' welfare, relationships with suppliers and sustainable procurement.

conscious) customers/consumers, and NGOs using business partnerships to boost their attractiveness, legitimacy, and power to influence in their domains of activity.

These initial remarks lend themselves to the deduction that the motives that bring businesses and NGOs into partnership is subject to a variable orientation towards either morality (and a focus on common objectives) or ad hoc utilitarianism (and an emphasis on short-term performance goals) on both sides (e.g., Idemudia, 2017; Jamali & Keshishian, 2009; Laasonen, Fougère, & Kourula, 2012). Vermeulen and Witjes (2016) maintain that individual agents acting on behalf of businesses or NGOs are likely to hold within themselves a dual identity balancing private and public interests. The literature specifies that the success of business-NGO partnerships in any targeted areas of sustainability is fundamentally linked to the mutual capacities and willingness of the partners to transcend self-interests, accept their worldviews, develop a discourse of shared understandings, and forge together disparate resources (e.g., Herremans, Nazari, & Mahmoudian, 2016; Murphy, Arenas, & Batista, 2015; O'Connor & Shumate, 2014). It further acknowledges the existence of a diversity of business-NGO partnerships based on differing degrees of stakeholder integration (or worldviews acceptance) and engagement in new (environmentally and socially responsible) activities (e.g., Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b; Reed & Reed, 2008).

As part of this trend, Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) developed a collaboration continuum construct, with one end for organizations that do not directly engage with each other to solve a social problem (as in philanthropic donations flowing from the company to the NGO), and the other end for organizations that have merged to create a new entity capable of responding effectively to a social problem. Austin and Seitanidi (2012b) explored four stages of the collaboration continuum: 'philanthropy' based on unilateral value creation, 'transaction' focused on resources exchange, 'integration' associated with value co-creation, and 'transformation' resulting in shared learning. Le Ber and Branzei (2010a) used longitudinal

narratives to specify that the potential for collaboration depends on three relational antecedents, one that stimulates collaboration: relational attachment; the other two that produce a stand-off that impedes collaboration: partner complacency and partner disillusionment. These findings corroborate the argument that the dynamics of business-NGO partnerships are complex and non-linear. That is, they are likely to incorporate both elements of conflict and cooperation and to undergo continuous iterations between phases of alignments and misalignments, notably in terms of resources, mission, and strategy (e.g., Arenas, Sanchez, & Murphy, 2013; Murphy et al., 2015; Rey-Garcia, Mato-Santiso, & Felgueiras, 2020). Research has yet to meet the challenge of clarifying what these phases might be, thus venturing beyond categorisation efforts that facilitate the identification of varying levels of relational intensity, resources deployment, and disruption capacity (e.g., Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010c), towards the development of a typology of processes that accounts for the evolving disposition of businesses and NGOs to engage in cross-sector partnerships and enhances our capacity to fully understand how these partnerships can effectively meet the normative expectations placed on them.

It is against this backdrop that this paper explores the question: What are the processes that explain the dynamics towards either congruity or dissent in business-NGO partnerships? As a premise for the conceptual analysis, it is argued that businesses and NGOs that engage in genuinely mutual partnerships can hold together heterogeneous (and potentially contradictory) idea systems to create something new or modified through 'syncretism'. The concept of syncretism has traditionally been used as a heuristic tool to analyse instances of collisions between disparate cultures and / or religions, with a tendency to determine whether / how these clashes breed new or modified idea systems (Martinez, Peattie, & Vazquez-Brust, 2019). Some authors have explored the relevance of this process for sustainable and socially responsible change in business (e.g., Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2007; Martinez et al., 2019,

2021), but never as a theoretical framework that clarifies what happens when the idea systems of businesses and NGOs collide. Mainstream conceptualisations of cross-sector partnerships have tended to overlook this phenomenon by focussing on partnership fragilities (e.g., distrust (Macdonald & Chrisp, 2005), complacency (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010a), power asymmetries (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2004)), purpose (e.g. negotiating class differences, constructing practical meaning (Chapple, 1942), redefining social priorities (Plowman et al., 2007)), and outcomes (e.g., social / community value creation (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010b), financial gains (Barney, 1991), reputational and social costs (Macdonald & Chrisp, 2005)) rather than processes[2]. Scholars in these areas have mainly addressed issues related to dyadic antagonism and the pressure response model (e.g., Kourula & Laasonen, 2010; Laasonen et al., 2012). They converge on the observation that business-NGO partnerships are subject to shifts between phases of collaboration and phases of antagonism. What remains to be more explicitly articulated in research are the 'constructivist' processes that determine valence in the orientation of cross-sector partnerships. It is proposed in this paper that the syncretic perspective can contribute to fill gap in existing research.

To explore this proposition, I draw upon the analytical method used by Martinez et al. (2019, 2021) to construct analogical relations between the phenomena of religious/cultural syncretism and business-NGO partnerships. Known as analogical reasoning, this method has value as a semantic tool for theory-building in that it builds on, and utilizes, the knowledge gained from a source domain to contribute new insights and develop applicable theories in a target domain. It generally enables scholars to investigate a phenomenon from a new conceptual angle, produce interesting research propositions, generalize by analogy to 'comparable' contexts, and suggest avenues for future research to validate a type or to challenge and

[2] Le Ber and Branzei (2010c) propose a four-stage model of frame negotiation, elasticity, plasticity, and fusion that unpacks the process of value creation in cross sector partnerships yet falls short of considering partnership processes that do not lean towards fusion or reconciliation.

reinterpret it (Martinez et al., 2021). In this paper, a conceptual representation of the source domain (religious/cultural syncretism) is developed and transposed to the target domain: business-NGO partnerships. The focus is on the facets of syncretism that provide insightful analogies to the dynamics involved in the contemporary phenomenon of business-NGO partnerships, bypassing thereby the influence of the envisioning historical, cultural, and authorial contexts that have shaped the actual meaning of syncretism.

In combining insights from two separate streams of literature and underlining the analogies between the phenomena they explain, this study advocates for the adoption of a new conceptualization of cross-sector partnership dynamics as seen through the lens of syncretism. The resulting framework enriches our understanding of the dynamics involved in business-NGO partnerships in three main ways: (1) it identifies key processes of syncretism that are activated when idea systems of businesses and NGOs collide, (2) it critically examines how these processes influence the extent to which business-NGO partnerships meet the normative expectations placed on them, and (3) it offers a new perspective on business-NGO partnerships focused on partnership processes, complementing thereof existing perspectives that have tended to emphasise partnership antecedents and outcomes.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Firstly, after a brief definition of the notion of idea system, a distinction is made between pejorative and non-pejorative conceptions of syncretism, as a way of framing the varying disposition of incumbent idea systems to accept external elements imported by syncretism. Secondly, based on the arguments that the trajectory of syncretism is complex but, in some measure, predictable, four syncretic processes (or ‘ideal types’) are identified and explored: Borrowing, Blending, Bridging, and Breaking (Bs). The discussion draws analogies between historical social experiences of the four Bs and cases of business-NGO partnerships in which similar experiences were lived. Finally, the theoretical

framework is synthesized, and a research agenda mainly articulated around the question of what can explain displacements along the four Bs is outlined.

Syncretizing Idea Systems: Pejorative and Non-Pejorative Assumptions

An idea system represents a constellation of perspectives, worldviews, interpretations, expectations, frames, attitudes, motives, beliefs, values, and logics that influence the assumed relational role of an individual or a group and shape the way information are gathered, perceived, and acted upon (Dentoni, Bitzer, & Schouten, 2018). In general terms, the 'business idea system' is mainly concerned with the (single value) objectives of profitability and maximisation of stockholder wealth, whereas the 'NGO idea system' is oriented towards improving social and natural systems, creating public benefit, and aggregating disparate values (Davies and Doherty, 2019).

The tensions arising from the 'collision' of these distinctive idea systems (generated by issues of, e.g., trust, complacency, control, power, use of finances/resources, decision-making, social versus commercial expectations) are often discussed as bearing a destructive rather than constructive effect on creativity (Rey-Garcia et al., 2020), in particular when the actors involved focus on latent disparities that they reinforce by imposing standardized and familiar solutions on their partner (G. Sharma & Bansal, 2017). By contrast, the mutual recognition of what the other partner can bring to the relationship and the capacity to imagine ways of reaching common objectives enable to reduce tensions and maintain successful partnerships (Ahmadsimab & Chowdhury, 2019). The assumption that businesses and NGOs are variably inclined to reduce tensions implies that their relationship is likely to be underpinned with complex syncretic processes towards either dissent (maintenance of opposed positions) or congruity (alignment of interests and/or creation of a new entity capable of taking on a complex problem).

In the domains of culture and religion, the tendency has been to forge a dual conception of syncretism as both a pejorative and a non-pejorative idea (Martinez, 2013). The pejorative conception of syncretism is often described to mean the *"inauthentic"* or the *"contamination"* of a presumably *"pure"* tradition by features (e.g., values, beliefs, symbols and meanings) seen as belonging to foreign, conflicting traditions (Shaw & Stewart, 1994, p. 1). For example, Christianity and Islam are often conceived of as 'un-/anti-syncretistic' in the literature, the underlying idea being that these two belief systems (or traditions) are incongruous or antagonistic (Shaw & Stewart, 1994). Therefore, they may not benefit from syncretism as much as they run the risk of being weakened or annihilated. From a Christian perspective, Moreau (2000, p. 924) described syncretism as a process that replaces or dilutes *"the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements"*. Baird (1991) added: *"syncretism is a concept applied to a religion by those who stand outside its circle of faith and hence fail to see or experience its inner unity"* (1991, p. 151). It follows that proponents of anti-syncretism strive to preserve and / or strengthen the validity of a (traditional) idea system whereas new elements stemming from syncretism are rejected (Hartney, 2001).

Other scholars emphasize the positive connotation of syncretism, describing it as an essential aspect of faith in that it contributes to its creation, growth, development, and enrichment (e.g., Boff, 1986; Kirwen, 1988; Sanneh, 1989). Pinto (1985, p. 22) explained that *"at times syncretism may be indispensable in the process of casting off the old and putting on the new"*. Others praised its relevance as an analytical tool for identifying *"what has or has not been borrowed or blended, and what has or has not influenced specific religious thinkers at specific points in history"* (Berling, 1980, p. 8). In eighteenth century 'Encyclopédie' articles by Denis Diderot ('Eclectisme' and 'Syncrétistes, Hénotiques, ou Conciliateurs'), syncretism is defined as the concordance of eclectic sources. From this non-pejorative perspective, syncretism is assumed to represent a common aspect of all collective social constructions (e.g.,

religions, cultures, and institutions) that are *"porous and composed of an indeterminate number of features which are decomposable and combinable"* (Berk & Galvan, 2009, p. 545). Therefore, they are open to mixtures of ideas that can be borrowed, hybridized, or blended to create something new or modified (Martinez et al., 2019).

The non-pejorative view of syncretism has been used across disciplines (e.g., anthropology, psychology, theology, politics, linguistics), and applied to a variety of cultures and / or religions in contact, to explore processes of social change (Martinez et al., 2021). Its emphasis is on the reconciliation or integration of differing or contending ideas and practices when several idea systems are brought in contact (Martinez et al., 2019). Business-NGO partnerships are approached in this paper as examples of collective social constructions – or open systems (K. Weber & Waeger, 2017) – in which two distinct (and potentially conflicting) idea systems collide, inciting proponents on each side to 'fight' for meaning. Cognitive capacities are employed and / or moral judgements are exercised that, in line with the social constructivist perspective on managerial activities (e.g., Alvarez & Porac, 2020; Guercini & Medlin, 2020), determine how proponents interact with each other, whether conciliation is possible, and, if it is, what form it will take – e.g., compromise, alignment, or assimilation. The idea that relationships between business organizations and stakeholders depend on both the instrumental motives and moral commitments of the individuals they involve is a key tenet of stakeholder theory, so is the question of how the interests of these groups can be made to converge (e.g., Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, 1994; Freudenreich, Lüdeke-Freund, & Schaltegger, 2019).

The syncretic perspective is concerned with the extent to which the actors involved are cognitively and morally inclined to accept or reject each other's idea systems at any stages of the partnership. Accordingly, Figure 1 synthesizes the assumptions of pejorative and non-pejorative syncretism in the format of a continuum from Proposition 1 (P1): external idea

systems are accepted; to Proposition 2 (P2): external idea systems are rejected. These assumptions help us to understand some tendencies regarding the potential of businesses and NGOs to engage in syncretic change and eventually accomplish the mission they were brought into partnership for.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The Four 'Bs' of Syncretism

While a pejorative conception of syncretism may annihilate chances of a partnership being created in the first place, its emphasis on the rejection of external idea systems may also emerge during an established partnership to explain a change of trajectory. The non-pejorative conception of syncretism considers that rejection is temporary and can be followed by a phase of reconciliation. As a case in point, Lado, Boyd, and Hanlon (1997) in developing a syncretic framework for explaining how firms generate economic rents conceptualized competition and cooperation as distinct but connected dimensions of syncretism – which would later be encapsulated in the term 'coopetition' (Luo, 2007). What is implied, by extension, is that a dynamic and creative flux of interrelated processes towards both dissent and congruity is possible. Stewart explained that religious syncretism is *"a matter of a continuing, creative flux, never a finished synthesis"* (1999, p. 48). As Pye (1994) suggested, the diversity of elements that constitute a syncretic combination is preserved – with some elements plausibly lying dormant at any given time (Crouch, 2005) – and not diluted by synthesis. Accordingly, a syncretic result cannot be seen as irreversible, stable, or permanent.

By analogy, it follows that businesses and NGOs are constantly able to change the trajectory of a partnership as they advance together (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010c) – as part of a joint value creation process (Williamson & Bercovitz, 1995) – and navigate multiple elements

of idea systems that coexist within their relationships on an ongoing basis. This reasoning notably implies that situations of conflicts (P2) between businesses and NGOs may be approached as a phase towards future consensus rather than a dead end. They can be used together with more 'harmonious' phases (P1) to generate a dynamically open trajectory for the partnership – evidence of which is available in e.g., Dawkins (2015); and Laasonen et al. (2012). Another implication is that elements of businesses' and NGOs' idea systems that are discarded, fragmented or traded-off during phases of partnership negotiations (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010c) may re-emerge at any given time in the syncretic process as actors work to minimise the impact of their differences (Seitanidi & Crane, 2009), question how they compute value, recalibrate their roles (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010a), and achieve a better alignment between idea systems to co-produce social value (Yaziji & Doh, 2009). The complexity involved in considering that such processes are possible poses the question of whether the trajectory of syncretism is as unpredictable as some authors suggest (e.g., Berk, 2009; Berk & Galvan, 2009). The challenge therefore is to identify syncretic processes that can be advanced and integrated into specific theoretical orientations for future research.

In line with the typological style of theory development described by Cornelissen (2017), and concocted by M. Weber (2012), this paper aims to derive a set of constructs and partial explanations from the literature and classify these as 'ideal types' that can be arranged into a unified conceptual framework. To begin with, the entry of the concept of syncretism in Eliade's (1987) Encyclopedia of Religion provided some level of clarity about how idea systems are navigated within a syncretic field. Based on a synthesis of decades of research on religious and cultural syncretism (Sharpe, 1990), the Encyclopedia identified the following three processes: transformation (or metamorphosis into something new), disintegration (or separation), and absorption (Colpe, 1987). This typology was since extended by some scholars who observed that syncretism can also move towards a fragmented mixture of elements that are

interspersed or juxtaposed (e.g., Ferretti, 2001; Lambropoulos, 2001). Such syncretism can be found, for example, in Afro-Brazilian religions such as Santeria and Candomblé whose disciples have adopted fragments of Christian practices (e.g., baptism, the litany) without adhering to other aspects of Christianism (Ferretti, 2001). By analogy, transactional collaborative efforts by businesses and NGOs imply that they share resources that are useful to perform a specific activity but insufficient on their own to meet the broader social expectations placed on business-NGO partnerships (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012b).

Four processes are now explored – and illustrated with (historical) examples of syncretism in culture, religion, and business-NGO partnerships – that reflect this typology and are arguably distinct enough to cover a wide variety of syncretic processes within business-NGO partnerships: (1) 'borrowing' (resulting in a fragmented mixture), (2) 'blending' (resulting in absorption), (3) 'bridging' (resulting in transformation) and (4) 'breaking' (resulting in disintegration).

Borrowing

Droogers (1989) discusses a process of syncretism whereby individuals or groups in contact borrow ideas and forms that are compatible and combinable within intersecting areas of common interest. In the process, elements lying outside the boundaries of intersecting areas, and that are therefore not instrumental to a specific activity or project, are discarded as incompatible with the prevailing idea system. This process retains the distinctive meaning of each idea system, with minor adaptations.

In late antiquity, the rapid expansion of the Roman Empire, and its inherent territorial conquests, generated multiple opportunities for Roman culture and 'indigenous' idea systems to collide (Moatti, 2006). The Romans used to be actively engaged in syncretism by adding the gods of conquered nations to their pantheon (Allan, 2004). If conquered nations had

sophisticated religions and influential clergy receptive to reconciliation, the favoured type of syncretism was borrowing (Webster, 2011). For example, the Egyptian goddess Isis was 'borrowed' and added to the Roman pantheon with a hierarchy like Demeter or Diana. Isis had her own temples borrowing features from Roman and Egyptian architectures. The cult of the goddess combined distinctive Egyptian and Roman iconography and rituals while, importantly, Egyptians priests were allowed to lead their cult (Peel, 2009). The cult of Isis was popular and instrumental in the (relatively) bloodless conquering of Egypt but never reached Roman citizens and leading classes. It remained on the margins, with Isis followed mainly by people from conquered nations, militia, and slaves (Peel, 2009).

In the domain of business-NGO partnerships, syncretic borrowing is associated with deliberate efforts by partners to retain (sector-specific, partnership-specific and / or organization-specific) elements of idea systems that can be used to reach an agreement while discarding others (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010c). A roundtable discussion on the problem of unsustainable palm oil extraction was held in Jakarta (Indonesia) in 2004 during which the company Unilever and NGO WWF adopted a similar syncretic process. They used pragmatism and technical rationality to prevent the emergence and persistence of conflictual phases (Ponte & Cheyns, 2013). The elements that may have created antagonism were pulled out of dialogues (Schouten & Glasbergen, 2012). By discarding these elements and focusing on those that can simply be borrowed, the roundtable turned out to be rather limited in terms of depth and impact, leading to the observation by Dentoni et al. (2018) that the problem ended up being denied. Decisions on controversial issues that were not deemed essential by stakeholders (such as the orang-utan issue) were dismissed from the agenda (Ruysschaert & Salles, 2014). The potential of the borrowing process to effectively contribute to the achievement of SDGs is therefore limited. Some progress can be made in selected domains of mutual interest (through strategic pragmatism and charity for example), but the management of the more complex issues that

require a stretch of business and NGOs competencies are neglected. The gap between ideal and actual (practice) outcomes that syncretic borrowing may generate justifies that businesses and NGOs have recourse to alternative processes (Høvring, Andersen, & Nielsen, 2018).

Blending

In the blending process, syncretism reflects the domination of one idea system by another so that 'weaker' elements of the subordinate system morph into a dominant idea system (Pye, 1994). The dominant system retains its meaning whilst the dominated system is subverted and loses distinctive meaning.

For example, the Romans used blending to deal with the idea systems of conquered nations or adversaries that were perceived as less sophisticated or weaker (Dirven, 1999). They chose a local god or goddess and blended it with a Roman equivalent by giving it Roman attributes and a part-Roman name. That is how the Breton God Montasgus became Apollo-Montasgus. These gods or goddesses were then worshipped only in Roman temples, and under the lead of Roman priests (Webster, 2011). While borrowing allowed conquered idea systems to preserve meanings and most practices and actors, blending generally leads to the conquered idea system being absorbed, and eventually being deprived of influence (Turner, 1969). Blending may therefore be associated with a more 'pernicious' type of syncretism than borrowing in its potential to limit progress towards SDGs. It is often represented in the cross-sector partnership literature as the manipulative use of social needs by businesses to achieve private benefits, the lack of 'green' substance in business activities, and misleading representations of business's societal responsiveness (e.g., Le Ber & Branzei, 2010b; Welford, 2013).

Businesses can for instance choose to partner with an NGO to bring sustainability values within their system. Engaging in blending implies that the partnership is overlaid with a profit

orientation. Yet it is assimilated as ‘green’ in the same way as the Romans assimilated the gods of ‘weaker cultures’ as belonging to Rome. The result is profit-oriented sustainability strategies devised by conventional profit-orientated managers. One consequence of such a process is that NGOs feeling deprived of influence on the partnership can dismiss the practice as ‘green washing’ and an attempt at misleading the public about business ecological responsiveness or the ecological credentials of products and services (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Companies are greener in discourse, appearance, and policy but practices are only ‘greened’ to the extent that they contribute to profit-making.

There is a growing argument in the literature that business interests have tended to subvert sustainability or that financial value dominates social and ecological value (Alexius & Cisneros Örnberg, 2015), both sustainability and non-financial value becoming merely labels for conventional short-term profit-oriented strategies (Bowen, 2014). As a result, sustainability is manifestly everywhere but it exists as a demoted and diluted notion within business practice (Colby, Kingsley, & Whitehead, 1995) and business research (Gladwin, 2011). The sustainability-oriented idea systems of NGOs tend to be blended in business idea systems imbued with overreliance on the single-objective value of profit generation. As a case in point, the company Chiquita communicated widely about its Rainforest Alliance certified label to underscore its ‘commitment’ to social and environmental performance and get consumers to pay a price premium for its bananas. The partnership had subsequently come under significant criticism from, e.g., Greenpeace and Fairtrade Organization activists who believed that it was overlaid with a hard-nosed profit orientation and weak authenticity in terms of social and environmental performance (Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007).

Blending may also be pursued by NGOs who deliberately wrap their societal projects in management discourses and emphasise the business case in their day-to-day operations and interactions with firms. Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the tendency of NGOs

to professionalise their activities, match the competencies of private organizations in terms of finance, strategy, marketing and human resources management (Shumate, Fu, & Cooper, 2018). This type of syncretism, often used by allegedly less powerful actors, has the potential to be a more 'game-changing' pattern of syncretism than borrowing because idea systems can be thoroughly reconfigured and/or altered in the process. Blending however exposes NGOs and businesses to pragmatic negotiations with partners who have divergent interests and may dismiss pro-sustainability initiatives that are used for the sole purpose of gaining legitimacy (O'Neil & Ucbasaran, 2011). It can for instance result in marginalisation when NGOs are not deeply integrated as a project partner, but just enough to satisfy the symbolic expectations of businesses.

Bridging

In line with Lindenfeld (2005), bridging can be assimilated with the development of a new coherent idea system, with its own identity and meaning and in which none of the contributing traditions dominates, but none is diluted either. Cuban culture, for example, developed as various exogenous cultures (primarily Spanish and African) met and mingled (Stewart, 1999).

This process differs substantially from borrowing and blending in that it seeks to generate a new idea system and it requires more creativity. It not only involves the identification of relationships of resemblance between idea systems but also allows for the union of differences rather than their dilution (Gregory, Volk, & Long, 2013). Martin (1983) explained that relations of resemblance are patterns of relationships constructed through a process of sympathy/antipathy rather than thesis/antithesis/synthesis. Bridging is in this sense the reconciliation of two or more initially contradictory elements of idea systems by making them resemble each other. A relational system of sympathetic elements is thus introduced and organised in terms of their antipathy to a 'foreign' element. Two antipathetic foes only realise

they resemble each other when faced with a more markedly dissimilar foe. They come into sympathy via their mutual antipathy towards the dissimilar foe. For example, the Cretans often quarrelled with, and warred against, each other (notably during the Ottoman ruling of Crete from 1669 to 1869) yet bridged their differences and united whenever outside enemies attacked (Shaw & Stewart, 1994).

An example of bridging is the deist perspective of natural religion and its associated idea system of plurality and tolerance. Van der Veer (1994) explained that the deist perspective in the early eighteenth century was a syncretic response to the European religious wars triggered by the protestant reformation and split from Catholicism, perhaps most ostensibly in Britain and France during the Age of Enlightenment. The perspective acknowledged that worship of a spirit or deity is common to all human beings, and each religion has its own legitimate claims to truth. Erasmus used deism to advocate a process of reconciliation of plurality of religions, truth, and communities of faith (Lambropoulos, 2001). The notions of syncretism and tolerance advocated by Erasmus remain the pillars of modern multicultural societies (van der Veer, 1994).

For institutions and organizations, bridging is a positive survival strategy to contain conflict and promote tolerance, or at least dialogue, between internal factions with competing idea systems (van der Veer, 1994). It emphasises common characteristics over and above any differences. What is induced in syncretic bridging, by analogy, is that business and NGO partners reach common ground by coming to appreciate their differences and recognising that the partnership's purpose (e.g., creating social value) somehow overwrites with their own purpose. Partners not only re-examine their idea systems in relation to each other, but they do so in reference to, and in conversation with, each other – evidence of which is available in Le Ber and Branzei (2010c). Historical examples suggest that bridging is the most promising syncretic avenue to promote social renewal and include the 'margins of society' in social innovation processes (Turner, 1969; van der Veer, 1994). Entrepreneurship is often brought

forward in the literature as one important catalyst for emerging grassroots solutions to a range of social and environmental problems (e.g., Al-Tabbaa, Ciulli, & Kolk, 2021; Ventures, Hartigan, & Elkington, 2018). Powell, Gillett, and Doherty (2018) explain that sustainability-driven entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial teams typically engage with external parties to create hybrid entities independent of established business activities. They strive to sustain a balance of market- and mission-oriented idea systems. An independent organization or certification can be created by pooling tangible and intangible assets from, e.g., businesses and NGOs (Vurro, Dacin, & Perrini, 2010) and setting specific goals and roles in a way that limits the likelihood of post-engagement conflict of interests in respective roles (King, 2007).

Nicholls and Huybrechts (2016) discuss the potential of Fair-Trade organisations and corporate retailers to partner and use bridging processes to facilitate cross-logic relationships. They present the Fair-Trade certification system as a differentiated type of idea system '2.0' that brings together organisations through a set of harmonised rules and practices. By generating a new unified idea system that satisfies the expectations of both NGO and business, bridging can potentially provide for a unique conception of business as a proxy for societal welfare, the success of which is measured in terms of the shared well-being of the communities that are impacted by its activities. There is no shortage of examples that can be used to illustrate the practice of business-NGO bridging and how it yields to the creation of a new idea system – e.g., (i) the British NGO Fairtrade Foundation initiated a series of pilot projects to help companies develop codes of practice to improve their relationships with suppliers (local communities); (ii) The Ethical Trading Initiative brings together companies, NGOs, and trade union organizations to identify and promote good labour practices; (iii), British-Dutch food corporation Unilever partnered with the WWF to develop a certification system that identifies fish products being harvested in line with sustainability standards.

Crilly, Hansen, and Zollo (2016) discuss how firms in the pursuit of 'bridges' with the idea systems of NGOs use subtle linguistic nuances, properties, and techniques to report sustainability practices that can only be understood by specialist stakeholders. This practice suggests that NGOs – as 'specialist stakeholders' themselves – can detect gaps between corporate discourses and practices, and eventually distinguish between authentic (e.g., bridging) and peripheral (e.g., borrowing, blending) business practices in the domain of sustainability. Sustainability reports that are overly simplistic, and borrow 'common' points of content, are likely to raise doubts about the firm's actual commitment to bridge idea systems.

Breaking

The fourth syncretic process identified in this paper is 'breaking'. Following Pye (1994), syncretic breaking consists of a reassertion of the separate identity (or divergent meaning) of disparate elements that are consequently drawn apart. Divergent meanings are arguably latent within syncretism and a contested hegemony may at some point be reasserted in another form.

In the domain of religion, Pye (1994) discusses how meaning divergences between the closely associated traditions of Buddhism and Shinto emerged when worshipers from the two religions were brought together in a festival. The unity that the festival as a syncretic field meant to the participants clouded the apparent diversity of idea systems that Pye (1994) observed. At specific points during the festival, each side enacted ritual practices, and purveyed meanings, independent of the other side. In the domain of sustainability, the rejection of market logics by radical NGOs is one possible pattern of breaking. Radical green movements may be seen as associated with idea systems that reject excessive materialism and advocate for an aesthetic of simplicity and liberation from extant economic and industrial processes and systems (Dzhengiz, Barkemeyer, & Napolitano, 2021). Discourses of radical greening tend to discriminate the mainstream economic paradigm as unjust and vehemently emphasise the distinctiveness of the

idea systems they embody (for an example of these trends, see: Carberry, Bharati, Levy, & Chaudhury, 2019).

A stream of scholars in the cross-sector partnership literature acknowledges and documents the fact that interactions between businesses and NGOs incorporate both elements of cooperation and conflict (e.g., Fiol & O'Connor, 2002; van Tulder & Keen, 2018; Yaziji & Doh, 2009), The process of syncretic breaking implies that conflicting elements may lie dormant yet (re)surface at any given time to disrupt the partnership. To illustrate this syncretic process, one might refer to events that took place in the context of a partnership between sportswear manufacturer Adidas and the NGO Thai Labour Campaign. In the lead up to football World Cup 2006 in Germany, Adidas set up a factory in Thailand to produce the ball for the competition. The company partnered with Thai Labour Campaign to ensure that its local operations conformed with local labour rights and standards. During the competition, the NGO published a report based on claims of poor working conditions in Adidas factories in Thailand (Yimprasert, 2006). The report was released without the consent of Adidas and in spite of the previous collaborations between the company and the NGO (Adidas, 2006). Beyond questions about the labour practices of Adidas and the validity of the claims made by Thai Labour Campaign, this event is interpreted here as a case of a NGO reasserting its separate identity, what it stands for, and breaking its collaboration with its corporate partner by vehemently criticizing its activities in Thailand.

The rejection of pro-sustainability ideas by mainstream business is another cause of syncretic breaking. The economic paradigm, and the market logics that underpins it, dominate the beliefs of business agency and entrepreneurship (Powell et al., 2018). Some actors within this context may assert that the syncretic combination of business and NGO idea systems constitutes a threat to the purity of the dominant belief. In the same vein, businesses that have developed sustainability strategies yet remain obedient to the ‘dominant economic paradigm’

may abandon or reverse them, in contrast to the common assumption that businesses move progressively through phases of increasing commitment to sustainability (Dunphy, Griffiths, & Benn, 2003). This generates instances such as those documented in O'Neil and Ucbasaran (2011) when business actors, regardless of whether they support the sustainability agenda or not, have recourse to a syncretic process of identity reassertion that casts pro-sustainability ideas as improper to the business agenda that is at play. But the outcome of syncretic breaking is not permanent insofar as the separated elements may be reconciled in the future. For example, pro-sustainability ideas such as recycling as well as those under the rubric of corporate social responsibility that were previously contested and considered heretical are now broadly mainstreamed (Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003).

Table 1 synthesizes the theoretical propositions derived from the above analysis by presenting an overview of how the four syncretic Bs are conceptualised in the literatures on religious / cultural syncretism and business-NGO partnerships.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Discussion – What Can Explain Displacements Along the Four Bs?

A conceptual framework

The four Bs typology proposed in this paper is unique in that it places business-NGO partnerships in a syncretic context that reveals hitherto unexplored processes as *"actors attempt to either displace one logic with another, defend their preferred logic or navigate multiple logics that coexist within a field on an ongoing basis"* (Hills, Voronov, & Hinings, 2013, p. 100). Figure 2 puts the key aspects of the framework together in a diagram that visualizes the diverse syncretic trajectories that business-NGO partnerships can embrace. The analysis indicates that while all forms of syncretism bring about some form of change, not all temporary

settlements may meet the normative expectations placed on a given partnership. There is a potential for negative outcomes in borrowing, blending, and (less subtly) breaking, that justifies an intended quest for syncretic re-alignments within the partnership. One can further expect that the achievement of a syncretic result does not mean that other syncretic processes are buried and unable to re-emerge – hence the links suggested in Figure 2. This induces that both positive and negative outcomes are possible so long as the partnership is kept alive as a syncretic field. Understanding of this phenomenon may well incite proponents of businesses and NGOs to cultivate their syncretic ties, rise above phases of conflict, and look ahead to the benefits that can ultimately be gained. The conceptual reasoning remains however to be theoretically and empirically consolidated, that is, if it is to have real meaning for how partnership's proponents can actively preclude unfavourable partnership trajectories and sustain an expected standard of performance.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

An illustration

A brief analysis of how a business-NGO partnership underwent a shift from one syncretic B to another can be useful in this sense. The company Chiquita managed to create a 'bridge' with the Rainforest Alliance using the NGO's certification system to stimulate their social and environmental performance. After some time, criticisms were levelled at the authenticity of this partnership, suggesting that the unity that was forged eventually turned into a 'masking' strategy (i.e., displacement from bridging to blending, cf. Figure 2). Both the attempt of Chiquita to blend the NGO's idea system and the perceived proneness of the Rainforest Alliance to tamper with its own idea system (and use the partnership with Chiquita to increase its power to influence in its domain of activity) were emphasized in the media. One possible interpretation

of this event in the light of the conceptual reasoning developed in this paper is that the business actors involved had not firmly maintained their orientations towards P1 during the partnership by taking advantage of their dominant position to deprive the NGO of any influence on the partnership. This generated a displacement along the four Bs and was perceived by external observers as a failure to sustain moral integrity on both sides of the partnership. The framework sketched in Figure 2 specifies that this displacement is underpinned by a dual syncretic effect: (1) the reassertion of divergent identities and meaning and (2) the absorption of weaker elements of the NGO's idea system by the (manifestly) dominant business idea system.

Implications for research

In providing a conceptual resource for articulating the dynamics involved in dyadic business-NGO partnership as syncretic processes, this paper complements existing research that have essentially focussed on partnership antecedents and outcomes. Future research can aim to elaborate a more exhaustive list of variables that interact to cause the types of displacements described above. The idea is to improve our understanding of how the syncretic Bs can be activated, clarify the levers partnerships' proponents can use to influence the trajectory of syncretism, and eventually extend the four Bs typology to reveal forms of engagement in syncretism that are not differentiated in the literature. If previous research supports the existence of syncretic processes in a dynamic and non-linear framework, it does not clearly identify an evolutionary and sequential process for syncretism. The links contemplated in Figure 2 are therefore difficult to establish more exhaustively in this paper, at least beyond the arguments that the endorsement of P1 by both businesses and NGOs facilitates syncretic bridging and that mutual endorsement of P2 results in syncretic breaking.

What is more, the present study exclusively focuses on the exploration of the analogical relations between religious / cultural syncretism and the dynamics involved in business-NGO

partnerships. The question of how these phenomena differ (according to, e.g., the influence of the historical, situational, and institutional contexts in which syncretism occurs) may be usefully explored in future inquiry seeking to delimit the framework's boundaries and enhance its tractability. One might wonder, for example, if syncretic dynamics in business-NGO partnerships are impacted by individuals' need for emotional / spiritual attachment as manifestly and intensively as religious syncretism is. Current trends indicate that business activities (including decision-making) are increasingly influenced by spirituality (Vu & Burton, 2022). Workers, Kolodinsky, Giacalone, and Jurkiewicz (2008, p. 465) write, "need connectedness, meaning, purpose, altruism, virtue, nurturance, and hope in one's work and at one's workplace". This 'trendy' aspect of work suggests that business organizations and NGOs can be used as sources of attachment and meaning for their individual members. The search for meaning that is often associated with emotionally and spiritually intelligent workers / leaders implies that they may be willing to welcome influences from external idea systems. This acts to justify that more research is conducted that build upon analogies between different domains of relevance for syncretism (e.g., religion, culture, cross-sector partnerships) to develop a finer-grained analysis of syncretic dynamics in these domains.

Religious and cultural syncretic phenomena are typically investigated by anthropologists whose strategies of inquiry consist of capturing the deep social constructions that take place in a specific religious or cultural context in which individuals have undertaken to synchronise or otherwise manage relations between an old and a new idea system (Robbins, 2011). Empirical studies of syncretic phenomena in the domain of business-NGO partnerships, or any similar class of stakeholder collaboration, may be designed as immersive experiences where the researcher(s) passively observe why and how individuals actively attempt to 'syncretize' elements of colliding idea systems. Using participant observation over a long period of time through non-participative immersion can contribute to establish the syncretic

perspective as an applicable theory in the domain of stakeholder management. The collection of data may also interestingly focus on single organizational settings where sustainability and business idea systems appear to be successfully bridged – e.g., the Dutch organization Fairphone (Cornelissen, Akemu, Jonkman, & Werner, 2020) and the Swedish organization The Natural Step (Alexius & Furusten, 2020). Exploring the syncretic processes that are at play in these settings can contribute new insights on how hybridized idea systems (or sustainable transformation) can be sustained.

Implications for theory

On the front of theory, interested scholars can aim to address the question of how the syncretic Bs interact to explain tendencies in the various forms of engagement in business-NGOs partnership covered in the literature, including corporate social responsibility, business model innovation, social entrepreneurship, social innovation, and corporate philanthropy. Some streams of literature can be identified in these domains that suggest promising and relevant lines of inquiry to be explored in future research. In the stakeholder management literature for example, one argument that explains how a favourable syncretic result can be produced (and possibly sustained) is that organizations are generally reluctant to engage in compromises between idea systems (Schildt & Perkmann, 2017). Rather they rely upon the creativity of their individual constituents to adopt a multi-objective reasoning and design 'truces' that can accommodate their seemingly irreconcilable idea systems (Mitchell, Weaver, Agle, Bailey, & Carlson, 2016). In doing so, organizations focus on the dual objective of preserving the distinctiveness of their idea systems while exploiting the benefits of their interdependence (Martinez et al., 2021). The syncretic approach advocated in this paper adds that the elements of idea systems that retain their distinctiveness in the design of truces can emerge at some point during the process to disrupt its perceived stability. At least one of the actors involved may for

instance reassert its separate identity and effectively break truce. Alternatively, truces may be maintained but with borrowing and blending as the main mechanisms supporting multi-objective reasoning, and the risk of failing to fulfil all objectives and 'reigniting' discord. Truces are arguably less likely to be exposed to failings when differences are effectively united and previously irreconcilable idea systems become interdependent, as in syncretic bridging.

To explore the variables that can cause displacements along the four Bs, a link to normative stakeholder theory can be made, with a particular emphasis on the argument that individual agents operating on behalf of organizations relate to a set of subjective moral principles and codes of conduct that determine their openness to external idea systems. In religious syncretism by comparison, readiness to engage in syncretism is generally explained to depend on how individuals interpret objective truth (Droogers, 1989). Idea systems with exclusivist truth claims, it is argued, are likely to perceive syncretism negatively and resist its non-pejorative meaning. For example, NGOs devoted to a 'role of private watchdog' are likely to hold exclusivist truth claims. Their mission is achieved through advocacy and political effect (e.g., WWF), not by engaging in business partnerships (Millar, Choi, & Chen, 2004). They survey business behaviours and make a judgement about whether business actions are right or wrong (Campbell, 2018). These types of NGOs strive to maintain their status of outsiders lobbying against any socially harmful products, services, or practices (Schwarz & Thompson, 1990), sometimes to the extent of generating a negative economic impact on businesses and provoking a redemptive reaction from them (Burchell & Cook, 2013). Another analogy can be made with cases of companies that endorse P2 and raise to the argument of a 'duty' to orient decision-making and action-taking towards the objective of maintaining the short-term economic viability of their operations, and thus ignore external pressures (stemming from, e.g., civil society, NGOs, the media and governments) to address the societal harm they cause (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2014). They may perceive nature as stable and robust enough

to cope with the introduction of new materials into the ecosystem without them having to intervene and consider stakeholder expectations.

Alternatively, idea systems with pluralist truth claims accommodate a diversity of ways to knowledge and 'truth' (e.g., in religion: Graeco-Roman, Shinto, Taoism, and Buddhism) (Martinez et al., 2021), following therefore the assumptions of P1. That may consist of businesses and NGOs approaching partnership engagement, and the acceptance of each other's idea systems, as an opportunity to fulfil their sustainability mission and take action to correct what they believe needs correcting (Millar et al., 2004). NGOs can demonstrate their openness to participate in collective action by involving a powerful economic actor in the social or ecological mission they were created for. There may also be an interest in the business community in expanding their know-how by involving employees as social entrepreneurs, innovation teams, and co-creators in partnerships with NGOs (Mirvis & Googins, 2018). That can either stem from borrowing or blending processes motivated by a desire to achieve profit-oriented goals (i.e., social legitimacy and reputation towards customers/consumers) (Moosmayer, Chen, & Davis, 2019) or from a bridging process based on the recognition of their expanded role and responsibilities to develop connections with parties that help resolve social or environmental problems (Westermann-Behaylo, Rehbein, & Fort, 2015).

The positioning theory of Davies and Harré (1999) entails that individuals choose institutional sets of rules as most appropriate in accordance to their role at a moment in time. The syncretic perspective specifies that 'appropriateness' is shaped by individuals' conception of truth and their power to sustain exclusivist and/or pluralist truth claims. Individuals involved in syncretic processes may for instance have the legitimacy and authority within a given organizational context to retain, modify, or cast aside incumbent beliefs or practices, and eventually integrate those coming from the outside, as in business-NGOs partnerships

(Martinez et al., 2021). Droogers argued: *"if power is defined as the capacity to influence other people's behaviour, syncretism has a power dimension to it"* (1989, p. 16).

In instrumental stakeholder theory, cross-sector collaborations are also understood to occur within the context of power (Bruggemann, Tracey, & Kroezen, 2018). The impact of the power dimension is evident in two main forms of syncretism that may be usefully considered in future research. The first form is triggered by actors occupying dominant positions and having legitimacy within a syncretic field to exercise power. In the context of business-NGO partnerships, the assumption that power asymmetries exist between partner organisations often implies that businesses are the most powerful entities (Bruggemann et al., 2018). They may exploit this position in attempts to neutralise those NGOs lobbying against their products/services (Rudebeck, 2019). The second form of syncretism is triggered by those who occupy lower power ranks and are typically deprived of influence, thus representing what Meyer referred to as *"the silent majority"* (1994, p. 45) in a syncretic field. The assumption that NGOs are likely to occupy this position in a partnership means that they may either submit to the idea system of the business partners or attempt to resist and contest it. It is suggested therefore that an organization's relation to power, together with its conception of truth, can be investigated as key variables that determine its openness to external idea systems, and by extensions the dynamics contemplated in Figure 2.

Conclusion

In this paper, the core components of a framework that clarifies fundamental aspects of the dynamics involved in dyadic business-NGO partnerships are articulated. The propositions are drawn from an analysis of the literature on religious and cultural syncretism – building therefore upon the work of Martinez (2013) and Martinez et al. (2019, 2021) – and the identification of key elements that can be extended to enrich our theoretical understanding of the capacity of

businesses and NGOs to collaborate and manage the complex dynamics that the collision of their prevailing idea systems generates. The paper outlines a research agenda, including a set of research directions and theoretical ramifications about the factors that motivate businesses and NGOs to engage in, and sustain, partnerships that meet the normative expectations placed on them. The varying capacity of businesses and NGOs to open themselves to 'external' idea systems (i.e., non-pejorative versus pejorative syncretism), combined with the syncretic processes that can unfold in this context (i.e., borrowing, blending, bridging, and breaking), are argued to critically shape a partnership's trajectories and outcomes, and by extension its potential to contribute to the UN SDGs. Exploring and understanding them represents therefore a significant challenge ahead of 'business in society' scholars and practitioners.

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Figure 1. Contrasting the pejorative and non-pejorative assumptions of syncretism

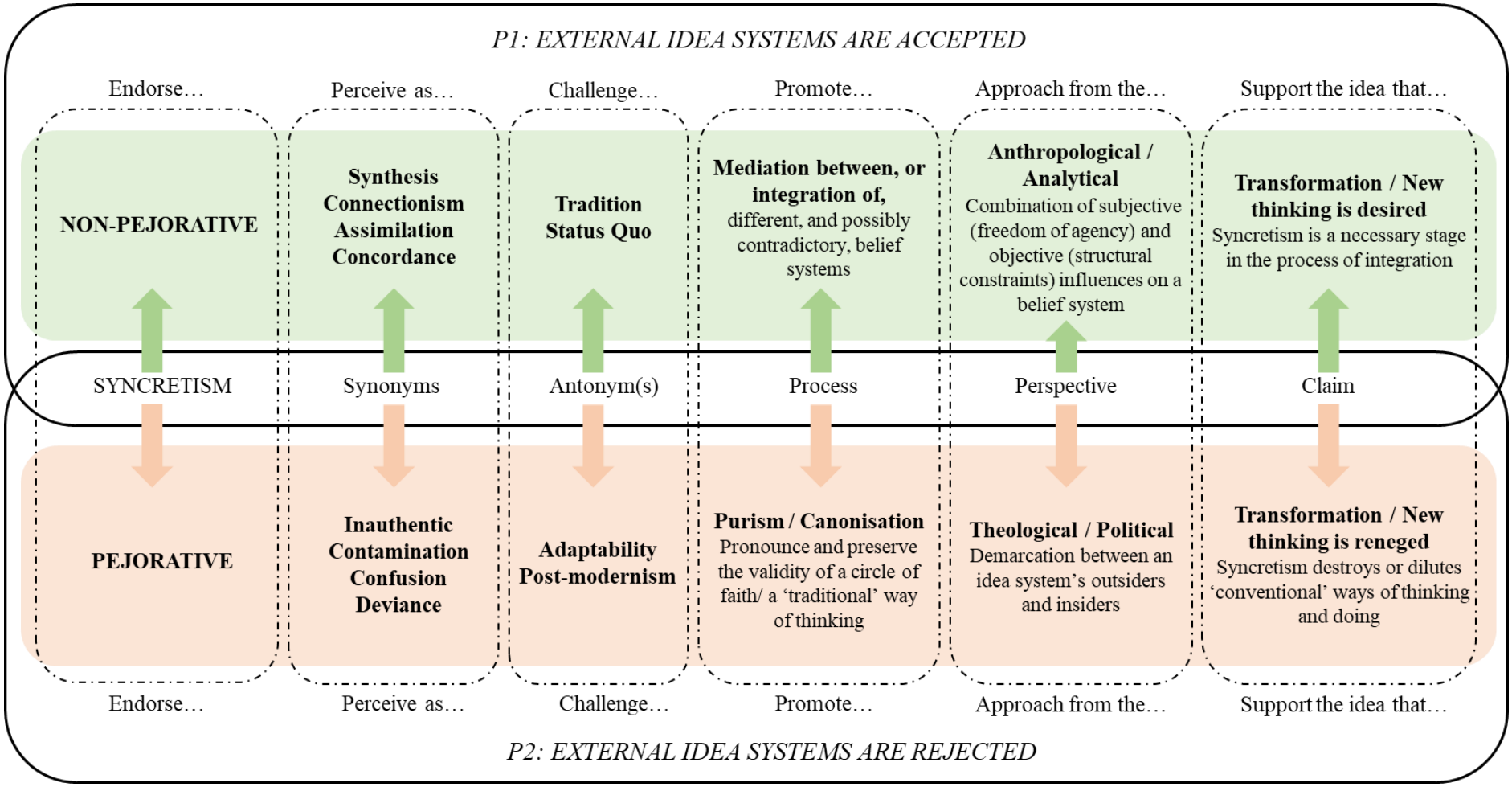

Table 1. Tracing how the syncretic Bs are conceptualised in the literature …

Syncretic process	…on religious / cultural change		…on business-NGO partnerships	
	Key framings	**Core assumption**	**Key framings**	**Core assumption**
Borrowing	• Transposition (Droogers, 1989) • Fragmented or disintegrated mixture (Lambropoulos, 2001) • Convergence (McLeod, 2016)	Individuals or groups in contact borrow elements of idea systems that are compatible and combinable within intersecting areas of common interest	• Creation of particularized ties (Hardy, Lawrence, & Phillips, 1998) • Frame plasticity (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010c) • Strategic fit (den Hond et al., 2015)	Business and NGO partners make deliberate efforts to retain some of the new elements that the partnership brought in while discarding those that are deemed incompatible with the prevailing (business) agenda
Blending	• Merging or assimilation (Wallensten, 2014) • Absorption (Colpe, 1987)	Individuals and groups in contact are exposed to a dominant idea system that tends to absorb and subvert 'weaker' elements of subordinate idea systems	• Greenwashing, bluewashing (Jermier et al., 2006) • Hijacking of environmentalism (Laufer, 2003) • Lack of green substance (Welford, 2013),	Business and NGO partnerships are overlaid with hard-nose d profit-oriented interests and calculations, implying that partners driven by the social mission are deprived of influence and non-financial elements relating to the social mission are co-opted by financial elements relating to business performance
Bridging	• Hybridization (Stewart, 2011) • Metamorphosis into something new (Youngblood, 2020) • Transformation (Ferretti, 2001)	Individuals and groups in contact endeavour to develop a new coherent idea system with its own distinctive identity and meaning, and in which none of the contributing traditions dominates, but none are diluted either	• Inclusivity (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012a) • Development of a collective identity (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005) • Equal expectations of participation in social relationship (Adler et al., 2007) • Frame fusion (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010c)	Business and NGO partners identify themselves with the partnership's social purpose and endeavour to create a new unified idea system built upon common characteristics over and above any differences

			• Principle of integration	
Breaking	• Separation (Glazier, 1985) • Mosaic syncretism (Capone, 2007) • Shift away from unity (Kraft, 2002) • Antagonism (Shaw & Stewart, 1994)	Individuals and groups in contact reassert their own identity or divergent meaning of disparate elements that are consequently drawn apart	• Clashes in diagnostic frames (Le Ber & Branzei, 2010c) • Antagonism (Yaziji & Doh, 2009) • Power asymmetries • 'Mises' (misunderstandings, misallocations, and misfortunes)	Business and NGO partners are drawn into a focus on divergences and engaged in adversarial postures that disrupt the social agenda being pursued, with elements of at least one idea system being disparaged and / or rejected
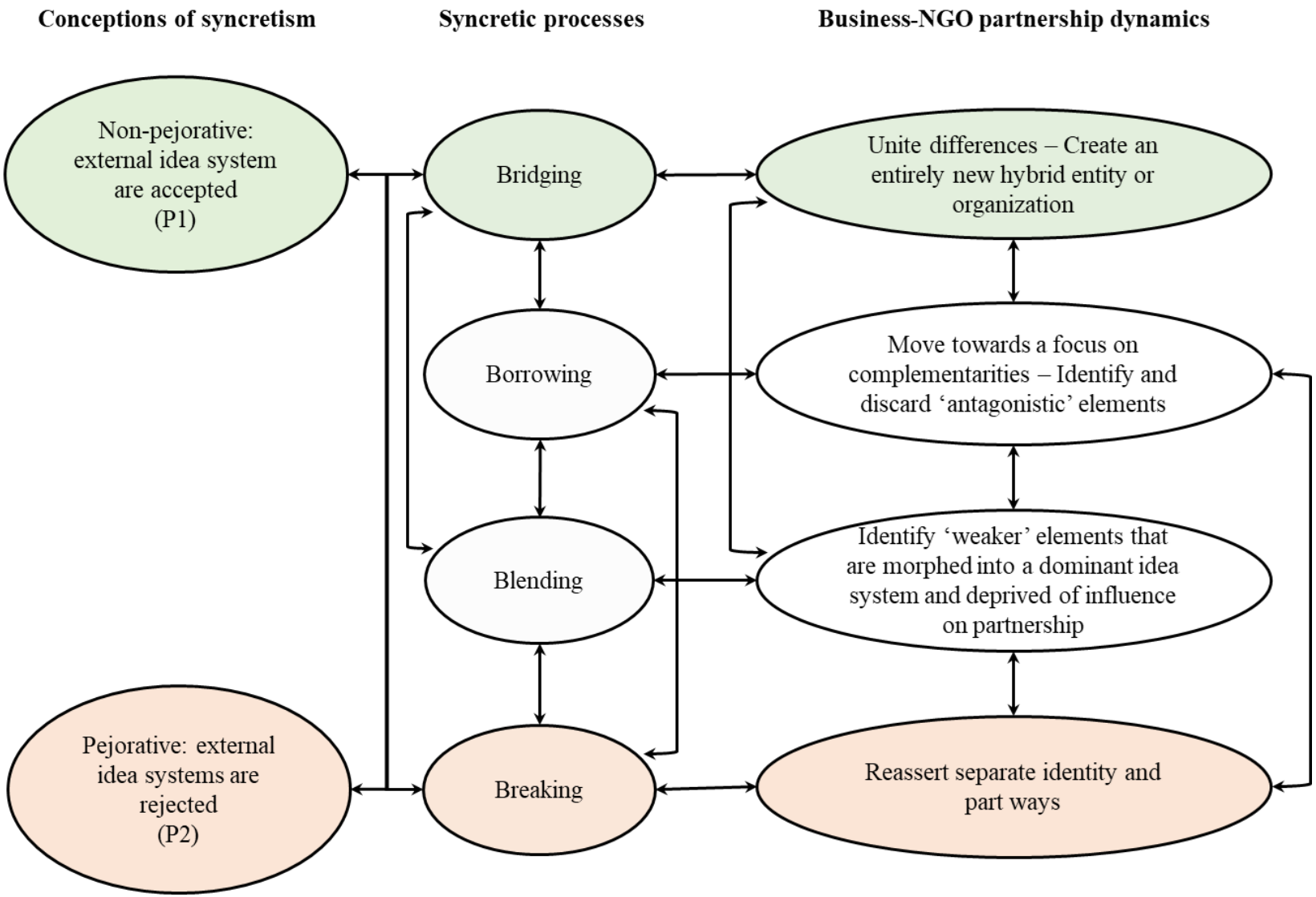
Figure 2. Syncretic processes and implications for the dynamics involved in business-NGO partnerships