EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS: EXAMINING HOW ENVIRONMENTAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (ENGOS) MANAGE COMMUNICATIONS WITH CORPORATIONS

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BY

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder demand for corporations to demonstrate greater ecological responsibility, as well as funding and mission pressures for Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOs), has led to a rise in cross-sector partnerships between the two. While such partnerships can be mutually beneficial, research shows ENGOs suffer more risks. This study aimed to produce an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of cross-sector partnerships between ENGOs and corporations, specifically in terms of how ENGOs use communication tactics to manage such relationships. A phenomenological, in-depth, semi-structured qualitative research was conducted with five members of ENGOs with a minimum two-year experience in communicating with corporations. The research carried out via one-on-one online interviews verify ENGOs are aware of these risks and have developed communication tactics to protect themselves. The plan starts with screening potential corporate partners and culminates in agreements and legal contracts before official partnerships begin. There are two novel findings in this research. The first being that ENGOs in Malaysia spend a lot of time in the initial screening phase educating their potential corporate partners of the ENGO's mission and methods as a form of risk aversion. The other novel finding is that some ENGOs in Malaysia perceive short-term partnerships to be greenwashing attempts. These findings highlight Malaysian ENGOs are capable of protecting themselves in a cross-sector partnership. However, they are still at a disadvantage in the partnership because of an imbalance in resources. Ultimately, Malaysian ENGOs are aware of their disadvantages but are still

willing to work with corporate partners to pursue their environmental mission. The study could be considered to motivate budding ENGOs to improve their self-protection mechanisms via legal contracts and also inspire corporations to consider long-term sustainability partnerships. (276 words)

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APPROVAL SHEET

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DECLARATION

I, Irene Chooi Mei Ting, hereby declare that the dissertation is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UTAR or other institutions.

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CAP	Consumers' Association of Penang
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EDF	Environmental Defense Fund
ENGO	Environmental NGO
GEC	Global Environment Centre
MNS	Malaysian Nature Society
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
SAM	Sahabat Alam Malaysia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TRCRC	Tropical Rainforest Conservation and Research Centre
UN	United Nations
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Environmental sustainability is a central concern for the global community in the 21st Century. The United Nations (UN) warns the earth is on the brink of irreversible damage caused by "land degradation, biodiversity loss, air and water pollution, and … climate change" (Parker, 2019). Malaysia is also suffering from the effects of environmental degradation such as haze, floods, landslides, deforestation and water pollution (Mohamad Saleh, 2017).

Ecological damage and climate change among other pressing issues lead the UN to formulate the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The agenda encapsulates 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at eradicating poverty, halting environmental degradation and promoting prosperity and peace through multi-stakeholder partnerships in the "public, public-private and civil society" spheres (United Nations (UN), 2015).

SDG Goal 17, specifically 17.16 on enhancing global partnerships for sustainable development and 17.17 on encouraging and promoting effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships, is embraced by UN member nations, including Malaysia. The nation's stock exchange, Bursa Malaysia, implements corporate sustainability reporting and encourages companies trading in the country to practice SDG Goal 17 (Bursa Malaysia, 2018). Bursa Malaysia encourages partnerships between corporations and their stakeholders to meet SDG demands, sustainability reporting legislation and also stakeholder expectations (Bursa, 2019). These stakeholders include "investors,

customers, employees, suppliers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and local communities" (Bursa Malaysia, 2018).

This pressure on corporations to do their part for the environment is unsurprising as businesses are the drivers for change in the communities they operate in (Chandler, 2017). They also have a substantial environmental footprint due to the sheer size of operations and supply chain reach (Stibbe & Presscott, 2020). As the environmental consciousness of the global community grew, stakeholder pressure also forced corporations to be more mindful of their environmental sustainability actions and encouraged them to build cross-sector partnerships (Bursa Malaysia, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Prasad et al., 2019; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

Non-profit NGOs are an ideal partner choice for profit-driven corporations in cross-sector partnerships for various reasons. Other than being a corporation's stakeholder, NGOs are also civil society members (Jezard, 2018; UN, 2015) and hold more public trust than companies, the media and even the government across various issues (Poret, 2019).

The interest in a cross-sector partnership is not one sided. Funding issues (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Berny & Rootes, 2018; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Poret, 2019), competition with fellow NGOs (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Poret, 2019) and worsening social and environmental degradation (Poret, 2019) have been credited with encouraging NGOs to work with corporations.

While NGOs advocate a wide array of concerns, including human rights, wildlife protection, environmental conservation and disaster relief (Karns,

2020), this study shall focus on Environmental NGOs (ENGOs) in keeping with the environmental sustainability theme.

In the next section, we shall take a closer look at ENGO-Corporate partnerships and discuss the focus of this study.

1.2 Problem statement

Corporations play a crucial role in the societies they operate in. They support communities and the local economy through job creation and are viewed as the primary vehicles for necessities such as "food, housing [and] healthcare" (Chandler, 2017). The essential role of businesses in society means it has an immense responsibility towards its stakeholders and the environment (Stibbe & Presscott, 2020).

The idea of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerged to address a corporation's relationship with the societies they are a part of and also the responsibility of the society to hold the corporation accountable for their actions (Chandler, 2017). In a nutshell, CSR describes a corporation's responsibility towards environmental, social and economic sustainability (Chandler, 2017; Hizam et al., 2019; Prasad et al., 2019; United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), n.d).

Widespread ecological damage gave rise to an increased consciousness of the importance of environmental sustainability among stakeholders worldwide. That awareness created pressure for organisations to revamp their CSR culture to meet stakeholder expectations (Bursa Malaysia, 2018; Chandler,

2017; Idemunia, 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Prasad et al., 2019; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

Unfortunately, stakeholders such as consumers were sceptical of these efforts and corporations found themselves facing accusations of greenwashing (Plank & Gschoesser, 2019). To address these stakeholder concerns, some corporations decided to engage in cross-sector partnerships with NGOs (Poret, 2019) or specifically ENGOs to tackle environmental sustainability issues.

ENGOs are ideal partners for corporations seeking to minimize their environmental footprint while appeasing stakeholders. This is because ENGOs were born in response to landscape and wildlife threats and are thus critical and knowledgeable in championing environmental sustainability issues (Berny & Rootes, 2018). They also have significant influence on environmental sustainability outcomes through projects and also influence on government policy (Karns, 2020; Partelow et al., 2020). ENGOs are also considered stakeholders of their corporate partners (Asfaw at al., 2017; Bursa Malaysia, 2018; Chandler, 2017) and yet hold more public trust than corporations when it comes to environmental issues (Poret, 2019).

A cross-sector partnership between ENGOs and corporations are usually characterised as symbiotic with both parties obtaining benefits and bearing risks (Lee, 2018; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Mousavi & Bossink, 2020; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018), although the motives to partner up may differ.

Corporations choose such partnerships in response to SDG Goal 17 (Stibbe & Presscott, 2020) and to meet sustainability reporting requirements in Malaysia (Bursa Malaysia, 2018). Cross-sector partnerships can also help

business meet stakeholder expectations (Liu et al., 2020), move away from accusations of greenwashing in their CSR practices, boost profits, reputation and credibility, increase legitimacy, improve social status, increase visibility and differentiate themselves from the competition (Maktoufi et al., 2020; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

ENGOs stand to gain a boost to their visibility, reputation, public image, political influence, set themselves apart from competitors (Poret, 2019) as well as to seek funding (Al-Tabbaa, 2019; Lee, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Poret; 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018). Research (Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018) also states that while a corporation seeks to boost its profits, ENGOs see a partnership as an opportunity to further its mission.

There are concerns present for both parties in this cross-sector partnership. Corporations may be concerned about the economic consequences of spending "a considerable amount of time and money" on environmental endeavours (Idemunia, 2017; Topic & Rohwer, 2018). This is especially true if the company engaged in such endeavours as a result of consumer pressure, instead of a genuine concern for the environment (Plank & Gschoesser, 2019). There might also be worries that some ENGOs might be more interested in obtaining funding than helping the corporation realise its CSR commitments (Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

Idemunia (2017) pointed out there is a risk of corporations "divulging sensitive information that could be misused". While Liu et al.'s (2020) research also highlights the risk of goal misalignment in cross-sector alliances due to ambiguities in the communication process.

However, research has shown that ENGOs bear the bulk of risks in a cross-sector partnership. Research has shown ENGOs worry about their integrity, independence, credibility, legitimacy, autonomy, reputation and co-optation (Idemunia, 2017; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer; 2018).

Co-optation happens when an ENGO's values and interests are manipulated by the corporate partner to be in line with its own (Poret, 2019). Poret (2019) pointed out this can happen via information asymmetry where the corporation intentionally withholds or manipulates information about its environmental performance to an ENGO. Co-optation can result in the ENGO losing its objectivity and autonomy (Idemunia, 2017; Poret, 2019).

The reputation and legitimacy of an ENGO could also suffer due to the corporate partner's environmental scandals. Poret (2019) drew the example of WWF's water conservation partnership with Coca-Cola which is marketed as the scientifically vague "global water neutrality". Critics accused WWF of failing to call out Coca-Cola for its ongoing water source abuse issues and for being part of this environmentally dubious partnership because of an overdependence on financial resources from the firm (Poret, 2019).

Such scandals arguably have a greater impact on an ENGO as companies might suffer from a loss of revenue for a period of time, but ENGOs risk their identity because their reputation is so tightly intertwined with public trust (Lee, 2018; Poret, 2019). In fact, Lee (2018) highlighted the intense pressure on ENGOs to consistently produce "tangible results" to protect their reputation.

In relation to this, an ENGO that has lower public trust will be seen as a less attractive partner for cross-sector alliances (Lee, 2018), which could impact

an outfit that depends on such alliances for funding. This shows that ENGOs face a fundamental reputation risk when collaborating with corporations.

Power imbalance in cross-sector partnerships is another issue that impacts ENGOs. Research shows corporations have the upper hand in partnerships as they possess more financial resources and can therefore bend ENGOs to do their bidding (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Fontana, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Poret, 2019).

Such conflicts and concerns have been blamed on a lack of effective communication between ENGOs and their profit-driven corporate partners (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020; Poret, 2019). Research has found that ENGOs use a series of communication tactics before, during and after establishing a cross-sector partnership (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Klitsie et al., 2018). These effective communication tactics help ENGOs increase their attractiveness to potential partners, reduce reputational risks during the partnership and emerge from the partnership with added-value (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019).

Research has established that cross-sector partnerships are important for environmental sustainability (Asfaw at al., 2017; Idemunia, 2017; Lee, 2018), but there is scant research examining the partnerships between ENGOs and corporations. Most of the available academic literature on cross-sector alliances investigates partnerships between corporations and NGOs (Aigner & Pesqueira, 2020; Feilhauer & Hahn, 2021; David, 2019; Fontana, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Prasad et al., 2019; Poret; 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018),

even if the topic of investigation is environmental sustainability (Asfaw et al., 2017; Idemunia, 2017; Mousavi & Bossink, 2020).

Cross-sector partnerships have also been examined in-depth mainly in developed countries such as Sweden, France, and the United Kingdom (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Fontana; 2018; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018) leaving a research gap in developing countries. This gap is especially glaring in Malaysia where sparse research is published on ENGO-Corporate relationships, particularly on how ENGOs can use communication tactics to manage such partnerships to reduce their risks and balance the partnership.

It is critical to address this as environmental sustainability efforts in Malaysia are still in its infancy (Govindasamy & Suresh, 2018) as are CSR policies (Prasad et al., 2019). Case in point, Bursa Malaysia only mandated sustainability reporting for certain grades of trading companies in 2016 (Bursa Malaysia, 2018). Hizam et al. (2019) also found that Malaysian companies view CSR as an unnecessary form of extra spending. Therefore, this study hopes to advance CSR and environmental sustainability efforts in Malaysia by providing rare insight into how local ENGOs communicate with corporate partners in an alliance.

1.3 Significance of Study

This study aims to produce an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of cross-sector partnerships between ENGOs and corporations, specifically in terms of how ENGOs use communication tactics to manage such relationships. Having a thorough understanding of the nature of such

partnerships from a party which is generally deemed to be vulnerable in such alliances (Liu et al., 2020; Poret, 2019) will be beneficial to ENGOs, corporations, the government and academia.

This study is important because of two reasons. There is a lack of literature on partnerships between corporations and ENGOs in environmental sustainability efforts. Research has shown that partnerships between corporations and ENGOs can result in higher levels of sustainability (Asfaw at al., 2017; Lee, 2018; Poret, 2019). ENGOs and corporations can use the results of this study as a reference to modify how they communicate with each other to boost the effectiveness of the partnership, and utilize the findings of this research for partnership-risk identification and improve mutual-protection. The outcomes of this study could also be used as a weighing scale by ENGOs to determine whether they want to engage in cross-sector partnerships based on the positives and negatives highlighted.

This research also addresses an ENGO-Corporate partnership from the ENGO's point of view. This was a crucial issue to investigate as ENGOs are viewed as more vulnerable in cross-sector partnerships due to a resources-related power imbalance and fundamental reputation risks (Fontana, 2018; Lee, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Poret, 2019). Therefore, this study focused on the communication tactics ENGOs in Malaysia use to manage cross-sector partnerships with corporations.

The novel and exploratory nature of this study also means it is beneficial for the academic fraternity on environmental sustainability and corporate cross-sector relationships, especially in Malaysia.

1.4 Research Question

It is important to reiterate that this study focuses on the communication tactics used by ENGOs to manage cross-sector partnerships. The sparse academic literature available on this topic deems this study to be exploratory and novel. As this is a qualitative study, this researcher shall state a research question instead of objectives or hypotheses to allow for a more flexible examination of the issue at hand (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) highlighted that the difference in formulating research questions for quantitative and qualitative studies lies in the intent. Qualitative research is intended to explore general and complex issues, while quantitative studies investigate a narrow, specific field (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Therefore, here is the research question:

RQ1: How do ENGOs use communication tactics to manage a cross-sector partnership with corporations?

1.5 Definition of Terms

1.5.1 Corporations

Bursa Malaysia adheres to the Securities Commission of Malaysia's definition of corporations, which is "any body corporate formed or incorporated within or outside Malaysia and includes any foreign company" (Securities

Commission Malaysia, 2021). This study will refine the definition of corporations to focus on those with operations in Malaysia and integrate the requirement for sustainability reporting imposed by Bursa Malaysia. Therefore, this study shall define corporations as any body corporate formed or incorporated within or outside Malaysia, operating within Malaysia.

1.5.2 Stakeholders

Bursa Malaysia (2018) defines stakeholders as inclusive of "investors, customers, employees, suppliers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and local communities". Therefore, this study defines stakeholders as a corporation's investors; customers; employees; suppliers; community members living in and around the corporation's area of operations, manufacturing and supply-sourcing; and NGOs as members of civil society (1.5.6.1).

1.5.3 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The UN defines CSR as "the way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives while at the same time addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders" (UNIDO, n.d). This study shall define CSR as a corporation's responsibility towards environmental, social and economic sustainability.

1.5.4 Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation (ENGO)

ENGOs are the physical embodiment of a wide range of ecological concerns including wildlife welfare, habitat loss, biodiversity conservation

(Berny & Rootes, 2018), landscape rehabilitation and more. In this research an NGO is considered an ENGO when its mission or founding principles contains significant elements of ecological sustainability, conservation, protection or proliferation.

1.5.5 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The UN's official resolution for the Agenda for Sustainable Development defines SDGs as a blueprint to eradicate poverty, halt environmental degradation and promote prosperity and peace by 2030 through multi-stakeholder partnerships (UN, 2015). The 17 interrelated goals contain 169 targets aimed at encouraging member nations to tackle critical issues related to "people, planet, prosperity [and] peace" through partnership (UN, 2015).

1.5.5.1 SDG Goal 17

SDG Goal 17 aims to "strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development" (UN, 2015). This study focuses on SDG goals 17.16 and 17.17 which emphasises on multi-stakeholder partnerships between "public, public-private and civil society" partners who "mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources to support the achievement of the [SDG] goals in all countries, particularly developing countries" (UN, 2015). Therefore, the term "SDG Goal 17" in this study will be used to refer to cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development, specifically environmental sustainability.

1.5.6 Multi-Stakeholder Partnership

The UN defines a multi-stakeholder partnership in the SDG context as "An ongoing collaborative relationship between or among organisations from different stakeholder types aligning their interests around a common vision, combining their complementary resources and competencies and sharing risk, to maximise value creation towards [SDGs] and deliver benefit to each of the partners" (Stibbe & Prescott, 2020).

1.5.6.1 Cross-Sector Partnership

This study draws upon the definition of multi-stakeholder partnership above to explain the term "cross-sector partnership". The UN views corporations and ENGOs as separate stakeholder types (Stibbe & Presscott, 2020). Corporations fall under the "business stakeholder" category, while ENGOs as part of the NGO umbrella are considered members of civil society (Stibbe & Presscott, 2020). Therefore, cross-sector partnerships in this study shall refer to a collaborative relationship between ENGOs and corporations.

1.5.7 Environmental Sustainability

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionaries (n.d) defines the environment as "the natural world in which people, animals and plants live in". While the UN (n.d) defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This study combines the two definitions to explain environmental sustainability. Therefore, this study shall define

environmental sustainability as action related to the natural world that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

1.5.8 Management of Communication with Stakeholders

In his study on organisational management of stakeholder relationships, Rajhan (2018) defines effective communication management as "a process in which multiple types of communication are delivered in such a way that the objective for which the communication is released is achieved to the maximum extent". This study emphasises on the importance of using communications to maintain a collaborative relationship between ENGOs and corporations and also establishes ENGOs as the disadvantaged stakeholders of corporations (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Fontana, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Idemunia, 2017; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer; 2018). Therefore, this study shall define management of communications with stakeholders as how ENGOs achieve their collaborative objectives and minimise collaborative risks through multiple types of communication delivered to their corporate partners.

1.5.9 Effective Communication Tactics

The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d) defines tactic as "a planned way of doing something". Meanwhile, Saxton's (2018) study on communication tactics describes it as a method to change opinions through "informing, persuading, convincing, and linking, by developing shared meanings and identities, and by

changing the predominant framing of key issues". Therefore, this study shall define effective communication tactics as an ENGO's planned methods to successfully change the opinions of their corporate partners in a cross-sector partnership by informing, convincing, and developing shared meanings by changing the predominate framing of key issues in the partnership.

1.6 Organisation of Chapters

This dissertation will be organised within five chapters. The order of chapters are Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, and Discussion and Conclusion.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Review of the Literature

2.1.1 Evolution of ENGOs

ENGOs have been around for a long time and play a key role in environmental sustainability (Lee, 2018). The formation of the oldest ENGOs in the world can be traced back to the 19th century in Europe, Northern America and Asia (Partelow et al., 2020). The first recorded spike in ENGO formations came in the 1960s, triggered by the environmental movement boom in Northern America and Europe (Partelow et al., 2020).

Asia is home to some of the oldest ENGOs, but it's not uncommon for them to have colonial roots (Partelow et al., 2020). ENGOs were initially formed in response to "actual or perceived threats to wildlife [and] landscapes" (Berny & Rootes, 2018), hence their initial role was conservation-focused and they had no qualms in challenging corporations found to be harming the environment (Lee, 2018).

By the 1960s, ENGOs embraced an "environmental police" role and helped set up rules and regulations for environmental protection worldwide (Lee, 2018). This was made easier by the fact that global legislators accepted ENGOs as authoritative voices on environmental concerns (Berny & Rootes, 2018).

The 20th century saw a lull in ENGO formations, until the UN's 1992 Rio Convention (or Earth Summit) led to another spike in ENGO establishments (Partelow et al., 2020). In fact, the Rio Convention can be seen as a critical

turning point for ENGOs, marking the transition into the third wave of environmentalism:

> While the first wave of environmentalism was reckoned to be all about conservation and preservation, the second was being based on regulation and litigation; the third wave of environmentalism that is rooted in economics and market-driven strategies for solution-oriented approaches is what shapes environmental sustainability now" (Lee, 2018)

The third wave of environmentalism saw the rise of cross-sector alliances between ENGOs and corporations, where partners engaged in "aggressive goal-setting, problem-solving and market-based frameworks to achieve environmental goals" (Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), 2018). The fourth and current wave of environmentalism is centred around the use of technological innovations, such as the use of data analytics and automation to solve environmental concerns. (EDF, 2018).

ENGOs also play different roles in developed and developing nations (Lee, 2018). In developed nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom, ENGOs are "highly vocal in promoting activism, influencing local regulations and public policy, and uncovering misconduct in the corporate sector" (Lee, 2018). However, ENGOs in developing countries are less concerned with the consumer movement, and instead focus more on a governmental-consultant role (Lee, 2018).

2.1.2 ENGOs in Malaysia

The first ENGO in Malaysia was established by British expatriates in 1940 (Yew & Tayeb, 2017). The Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) was formed to mitigate environment issues and promote the protection of nature (Mohamed Saleh, 2016), but it wasn't until the 1970s that the ENGO started to engage in environmental "activism" (Yew & Tayeb, 2017). Other leaders in the ENGO movement include the Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP), Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) and WWF Malaysia (Yew & Tayeb, 2017).

The first ENGOs in Malaysia were set up to help the government. They worked hand-in-hand with policy makers to develop rural communities (Mohamed Saleh, 2016), educate the public and "propagate environmental protection policies" (Yew & Tayeb, 2017). However, the good relations between ENGOs and the Malaysian government did not last. Nowadays, the government views most ENGOs as "threats" that are always opposing the ruling coalition (Mohamed Saleh, 2016).

Yew and Tayeb (2017) highlighted several examples such as the 2016 grassroots and ENGO-led protest against the Sarawak government's plan to build to the Baram Dam, and the Anak Malaysia Anti Nuklear group's campaigns against governmental plans to construct nuclear power plants.

Autonomous ENGOs in Malaysia usually spring from the grassroots. A few notable examples include the 1983 grassroots-led protest against a Japanese rare earth refinery factory in Bukit Merah, Perak and a similar movement against proposals to construct a dam in 1982 which would have destroyed the National Park (Yew & Tayeb, 2017). History repeated itself when the Anti-

Lynas movement was formed in 2012 to protest against an Australian rare earth processing factory in Gebeng, Pahang. The Anti-Lynas movement has been credited with highlighting the bottom-up green movement in Malaysia to the world, and has also been used as an example of ENGOs working together for higher impact (Yew & Tayeb, 2017).

The examples above display the passion and tenacity ENGOs in Malaysia have for their mission of environmental sustainability. This dedication to their mission lead to ENGO-ENGO coalitions in aims to further the environmental sustainability agenda (Yew & Tayeb, 2017), but due to changes in stakeholder expectations and a greater collective environmental consciousness, cross-sector alliances between ENGOs and corporations were born.

2.1.3 ENGO-Corporate Partnerships

As members of the public developed higher environmental awareness, they began to demand more ecological consciousness from the companies they custom. It was no longer enough for corporations to bring value to consumers; they must also be perceived to be bringing value to the environment and contribute to sustainability (Bursa Malaysia, 2018). Such demands from consumers led to a CSR culture revolution for corporations, arguably under duress. The pressure to revolutionize longstanding CSR efforts to incorporate environmental sustainability without blowing the budget led to greenwashing and eventually caused consumer suspicion and doubt (Plank & Gschoesser, 2019).

This stakeholder suspicion of CSR could be because of its reputation as a transitory tactic to boost brand awareness (Liu et al., 2020). This problem is more pronounced in developing countries where a lack of formalised CSR culture means there is a risk of corporations using CSR for philanthropy rather than environmental sustainability (Prasad et al., 2019).

Even if a corporation was not proven to be engaged in greenwashing, the communication channels it used to relay environmental sustainability efforts to consumers had a risk of being perceived as such (Ferguson et al., 2019). Poret (2019) believes this is because information and the ability to give feedback is important to consumers. The one-way communication of official websites can lead to a perception of greenwashing (Ferguson et al., 2019), but social media channels such as Facebook and YouTube allow consumers to question corporations and express any displeasure, leading to a lighter punishment for perceived greenwashing digressions (Plank & Gschoesser, 2019). This need for information is one of the reasons for cross-sector partnerships.

Corporations partner with ENGOs in several ways, including certification initiatives and sustainability labelling schemes, to improve communication about their environmental-protection efforts (Poret, 2019). Such partnerships are effective because ENGOs hold high public trust when it comes to environmental issues (Poret, 2019). This is due to the fact that ENGOs are vocal and active in championing pro-environmental causes (Lee, 2018). Their journey in setting up rules and regulations for environmental protection worldwide is made easier by the fact that global legislators accept ENGOs as authoritative voices on environmental concerns (Berny & Rootes, 2018).

Cross-sector partnerships are also convenient for corporations looking to boost their reputation overall, especially with governing bodies, as ENGOs have an undeniable influence on government policy and are able to affect public opinion on a brand (Berny & Rootes, 2018). The amount of public trust an ENGO holds can be key in whether it is considered a front-runner for cross-sector alliances, as just like all other types of NGOs, the more public trust an ENGO has, the better its reputation (Lee, 2018).

Another reason for such cross-sector alliances is to solve complex environmental issues that requires joint efforts through the combination of expertise and resources from both ENGOs and firms (Aigner & Pesqueira, 2020). The SDG initiative from the UN is another strong motivator for cross-sector alliances, specifically goal 17.16 and 17.17 which emphasises on such partnerships (UN, 2015). Country-specific legislation and sustainability reporting requirements are also motivators for cross-sector alliances (Bursa Malaysia, 2018).

From the point of view of ENGOs, working with corporations eases monetary pressure brought on by a financial crisis and a cut in government funding (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Berny & Rootes, 2018; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Poret, 2019). A growth in the number of fellow ENGOs championing similar causes also increased competition in the non-profit industry, forcing ENGOs to find a way to stand out from the crowd (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Poret, 2019). Worsening environmental degradation has also been credited with encouraging ENGOs to work with corporation (Poret, 2019).

These partnerships can be segregated into two main types. Nurturing Partnerships see ENGOs engaging in consensual CSR with corporations to build constructive partnerships and gradually encouraging the private sector partner to engage in more sustainable practices, while Pressure Groups use confrontations or dissensual CSR and communicate unflattering information about a company's practices to the public to damage firm reputation and force it to engage in sustainable practices (Aigner & Pesqueira, 2020; Asfaw et al., 2017; Idemunia, 2017; Lee, 2018; Poret, 2019).

While an ENGO's stance and communication style towards potential partners can affect its "reputation [and] access to resources" (Aigner & Pesqueira, 2020), this does not mean pressure groups do not engage in cross-sector alliances. In fact, famous pressure group Greenpeace has partnered with corporations before and is working towards using dialogue over confrontations to achieve its environmental sustainability missions (Lee, 2018). On the other hand, nurturing ENGO WWF has engaged in controversial partnerships with corporations accused of damaging the environment (Lee, 2018). This shows both nurturing and pressure ENGOs can engage in fruitful cross-sector partnerships.

Research has established that corporations and ENGOs engage in partnerships for different reasons. Corporations choose such partnerships to meet stakeholder expectations (Liu et al., 2020), boost their profits and reputation, increase legitimacy, improve social status, increase visibility and differentiate themselves from the competition (Maktoufi et al., 2020; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

As for ENGOs, they stand to gain a boost to their visibility, reputation, public image, political influence, differentiation from other ENGOs (Poret, 2019) and to seek funding (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Berny & Rootes, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018). Poret (2019) also believes that while a corporation seeks to boost its profits, NGOs see a partnership as an opportunity to further its mission.

As mentioned in the problem statement (Section 1.2), ENGOs bear the bulk of risks in a cross-sector partnership. This includes threats to their integrity, independence, credibility, legitimacy, autonomy, reputation and co-optation (Idemunia, 2017; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer; 2018). Effective communication tactics can help ENGOs mitigate these risks and form fruitful partnerships that can even help strengthen the ENGO's internal processes (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020).

On the other hand, concerns for corporations revolve around the financial aspects of time-consuming environmental endeavours and disingenuous partners (Idemunia, 2017; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

2.1.4 ENGO-Corporate Partnerships in Malaysia

There is sparse published research on ENGO-Corporate alliances in Malaysia, but that does not mean there are no such partnerships. There are examples of cross-sector alliances for the benefit of rainforest conservation (Cision PR Newswire, 2020; Lakshimanan, 2019; The Malaysian Reserve, 2019), food conservation (Zikri, 2020), wildlife protection (Inus, 2021; WWF-Malaysia, 2020) and sustainable fashion (Cheong, 2021).

It can be argued that mandatory sustainability reporting is one of the drivers for cross-sector partnerships in Malaysia (Bursa Malaysia, 2018). Malaysia's stock exchange, Bursa Malaysia encourages alliances between corporations and their stakeholders, which include ENGOs, to meet the UN's SDG demands, sustainability reporting legislation and also stakeholder expectations (Bursa, 2019).

Another motive for corporations to form these partnerships is to fulfil company CSR efforts (WWF-Malaysia, 2019; Zikri, 2020). Hizam et al. (2019) found that Malaysian companies have changed their minds about CSR in recent years. They have gone from viewing CSR as an unnecessary form of extra spending and irrelevant to the business to a "financial reputation" advantage (Hizam et al., 2019).

The UN's SDG goals are also a factor in cross-sector alliances in Malaysia (Cheong, 2021). However, Buniamin et al. (2020) found that it was low on the priority list, with only three percent of companies entering into partnerships to adhere to SDG Goal 17. These companies are spread across a wide variety of industries, namely construction, healthcare, industrial products and services, property, technology and transportation and logistics (Buniamin et al., 2020).

For Malaysian ENGOs, they view cross-sector partnerships as opportunities to widen their reach and further their mission (The Malaysian Reserve, 2019; Zikri, 2020). This researcher found no studies on the communication tactics ENGOs employ in managing their relationships with

corporate partners. The scant information about this topic lends more credibility to the necessity of this study.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory posits that organisations depend on their stakeholders for legitimacy (Baah et al., 2021; Mousavi & Bossink, 2020; Poret, 2019). Stakeholders are defined as those who have an active interest in and are able to affect the organisation and be affected in return (Baah et al., 2021; Chandler, 2017; Poret, 2019). This includes "investors, customers, employees, suppliers, NGOs and local communities" (Bursa Malaysia, 2018).

There is an argument that the environment should be considered a firm's stakeholder as well (Chandler, 2017; Prasad et al., 2019). However, the environment is unable to advocate for itself and communicate its interests, therefore it cannot be considered a stakeholder (Chandler, 2017). On that ilk, ENGOs who act on the interests of the environment are considered stakeholders of a corporation (Chandler, 2017). In fact, ENGOs have been found to be effective in impacting the environmental aspect of corporate CSR efforts in their capacity as stakeholder (Asfaw at al., 2017; Lee, 2018; Poret, 2019).

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This study draws upon the stakeholder theory and existing academic knowledge to develop a conceptual framework to be used as a guide for the study, but not a regulatory framework. The stakeholder theory has been used in similar studies to argue for a mutually-beneficial partnership between corporations and NGOs as representatives of society, at the risk of corporations losing their legitimacy (Poret 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

The literature review has shown that meeting stakeholder expectations is at the root of environmental sustainability action taken by corporations (Bursa Malaysia, 2018; Chandler, 2017; Idemunia, 2017; Liu et al., 2020; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Prasad et al., 2019; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

These environmental sustainability endeavours are carried out via CSR initiatives in partnership with ENGOs, who have been shown to be effective in impacting the environmental aspect of corporate CSR efforts in their capacity as stakeholders, both as a member of civil society and also as an advocate for the environment (Asfaw at al., 2017; Lee, 2018; Poret, 2019). We have also established that corporations engage in cross-sector alliances in part to improve the legitimacy of their environmental sustainability endeavours (Liu et al., 2020; Maktoufi et al., 2020; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018).

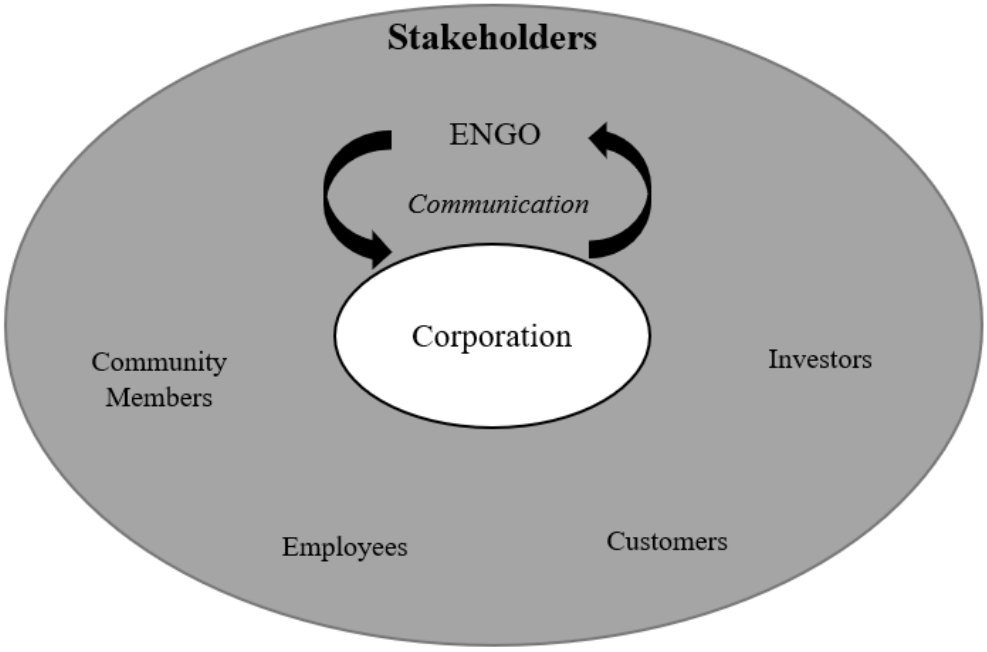
On the other hand, ENGOs engage in such partnerships due to funding, competition and mission achievement pressures (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Berny & Rootes, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Poret, 2019; Topic & Rohwer, 2018). Despite bearing a majority of the risks in such partnerships, ENGOs are able to manage

cross-sector partnerships well with effective communication tactics (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Klitsie et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020).

Therefore, the conceptual framework (Figure 1) displays the focus of the study, which examines the communication tactics an ENGO uses to manage a cross-sector partnership with corporations.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework showing ENGOs using Effective Communication Tactics to Manage a Cross-Sector Partnership with Corporations



3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A phenomenological, in-depth, semi-structured qualitative research was conducted with five respondents in September and October 2021.

A two-tier codebook was used because inductive codes that are recorded in a two-tier structure are vital to an exploratory study (SAGE Research Methods Datasets, 2019). The first step after the conclusion of an interview was to transcribe the recorded interview into a Microsoft Word document. Then, text segments were highlighted and preliminary as well as sub-codes were deduced. The deduced codes and text segments are inputted in a Google Sheets document. After each interview is concluded, the researcher repeated the process and compared the codes with the previous interviews while refining the codes and including additional codes as necessary. Finally, thematic saturation was achieved at the fifth interview and the interview process was concluded.

The respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions related to RQ1 probing the communication tactics used during the entire process of the cross-sector partnership, from pre-formation to conclusion with specific partnership examples.

Each interview took an average of 50 minutes and were carried out one-on-one by the researcher online. This is because the COVID-19 pandemic has "fundamentally altered the way social science research is conducted" (Howlett, 2021). In the face of pandemic restrictions, video conferencing has become a favourite among researchers to continue their work (Howlett, 2021). Video

calling allow researchers to capture “verbal and non-verbal cues” similar to physical interview (Gray et al., 2020; Howlett, 2021). The platform Zoom was used for all five interviews it is easy to use and has a low entry level (Dodds & Hess, 2020; Gray et al., 2020).

All interviews were conducted online through a pre-arranged timing after ethical clearance was granted to the researcher. Interviewees were informed of the topic of research and that the interview will be recorded. They were also told that there will be no renumeration for their time. After agreeing to the interview, respondents were given a link to the interview before the agreed-upon meeting time, but they were not given access to the questions beforehand to reduce bias.

3.2 Sample

A combination of criterion and snowball sampling were used to identify the interviewees of this study. Criterion sampling was first used to identify members of ENGOs with a minimum two-year experience in communicating with corporations.

Initially, three ENGOs (TRCRC, GEC, and WWF) from the Klang Valley in Malaysia were identified as possible targets with two interviewees from each ENGO. However, WWF removed itself from the study at the last minute. An interviewee from Rimba was secured via the snowball effect, but there was difficulty in securing another member of the organisation who fitted the sample criteria.

In referring to Creswell & Poth's (2018) advice on theoretical saturation, interviews were analysed to determine the need for additional sampling. Based on the data provided by the five respondents and the scarcity of new information emerging from the final two interviews (E1 = 23, E2 = 6, E3 = 3, E4 = 1, E5 = 2), sampling was concluded with five interviewees.

Table 1 lists the profile of the interviewees. TRCRC's main focus is on protecting Malaysia's rare, threatened and endangered plant species, through building plant nurseries, conserving forests, and engaging in capacity building. GEC is primarily focused on river care, forest and coastal protection, and peatlands. Rimba aims to provide evidence-based solutions to environmental conservation problems through scientific research.

All interviewees all fit the sampling criterion of having a minimum of two years in communicating with corporations on behalf of their ENGOs. All interviewees are leaders in their teams and have the power and flexibility to make decisions within the organisation, which means they are less constrained by institutional boundaries. This also means their input to the research fits the constraints of a phenomenological study as parts of their human experience.

All interviewees were asked about the communication tactics they use to manage a cross-sector partnership with corporations, decision making considerations before commencing a partnership, and the process of a partnership including examples of specific collaborations. A copy of the interview guide is available in Appendix A.

Table 1

Profile of Interviewees

Interviewee	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation (ENGO)	Experience
E1	Tropical Rainforest Conservation and Research Centre (TRCRC)	2 years
E2	Global Environment Centre (GEC)	7 years
E3	Global Environment Centre (GEC)	11 years
E4	Tropical Rainforest Conservation and Research Centre (TRCRC)	12 years
E5	Rimba	6 years

3.3 Validity

Triangulation of data was used to increase the study's validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Common themes were deduced by interpreting data obtained from the transcribed interviews and fieldnotes taken during the conversations with respondents. Only similar observations made by multiple respondents were taken into consideration.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

These ethical considerations were made in accordance with Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman's ethical policies for researchers.

The topic of this research is not plagiarised and was conducted under the supervision of a supervisor and co-supervisor. The study is unfunded, therefore there is no conflict of interest. All research respondents were asked for their consent to participate in the interview through an informed consent form (Appendix B) which was given to them before the interview took place.

Only personal details pertinent to the study were collected from the respondents. These details are only be accessible to the researcher and all records are kept safely in the researcher's computer. The respondents are referred to by codes in the dissertation and data analysis to protect their anonymity.

It was made clear in the initial contact with respondents that there will be no renumeration as this is an academic study. Respondents were also be notified that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without reason.

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This research found that the bulk of the communication in a cross-sector partnership occurs during the early stages. ENGOs see the initial phase as a crucial time to vet potential corporate partners to prevent greenwashing and abuse, educate potential corporate partners about their environmental mission, and also to protect themselves with comprehensive agreements between both parties.

Later on in the partnership, ENGOs also engage in conversations about continuing the partnership either beyond the current scope or to pursue a new environmental project.

4.2 Initial Communication

ENGOs have screening criteria they use to vet potential corporate partners before engaging in partnerships. ENGOs also spend time educating potential partners before finally sealing the cooperation with documented agreements.

4.2.1 Screening

The respondents of this research indicate the screening process begins with a background check into the corporate partners via three methods – talking to the corporations directly, searching for information online, or by reaching out to their ENGO or NGO networks.

During this initial background check phase, ENGOs examine the company's annual report, nature of business, policies, potential scandals, as well as origins of funding. The background check serves several purposes.

4.2.1.1 Greenwashing

The respondents highlighted that greenwashing is a major concern when they vet potential partners. Screening can help ENGOs identify the motives of their potential corporate partners. As respondent E1 pointed out, it is important to determine "what the corporation is trying to achieve". This includes gauging whether "they really care about the environment [or are] greenwashing."

Respondent E1 adds greenwashing attempts can be detected via dialogue. "[When we are] having those conversations, you realise they really don't care about the work, or this is just a greenwashing exercise for them … [then] that's not something we want to pursue anymore."

Respondent E5 also commented on the use of open communication to clarify contentious discoveries in the screening process to weed out potential greenwashing attempts.

> We noticed you're implicated in these contentious cases, are you doing anything about it? Is this just a PR scam you want to do or are you actively allocating resources to mitigate your previous sort of grievances. We have open discussions to see where they are [and] their wider strategy to be better. (E5)

E2 pointed out he is particularly careful to check whether the potential corporate partners are embroiled in any current environmental scandals to avoid being used for greenwashing. He highlighted that some corporate polluters who are facing court cases are known to reach out to ENGOs for partnerships

because they can use the cooperation to defend themselves in court and lessen the penalty.

This is also something E1 looks out for when she screens potential corporate partners.

> It's always at the back of my mind when I do engage with sponsors, to just see like are they trying to use our name, are they doing anything that's actually hurting the environment, and just quickly wanting to engage with us and push us [to the] forefront to say eh, no, we're working with [this ENGO], we're good. (E1)

E3 also pointed out a major concern at this stage is whether these companies are "interested in actually making a change" or are trying to use the cooperation as "a branding exercise".

> Some companies insist that we do more visibility for them, they wanted us to arrange for press and all that, we don't do that. We put it very clearly to them that if you want that, then you have to arrange on their own because we are an [ENGO], we're not an event company. I think some of the corporate[s] out there treat us like an event company. (E3)

4.2.1.2 Duration of Cooperation

During the screening process, ENGOs also enquire about the duration of cooperation. In general, all the respondents indicated an unwillingness to engage in short term or one-off partnerships. In fact, several respondents likened short term partnerships to greenwashing attempts (E1, E2, E4).

E5 linked the duration of cooperation to funding and said "there's no point in trying to secure short term funding, it's just a lot of work. There's a lot of costs involved." The costs include manpower and resources.

E1, who works with a tree conservation and rehabilitation ENGO, mentioned tree planting is a laborious process and short-term partnerships of

below three years might not be worth the ENGO's time as it does not achieve their mission.

In connection to this, the respondents explained they spend a lot of time educating potential partners about the ENGO's mission during the initial phase of the cooperation.

4.2.2 Education

After the initial screening to ascertain motives and risks, ENGOs spend time educating their corporate partners about their work with the environment, the importance of said work, and the duration of time it takes to achieve the desired results.

E1 said she spends most of her meetings with potential partners explaining "how our programme works, what we do, … because it gives context and understanding of why certain things are priced the way they are… We're not profiting off of this, this is restoration work."

E2 said educating corporate partners about the environment was a challenge. "They want everything in a very very short time and you know that to see a remarkable change in river, especially in environment, will take some time."

Part of the educating process includes setting practical expectations for the corporate partners. E5 mentioned it is important to "[explain] all the risks and things that are out of control" when it comes to environmental work, such as the possibility that trees planted may die. E4 concurred, adding education

about the “natural cycle” of plants is also important to ensure corporations know the risks involved and also the commitment required.

4.2.3 Agreements

Agreements and contracts are a vital part of a partnership between ENGOs and corporations. These documents include the budget and scope of work in the partnership. But most importantly for ENGOs, these documents include clauses on how the corporate partners are allowed to use the ENGO’s branding and also provides ENGOs with an exit strategy.

The respondents agreed that the agreements serve as protection for the ENGOs by preventing a situation where corporations abuse the ENGO’s branding, reputation, past projects, or claim to be contributing more than they are.

E5 highlighted the importance of agreements with an example of a previous corporate partnership.

> They said they [were] planting trees all across Malaysia … they were claiming credit for our previous work, they were using our assets like our photos in their promotional social media postings, so that's when we said, … you need to stop this, remove everything. This is not in the [agreement], you're breaching this, we're going to terminate the partnership, take legal action if [you don’t] take it down. (E5)

After the agreements or contracts are inked, ENGOs embark upon a partnership with corporations.

4.3 Continuation of Partnership

Towards the end of the partnership duration, there are important conversations about contract renewals or expansion of cooperation. E2 said this is a huge challenge for ENGOs because if there is no smooth transition of funding for environmental programmes when the existing sponsorship ends, “usually I would say 90% it will [be] done. It will over. I mean if you don't continue through other platforms, [the environmental programme] will die off.”

E2 combats this problem by persuading corporate partners to continue the partnership, or “we continue the project using new funding, new partner.”

E4 has similar conversations with corporate partners. E4 said he will put in effort to retain existing corporate partners because “when you start with a new partner, you have to develop everything from scratch, … you [spent] a lot of time developing [the existing] relationships, so it's easier to grow with the partners that you have.”

E4 also tries to “scale up the project, continue the project, [or] develop new projects with [corporate partners]" after a period of working together.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

The results of this research show ENGOs are aware of the risks to their reputation when working with corporate partners and therefore have developed effective communication tactics to protect themselves. In fact, communication is the first line of defence for ENGOs against potential greenwashing. The respondents also view it as the best method to gauge the motives and commitment level of potential corporate partners.

The communication tactics starts with a thorough dialogue process which can span from a month to a year or more (E2, E4). It is an exciting discovery for this researcher that during this dialogue process, a lot of effort is spent on educating corporate partners about environmental work and the risks of working with nature. The willingness of corporate partners to be educated at this stage is seen as a reflection of the Stakeholder Theory as corporations are willing to listen to ENGOs as their stakeholders, in their aim to meet wider stakeholder expectations.

This effort expended on education can be analysed as a form of risk aversion for ENGOs. As respondents E4 and E5 explained, educating potential corporate partners of the "nature cycle" and "risk [of] failure over time" before embarking on a partnership prevents unreasonable expectations of the outcomes of the environmental projects. For example, trees planted under the sponsorship of a corporate partner might die because of natural reasons.

Another intriguing finding of this research is that while all of the respondents were not keen on short-term partnerships, some of them perceived short-term collaborations as akin to greenwashing (E1, E2, E4). This could be because these partnerships are seen as CSR attempts, which have a bad reputation for greenwashing (Plank & Gschoesser, 2019).

In general, the respondents disliked and mistrusted corporate partners who want a branding or communications-centric partnership. As E3 explained and E5 experienced, corporate partners who only have branding in mind tend to abuse the collaboration with ENGOs for personal gain. Because of a lack of resources, ENGOs are at a disadvantage when such abuses happen.

This is why agreements and contracts are essential for ENGOs when it comes to cross-sector partnerships. These agreements provide ENGOs with the option to exit the partnership and seek legal action in case of abuse or breach of contract.

However, it is important to note that these agreements are not fool-proof because of a power imbalance between ENGOs and corporate partners in terms of funding and resources. E5 mentioned an experience where corporate partners refused to pay for a completed project that was agreed upon, but the ENGO decided not to pursue legal action because of a lack of resources. E3 also mentioned an experience where corporate partners delayed payment for a completed project by several months.

This verifies the literature review of a power imbalance between ENGOs and corporate partners due to financial resources (Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019; Fontana, 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Poret, 2019).

The power imbalance extends to the continuation of the partnership where ENGOs' environmental programmes could be perceived as being at the mercy of their corporate partners, who could choose to discontinue the partnership before the ENGO's missions are achieved.

ENGOs also have a strategy in place to combat this whereby they will communicate with the corporate partners and try to convince them to continue the partnership, or they will persuade new corporate partners to adopt existing programmes. This is part of ENGOs' efforts to ensure the progress they have made on their environmental mission is not wasted.

Based on the interviews, the definition of corporations within this research has also been refined to both corporate bodies which are listed and not listed under Bursa Malaysia. While corporate partnerships are important to help ENGOs achieve their mission, there did not appear to be any preferences to whether the corporation are listed as the interviewees described experiences with both listed and non-listed partners.

5.2 Conclusion

The research results highlight everything the ENGOs do is for their mission. They view partnerships with corporations as a means to achieve their mission of environmental sustainability, despite being fully aware of the risks of such partnerships.

Therefore, the key finding in this research is that ENGOs have developed effective communication tactics to protect themselves from potential risks in cross-sector partnership with corporations. While these planned and

intentional tactics may differ slightly based on the requirements of the corporate partners, ENGOs utilise a similar set of methods and processes with all corporate partners to avoid risks and maximise their mission achievement.

The plan starts with screening, moves on to education, and culminates in comprehensive agreements which, while shielding the ENGOs, unfortunately does not offer iron-clad protection to ENGOs with less financial means to pursue legal action.

Another important finding is that short-term partnerships are mistrusted by ENGOs and negatively perceived as greenwashing attempts.

The results of this research will be useful for budding ENGOs to improve their communication tactics when communicating with potential partners and also highlights the need to have agreements and contracts as protection.

Established ENGOs can use these findings to plug any holes in their current communication tactics and also take inspiration to build a bigger funds reserve as a precaution against late payments and payment refusals.

Now that this research has verified a negative perception of CSR activities among Malaysian ENGOs, corporations can use this as motivation to improve their environmental sustainability efforts. They can also take heart in the fact that ENGOs are willing to engage in open discussions and educate their corporate partners.

5.3 Limitations

The largest limitation of this study is the number of respondents. Due to the limited number of experienced ENGOs in Malaysia and the transitory nature of ENGO employees, it was difficult to secure interviewees who fit the criteria of having a minimum of two years' experience in communicating with corporations.

Although the five respondents are experts in their field and have a collective experience of almost four decades between them, this research could have been more impactful with more respondents. Another limitation is that all of these ENGOs are based in the Klang Valley, which could have created a geographical bias.

There is also a risk of bias in the perception of the communication process in a cross-sector partnership as this study only investigated the point of view of the ENGO.

5.4 Recommendations

Researchers seeking to replicate this study are advised to expand it across several plains. The number of respondents can be increased as this exploratory study has shown there is a need for further examination into the relationship between ENGOs and corporations. It is also recommended to speak to ENGOs of differing sizes, environmental focus, and location in Malaysia to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the topic.

This research requested interviewees to recount one example of existing or past partnerships with corporations. Further researchers might find it prudent to ask for two examples or more to gain a deeper understanding of cross-sector partnerships.

Finally, future researchers are advised to approach corporations and record their communication tactics in the partnership as well. This is to ensure a balanced view of the partnership between ENGOs and corporations as a whole.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Effective Partnerships: Examining How Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (ENGOs) Manage Communication with Corporations

Demographics and background:

1. Please introduce yourself.
    a. Name, position in ENGO
    b. Probe years of experience with ENGO
    c. Probe area of responsibility within ENGO

2. Briefly tell me about this ENGO you're with.
    a. Deepen understanding of ENGO
    b. Initial understanding of cross-sector partnerships

RQ1: How do ENGOs use communication tactics to manage a cross-sector partnership with corporations?

Literature review: Communication happens through formation to conclusion of partnership

1. Why did your ENGO decide to start working with corporations?
    a. Alternative: How did your ENGO get started working with corporations?

2. Tell me about the process of a partnership. (Ask for general examples)
    a. What happens before you engage in a partnership?
        i. (Research? Proposal planning?)
    b. How do you decide on who to work with?
        i. (How to reconcile differences in value between sectors?)
        ii. What's most important for you in a partnership?
    c. How do you decide on who does what in a partnership?
        i. (Communication with corporations to mitigate risks)
        ii. Conflict resolution
    d. Do you think these partnerships are beneficial for you?

3. Can you tell me about a specific partnership? (Specific examples)
    a. Probe entire process