Environmentalist-Business Collaboration and Strategic Bridging: An Analysis of the Greenpeace-Foron Alliance

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Environmentalist-business collaborative partnerships, commonly called *green alliances*, are emerging as mechanisms for integrating environmental responsibility with market objectives. They are encouraging corporate *enviropreneurship*, strategic innovations to address environmental problems that result in operational efficiencies, new technologies, and marketable "green" products. Aside from assisting firms directly through their scientific, legal, and ecological expertise, environmental groups can help firms indirectly by providing social influence and linkages to other societal stakeholders, referred to as *strategic bridging*, to support corporate enviropreneurial initiatives. This article focuses on the strategic bridging capabilities of environmental groups in green alliances by developing an extended strategic bridging framework that articulates process contingencies and stakeholder engagement strategies. The extended framework is then used to analyze the green alliance between Greenpeace and Foron Household Appliances in Germany for the enviropreneurial development and marketing of an environmentally-responsible refrigerator between 1992-3. Outcomes of the partnership highlight managerial implications of strategic bridging in green alliances, and future research directions are discussed.

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The nature of environmentalist-business relations is changing (Lober 1997). Traditionally, environmentalists have believed that the most effective means of enforcing corporate environmental responsibility was to adopt an antagonistic posture toward business (e.g., Dowie 1995). In turn, firms have viewed environmentalists as societal stakeholders that needed to be considered, but kept at arm's distance. Over the past decade, however, the culture of the environmental movement has been evolving from one of protest to one of practical solutions (Murphy and Bendell 1997). Environmental groups are increasingly favoring market, social, and public policy reforms to encourage environmentally-sensitive corporate practices over "command-and-control" regulatory mechanisms that typically pit business interests against environmental concerns (e.g., Krupp 1994). Likewise, firms are increasingly facing social, legal, and global market pressures to operate more sustainably, and many are recognizing that cooperative environmentalists can be allies for launching appropriate and credible environmental initiatives through various types of cooperative relationships called *green alliances* (e.g., Stafford and Hartman 1996).

Green alliances are collaborative partnerships between environmental groups and businesses that pursue mutually beneficial ecological goals (Stafford and Hartman 1996). Gray (1989) defines collaboration as a "process through which partners who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (p. 5). Hence, environmentalist-business collaboration facilitates finding the "common ground" between ecological and commercial interests. For example, green alliances are enhancing environmental entrepreneurial activities, referred to as *enviropreneurship*. These are corporate innovations and technological approaches to address environmental problems that simultaneously accommodate or capitalize on divergent societal

stakeholder needs and meet corporate economic objectives (Hartman and Stafford 1998; Menon and Menon 1997). Enviropreneurial outcomes can lead to operational efficiencies through resource reductions, competitive advantages through new technologies, and new marketable "green" products. While not all environmental initiatives can lead to competitive gains (see Esty and Porter 1998; Walley and Whitehead 1994), a confluence of ecological, social, and market objectives *are possible* from green alliances because they create collaborative forums for environmental stakeholders to define problems, discuss needs, establish common ground, and implement mutually-agreeable environmental programs that address the multiple needs of involved parties (Gray 1989). The Table summarizes several recent green alliances and their enviropreneurial objectives.

[Table about here]

Environmentalists can assist corporate enviropreneurial initiatives in two distinct ways. One, environmentalists can provide corporations *ecological, scientific, and legal expertise* (Milne, Iyer, and Gooding-Williams 1996; Hartman and Stafford 1997). Environmental problems are complex, and many firms lack the necessary know-how to integrate appropriate environmental and sociopolitical considerations with economic objectives for enviropreneurial initiatives; environmental groups are increasingly becoming useful consultants to industry (Ottman 1996).

Two, environmentalists can provide firms *social influence and network linkages to other social entities* to support corporate environmental programs. Environmental groups can leverage and broker corporate relationships with other diverse social and environmental stakeholders, such as consumers, government agencies, other environmental groups, and the media, who may possess resources critical to support the firm's overall enviropreneurial activities (Mendleson and Polonsky 1995). The ability to negotiate and build such social networks is called *strategic bridging*, which refers to situations in which one party links diverse constituencies together to address some problem domain, such as corporate environmentalism (Brown 1991; Westley and

Vredenburg 1991). As strategic bridging agents, environmental groups forward their own ends *while* serving as links between the firm and other stakeholders (Westley and Vredenburg 1991). Strategic bridging provides a viable environmental solution when diverse stakeholders are unable to negotiate or cooperate freely due to mistrust, tradition, logistic problems, or when there is need for a third party to restore a balance of power, resources, and expertise (Sharma, Vredenburg, and Westley 1994). In green alliances, environmental partners build linkages between the firm and other social entities, who traditionally may be skeptical, critical, or ambivalent toward businesses and their enviropreneurial activities.

The Greening of Industry Network's (GIN) proposed research agenda for sustainability has called for examining the "dynamics of emerging new partnerships" (Schot, Brand, and Fischer 1997, p. 157), and the theme of GIN's Seventh International Conference held in Rome, Italy, in November, 1998, centered on the need for "building alliances for a sustainable future." This paper is in partial response to GIN's charge as it focuses on the strategic bridging capabilities of environmental groups in green alliances by analyzing the linkages Greenpeace forged in its efforts to assist Foron Household Appliances in the development and marketing of an environmentally-sensitive, hydrocarbon refrigerator in Germany during 1992-3. Drawing from the public policy, organizational behavior, marketing, and stakeholder management literatures, a conceptual overview of environmentalist-business collaboration is presented, followed by the development of an extended strategic bridging framework articulating process contingencies and stakeholder engagement strategies. The extended framework is used to analyze the Greenpeace-Foron green alliance case, which is developed from publicly available data (cf., van den Bosch and van Riel 1998). Outcomes of the green alliance are discussed to highlight managerial implications of environmentalist-business collaboration and strategic bridging, and future research directions are proposed.

Green Alliances: Environmentalist-Business Collaboration

Stakeholder collaboration is part of a new trend in environmental problem-solving that has unfolded in the 1990s (e.g., Long and Arnold 1995). For our purposes, "stakeholders" are defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman 1984, p. 46), and "stakes" are issues in which the parties may have some interest, which in turn, may affect their behavior (Miller and Lewis 1991). Lober (1997) posits that a "collaborative window" has opened in the global environmental arena where emerging problem recognition, public policy, organizational, and social forces are motivating stakeholders to collaborate to address ecological issues. Faced with intense political, social, and institutional pressures, organizations are likely to develop comprehensive and coordinated multiple stakeholder strategies for long-term survival (Hutt, Mokwa, and Shapiro 1986).

"Partnerships" between nations, government agencies, and the public and private sectors are becoming commonplace (Milne, Iyer, and Gooding-Williams 1996). This is due to the realization that environmental problems are complex, transcending governmental boundaries. Moreover, the disparity of power and expertise among international stakeholders requires collaboration to deal with problems effectively. Global concerns, such as ozone depletion and climate change, have encouraged coordinated international stakeholder plans of action from political bodies (cf., National Association of Attorneys-General 1990), international trade organizations (e.g., ISO 14000 series), and trade treaties (Levy 1997). Further, private sector social responsibility investment forums (e.g., Coalition of Environmentally Responsible Economies [CERES]) are raising corporate accountability through environmental performance disclosure and institutional investor-environmental group cooperation (Wasik 1996).

Environmentalist-business collaboration is perhaps the most unconventional outcome of the "collaborative window" because it involves formal cooperation between traditional adversaries (Stafford and Hartman 1996). Many environmental groups see diminishing returns from anti-business postures (Krupp 1994). Opinion polls indicate that citizens value a strong

economy in conjunction with environmental protection (Hemphill 1996), and many environmental groups are moderating their platforms to appear "mainstream" and encourage "dialogue" to instill deeper corporate environmental sensitivity (Mendleson and Polonsky 1995). Using the market system, corporate collaboration, green technology development, and stakeholder relations, environmental groups are becoming more savvy, recognizing that the success of their ecological agendas is dependent on how well they satisfy or accommodate the needs of various societal stakeholders, including business (Lober 1997; Mendleson and Polonsky 1995; Murphy and Bendell 1997; Polonsky 1996).

Aside from changing environmentalist attitudes, the non-economic nature of government policy is tempering as well. President Clinton's "Reinventing Government" program, for example, reframes regulations to consider science and cost-effectiveness (Hemphill 1996). New regulation, involving outcome-based performance objectives and market incentives, is an important component of this reform. Public policies that create economic incentives, such as tax breaks and tradable pollution permits, can marshal corporate financial, organizational, and creative resources for environmental and social benefit (Porter and van der Linde 1995; Stavins and Whitehead 1997). Within this flexible regulatory framework, industry is expected to enter into a new "social contract," working with stakeholders to address environmental, health, and safety issues (Lober 1997). Hemphill (1996) advocates leveraging reforms through environmentalist-business cooperation to establish "self-regulation."

In terms of commercial and enviropreneurial interests, marketing alliance research suggests that when firms lack internal resources or skills to pursue objectives, they frequently turn to external partners with needed capabilities (Bucklin and Sengupta 1993). In green alliances, environmental partners can provide firms technical assistance for marketing opportunities, such as new products (Milne, Iyer, and Gooding-Williams 1996). Further, environmental group endorsements and brand name licensing can position products as "green" and appeal directly (i.e., bridge) to ecologically-conscious customers, who are commercially

desirable owing to their affluence and high educational levels (Harris 1992). Likewise, environmental groups are increasingly attracted to cooperative corporate ventures for the funding opportunities affiliated with corporate sponsorships, licensing and product endorsement fees, and private and public grants (Stafford and Hartman 1998).

In sum, regulatory, organizational, social, and economic forces are motivating green alliances, which allow firms to have more control over environmental solutions. While some criticize the use of green alliances as a "sell out" to business interests (e.g., Dowie 1995), Jay Dee Hair of the National Wildlife Federation has framed his organization's industry collaboration by saying, "We're not selling out, we're buying in! (Dowie 1995, p. 75). Although a comprehensive overview of the antecedents and implications of environmentalist-business collaboration is beyond the scope of this paper (see Lober 1997; Murphy and Bendell 1997; Stafford and Hartman 1998), one of the significant advantages that environmental groups bring to partnering corporations is their influence and bridging capabilities to relevant stakeholders to support enviropreneurial initiatives. An extended strategic bridging framework is presented next to describe process contingencies and stakeholder engagement strategies for bridging agents in green alliances.

An Extended Strategic Bridging Process Framework

> Sharma, Vredenburg, and Westley (1994) define strategic bridging as being:
>
> "... characterized by the presence of a third party as a stakeholder, which is separate and distinct in terms of resources and personnel from the "island" organizations it serves to link ... Unlike mediators, bridgers enter collaborative negotiations to further their own ends as well as to serve as links among domain stakeholders" (p. 461).

In green alliances, an environmental group promotes its own agenda by working on behalf of its corporate partner and exercising its social credibility, networks, and environmental advocacy influence to span other societal stakeholders and advance its corporate partner's enviropreneurial

activities. Bridging agents hold a vision toward solving problems in contexts characterized by high interdependence and turbulence (Brown 1991). Additionally, because bridging agents retain their independence, they can negotiate bilaterally with a diverse range of stakeholders. This freedom allows them the flexibility and opportunity to develop stakeholder familiarity that may eventually break down social and institutional barriers that typically separate diverse stakeholders, especially in environmental problem domains. Brown (1991) observes:

> "As a central actor among diverse constituencies, the bridging organization potentially has great influence over events. It can be a conduit for ideas and innovations, a source of information, a broker of resources, a negotiator of deals, a conceptualizer of strategies, a mediator of conflicts" (p. 812).

Through their strategic bridging capabilities, environmental groups with many contacts and linkages to other social entities can wield extraordinary influence among sociopolitical and economic constituents (cf., Rowley 1997).

Despite their potential influence, bridging organizations are also subject to many conflicting demands from their diverse constituencies. As a central actor, a bridging agent is highly visible and vulnerable to institutional and resource dependency pressures from constituents and other actors with stakes in the problem domain (Brown 1991). For example, for an organization to adopt a bridging role, its members must understand the diverse, and sometimes conflicting political, social, and economic interests of the varied stakeholders it is trying to integrate. Bridging agents must find alternative mechanisms to connect organizations that may be widely disparate in wealth, power, culture, language, values, interests, and structural characteristics. The more divergent these organizations and the more focused the bridging agent's agenda, the more difficult the bridging problem becomes (Brown 1991). Moreover, a bridging agent needs to maintain support from other stakeholders long enough to accomplish its objectives. There is also a "need for the [bridging agent] to obtain "back-home" commitment from its constituents -- because it remains at all times an independent entity with its own agenda"

(Sharma, Vredenburg, and Westley 1994, p. 461). For environmental groups, any internal dissension among staff, volunteers, or members that arises from enviropreneurial programs that represent potentially "compromised" solutions to broader environmental problems will seriously weaken its strategic bridging ability.

Westley and Vredenburg (1991) first proposed the concept of strategic bridging in the context of environmentalist-business collaboration in their analysis of a failed green alliance between Pollution Probe and a Canadian grocery retailer, Loblaws. "In the case, [Pollution Probe] attempted to act as a strategic bridge by endorsing a line of "green" products" (Westley and Vredenburg 1991, p. 65). The partnership failed largely because of Greenpeace's public challenge of the endorsement and internal conflict among Pollution Probe's own staff regarding the corporate relationship. Pollution Probe failed to defend its agenda from Greenpeace's threat and to build "back home" support among its staff; in essence, Pollution Probe failed to bridge the retailer to the environmental constituents involved (see Westley and Vredenburg 1991). While Westley and Vredenburg focus their analysis on the bridging dynamics between the retailer and environmental community through Pollution Probe, we extend the scope of strategic bridging in our case analysis of the Greenpeace-Foron alliance to consider the broader range of stakeholders typically engaged in or affected by enviropreneurial activities initiated by green alliances. To be an effective bridge between the firm and other relevant environmental stakeholders, a bridging agent must successfully administer several processes summarized next.

Process Contingencies. Drawing from strategic bridging (Brown 1991; Westley and Vredenburg 1991), collaboration (Gray 1989), and stakeholder management theory (cf., Polonsky 1996), we propose an extended process framework that includes a set of interrelated contingencies necessary for bridging agents to link the firm to its other stakeholders. These are described as follows:

(1) *Plan of action for bridging activities:* The bridging agent's assessment of the problem domain and proposed agenda (e.g., the green alliance's enviropreneurial strategy) for addressing the problem domain.

(2) *Internal support for bridging activities:* The bridging agent's ability to cultivate commitment to bridging activities and strategies among internal staff, organizational members, and constituents.

(3) *Problem domain articulation among bridged external stakeholders:* The bridging agent's ability to advance an understanding of the problem domain and strategies to address the problem domain among other external stakeholders in the form of shared values, terminology, norms of interaction, and mapping of problem boundaries.

(4) *Balance of self-interests with bridged stakeholders' needs:* The bridging agent's ability to be flexible, compromising, and willing to consider the diverse needs of other linked social entities.

(5) *Coping with external threats:* The bridging agent's ability to recognize and address powerful social and political interests of other stakeholders that may challenge or attack its agenda.

(6) *Linkage endurance:* The bridging agent's ability to establish and maintain linkages to other social entities and stakeholders for a sufficient period of time to achieve its agenda.

Stakeholder Engagement Strategies. We further extend strategic bridging theory by articulating specific strategies that bridging agents may use to influence, engage, or cope with other stakeholders in the bridging process, incorporating stakeholder management concepts. Although an extensive overview of stakeholder theory is beyond the scope of this discussion (see Donaldson and Preston 1995; Mitchell, Agle, and Wood 1997; Rowley 1997), stakeholder management is based on the normative principle that an organization must take into account all

of those groups and individuals that can affect, or are affected by, the accomplishment of organizational purposes (Freeman 1984; Polonsky 1996). In other words, organizations must adjust their strategies to address other stakeholder interests. For formulating strategy, organizations may adapt themselves to meet stakeholder expectations, attempt to change or isolate stakeholder interests, or alter stakeholder relationships through a variety of engagement strategies (see Freeman 1984; Harrison and St. John 1996; Polonsky 1996; Savage, Nix, Whitehead, and Blair 1991).

Oliver (1991) provides a useful framework, integrating institutional and resource dependency theories, for understanding organizational responses to stakeholder pressures. Institutional theory is founded on the premise that an organization's survival requires it to conform to social pressures and norms of acceptable behavior. Conformance serves organizational self-interests for legitimacy, social support, efficiency, or control (cf., DiMaggio 1988). By contrast, a resource dependency perspective holds that firms proactively attempt to alter situations to make compliance less necessary; that is, organizations attempt to achieve autonomy and latitude to control the environment and resources in accordance with their organizational goals (cf., Pfeffer 1982). Oliver's integrated framework proposes a continuum of behaviors, ranging from passive compliance with stakeholder interests (institutional theory) to more aggressive situation defiance and manipulation (resource dependency theory), specifying conditions that will determine organizational actions to obtain resources/support or neutralize external pressures. The *source* of external pressures or needed resources create the organization's set of stakeholders (Rowley 1997). In short, Oliver (1991) proposes that organizations are likely to acquiesce and conform to stakeholder pressures if:

- stakeholder interests are perceived to be highly socially or economically desirable;
- the organization is highly dependent on the stakeholder;
- stakeholder interests are compatible with organizational goals;
- stakeholder interests are legally necessary;

- o the organization faces a high level of uncertainty in the operating environment; or
- o external stakeholders share common sentiment and are highly cohesive.

By contrast, firms are likely to engage in more proactive resistance to stakeholder demands if:

- o stakeholder interests are socially or economically threatening;
- o multiparty stakeholder interests are diverse and conflicting;
- o stakeholder interests threaten or constrain organizational resources, marketing choices, or autonomy; or
- o stakeholder demands are noncompulsory.

In the context of strategic bridging, bridging agents may be confronted with similar institutional and resource dependency pressures when attempting to garner stakeholder support or cope with stakeholder threats. We adapt Oliver's (1991) framework into a set of bridging agent strategies for engaging other stakeholders as follows:

(1) *Acquiescence:* The bridging agent attempts to procure support or minimize threat by consenting to or complying with another stakeholder it wishes to bridge. Bridger compliance is an active obedience to or adoption of another stakeholder's values and norms in the anticipation of achieving the bridger's self-serving objective, such as social acceptance or resource procurement. Acquiescence depends on the bridger's conscious intent to conform with those stakeholders it needs to bridge, its degree of awareness of stakeholder norms and expectations, and its perception that conformity will advance its agenda.

(2) *Compromise:* The bridging agent attempts to procure support or minimize threat by balancing another stakeholder's pressures with its internal needs, accommodating another stakeholder's interests, or outright bargaining with another stakeholder. Bargaining, in particular, involves an exchange of concessions to win the support of another stakeholder. Compromise is employed in the spirit of conforming to and accommodating another stakeholder's pressures and demands; in contrast to

acquiescence, however, compliance is negotiated, and bridging agents more actively promote their own agenda. In light of the need to balance bridger self-interests with the interests of other linked stakeholders, compromise is likely to play an important role, particularly when bridging organizations are subject to many conflicting demands from diverse or fragmented constituencies (Brown 1991; Gray 1989).

(3) *Appeal:* The bridging agent attempts to procure support or minimize threat by appealing to or lobbying another stakeholder through reason or emotion. An appeal strategy is used to change another stakeholder's expectations or efforts (Polonsky 1996). The bridger perceives that through the shaping of expectations, values, and perceptions, the other stakeholder will accept the bridger's agenda as being appropriate and mutually beneficial; that is, in supporting the bridger's activities, the other stakeholder will realize that additional, equally important objectives can be achieved (e.g., Pollution Probe's intention with its Loblaws' endorsement was to encourage consumers to buy "environmentally-friendly" products as a means for abating environmental degradation [Westley and Vredenburg 1991]). In this situation, the other stakeholder's interests are expected to become compatible with the bridging agent, and the bridger avoids having to acquiesce or compromise its agenda to win the targeted stakeholder's support.

(4) *Avoidance:* The bridging agent attempts to procure support or minimize threat by precluding the necessity to conform to another stakeholder through minimizing that stakeholder's power or changing the decision forum or rules that govern the relationship (Polonsky 1996). This may be accomplished through concealing motives, reducing communication to the other stakeholder, or altering goals, activities, or domain to avert the other stakeholder's interests. For example, a bridger may move its activities out of another stakeholder's sphere of influence to

"escape" (e.g., launching an enviropreneurial initiative in another country or industry). Avoidance is motivated by the desire to circumvent another stakeholder's demands that may conflict with the bridger's agenda.

(5) *Defiance:* The bridging agent attempts to procure support or minimize threat by more actively resisting another stakeholder's interests through dismissing, challenging, or attacking that stakeholder's position. The objective is to nullify the other stakeholder's influence. Dismissing or ignoring the other stakeholder's expectations may be feasible when a bridger's agenda conflicts with that stakeholder's interests and enforcement of that stakeholder's demands is low. Bridgers may contest or attack another stakeholder's interests when the challenge can be reinforced by rationality, if it can enhance the integrity of the bridger, or if the issue is particularly discrediting for the other stakeholder among others (e.g., Greenpeace protested Pollution Probe's endorsement program to bridge public support for its own environmental agenda [Westley and Vredenburg 1991]). Thus, defiance may be used against one stakeholder to garner the support of others. This is consistent with Rowley's (1997) view that organizations need to consider how their actions impact the dynamics of interdependent "networks" of stakeholder relationships rather than simply individual organization-stakeholder (or bridger-stakeholder) relationships.

(6) *Coercion:* The bridging agent attempts to procure support or minimize threat by exerting power and domination to nullify another stakeholder's interest or will. Coercion is a more actively aggressive response to another stakeholder's pressure than influence or defiance strategies because the bridger's objective is to dominate rather than merely shape or neutralize the other stakeholder's interests (cf., Oliver 1991). Bridgers actively coerce or control another stakeholder by redefining institutional and social norms, manipulating the allocation of resources, or

building coalitions of others to express disapproval of that stakeholder's interests (cf. Savage, *et al.* 1991).

In sum, strategic bridgers can engage other stakeholders by either conforming to or resisting those stakeholders' expectations, and resistance may take on varying degrees of aggressiveness. Because problem domains are complex and dynamic, strategic bridgers may employ multiple engagement strategies simultaneously to address diverse stakeholders. Moreover, bridgers may adjust their levels of aggressiveness to engage other stakeholders as bridger agendas unfold.

On balance, a bridging agent in a green alliance has two roles in its partner's activities: (1) the bridger *is* a stakeholder with an interest in its partner's behavior, providing technical expertise; and (2) the bridger is a *link* to other stakeholders and a defender against external threats, indirectly affecting its partner's outcomes (Polonsky 1996). Next, we summarize the green alliance between Greenpeace and Foron in the enviropreneurial marketing of an ozone-safe, hydrocarbon refrigerator. Particular attention is drawn to the strategic bridges Greenpeace cultivated to other stakeholders on behalf of its corporate partner, and these bridges are analyzed with regard to our proposed extended strategic bridging process framework.

Greenpeace-Foron Alliance: Case Overview

In 1992, Wolfgang Lohbeck, Head of the Atmosphere Campaign of Greenpeace Germany, championed "Greenfreeze" refrigeration technology, an environmentally-friendly hydrocarbon, as a substitute for Freon, a leading CFC damaging to the ozone (Beste 1994; Kalke 1994). Greenpeace's motivation derived from the 1987 Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer mandated elimination of most forms of CFCs by the end of the 1990s. Scientists from the Hygiene Institute, Dortmund, developed the hydrocarbon technology as an energy-efficient and economically-viable alternative, and Greenpeace believed the technology could be used to green the entire German refrigeration industry (Beste 1994). Although the technology had been around since the 1930s, it had not been considered by appliance makers

because of its potential flammability. While modern refrigeration advances had eliminated this risk, major German appliance manufacturers were not interested in an old-fashioned, widely-available technology that could not be patented (Vidal 1992). The favored alternative was hydrofluorocarbon-134a (HFC-134a); while it did not destroy the ozone, it did contribute to global warming (Kalke 1994). Greenpeace's Greenfreeze technology neither added to the warming dilemma nor destroyed stratospheric ozone. Nevertheless, most western companies were heavily invested in HFC-134a, and until their investment capital had been amortized, there was little incentive to use alternatives (Beste 1994).

Only the former East German manufacturer DKK Scharfenstein, later renamed Foron Household Appliances, was willing to experiment with the hydrocarbon technology. Foron was already using a CFC-free insulation of pentane-propelled polystyrol in its refrigerators, but was relying on distant ex-USSR sources for HFC-134a. Like many former East German firms after reunification, Foron verged on bankruptcy due to state-run obsolescence, Western competition, and the currency union. The plant came under the control of the German privatization agency, the Treuhand. Its financial condition was such that if investors could not be secured, the firm would be dissolved. With its engineers eager to save their jobs, Foron agreed to work with Greenpeace as a last resort to save its manufacturing operation (Walsh 1995). Lohbeck convinced Foron engineers that incorporation of Greenfreeze technology into their appliances would give Foron a competitive edge in the market (Beste 1994).

After extensive talks, in July, 1992, Greenpeace granted Foron $17,000 to produce ten prototype hydrocarbon refrigerators. By July 13, however, the Treuhand announced that Foron was to be dissolved after an acquisition offer from Bosch/Siemens was withdrawn (Beste 1994). Greenpeace and Foron hastily organized a press conference for July 16 at which the first model of the new refrigerator, produced virtually overnight, was to have its debut (Beste 1994; Kalke 1994). When the Treuhand learned of the partners' intentions, it informed Foron that a press conference and any publicity about the Greenfreeze refrigerator was forbidden. In defiance, the

partners proceeded with the press conference, and Greenpeace launched a grassroots advertising campaign (Kalke 1994). Greenpeace gambled that publicity about the eco-refrigerator would build initial public interest and support to change the Treuhand's intentions. More than 200 people from the media attended, including the Treuhand representatives, and after some hours of debate before the press, the Treuhand conferred its support for the Greenfreeze project (Beste 1994). Siegfried Schlottig, head of public relations at Foron, remarked at the time that Foron would not have existed without Greenpeace: "Their energy helped us checkmate the Treuhand" (Kalke 1994, p. 22). The Treuhand eventually gave Foron substantial financial assistance and support in securing private investors. In March, 1993, Foron's "Clean Cooler," using Greenfreeze technology, made its market debut (Walsh 1995).

Alarmed western German chemical and refrigerator makers, however, launched a disinformation media campaign through the press, warning retailers that Foron's Clean Cooler was "an unacceptable danger in the home" and "a potential bomb in the kitchen" and that Greenfreeze was "energy inefficient" (Vidal 1992). Letters were sent to German manufacturers and retailers claiming that the technology was unproven and needed to be assessed over a long period. Greenpeace was charged as being irresponsible and obstructing constructive efforts to find feasible environmental solutions (*Air Conditioning, Heating & Refrigeration News* 1993). Admittedly, the hastily-developed first Clean Cooler prototype featured at the first press conference appeared to be energy inefficient, but the problem was quickly rectified. Further, Greenpeace's grassroots publicity and product endorsement generated over 70,000 orders within the first three months of the campaign (*Greenpeace Press Release* 1992). One by one, the negative charges were reduced or dropped as Greenpeace's advocacy motivated the government and scientific community to test for product safety. Soon they aligned with Foron and the Clean Cooler, against the chemical lobby. Later, Foron's Clean Cooler won the German Environment Ministry's prestigious "Blue Angel" award, in addition to other awards and certifications. By 1994, all German refrigerator manufacturers had either switched to Greenfreeze technology or

were planning to convert, fulfilling Greenpeace's environmental goal of eliminating CFCs in refrigerators.

Foron and Greenpeace were not surprised when the west German appliance manufacturers switched to the hydrocarbon technology (Kalke 1994). For Greenpeace, the industry's adoption of its Greenfreeze technology was the realization of its primary campaign objective of eliminating CFCs and HFCs in German refrigerators. With the marketing experience gained from the Foron alliance, Greenpeace introduced the hydrocarbon technology to China, India, and other developing countries (Beste 1994). Greenpeace literally gave the technology to willing enviropreneurs, convinced that Greenfreeze, if readily available, would be adopted widely in the developing world. In China, in particular, Greenpeace enacted bridges among German appliance manufactures, the World Bank, and the Chinese government to transfer technology and finances for converting Chinese refrigerator factories to hydrocarbons (*Greenpeace Business* 1993).

For Foron, however, the German industry's adoption of Greenfreeze presented a grim marketing reality. Foron lost its competitive advantage as it was no longer the exclusive marketer of environmentally-responsible refrigerators. By late 1994, Eberhard Gunther, managing director of Foron, announced, "We want to stand our ground with intelligent, innovative, and above all, ecological appliances" (Kalke 1994, p. 24). *Energy-efficiency* became Foron's enviropreneurial focus, and an innovative cylindrical refrigerator was developed; the smaller ratio between the refrigerator's volume and its surface significantly reduced the appliance's energy consumption (Kalke 1994). Despite these innovations, Foron's line of Clean Coolers did not rescue the firm from its lingering financial problems, and Foron's market share eroded as more sophisticated, rival hydrocarbon refrigerators appeared on the market.

In 1995, Samsung entered into negotiations to buy the company, but bowed out after six months citing that Foron did not fit with its planned European strategy (Handelsblatt 1995). Shortly after, Koc of Turkey began acquisition negotiations, only to withdraw the following year

due to Foron's poor sales and financial situation (Handelsblatt 1996a). Greenpeace had already abandoned the company to concentrate on its global Greenfreeze campaign, and Foron lacked the financial resources and marketing know-how to establish itself independently. In March, 1996, Foron declared bankruptcy (Die Welt 1996), and by December, its refrigerator division was eventually acquired by Dutch ATAG Kitchen Group (Handelsblatt 1996b).

Case Analysis

There are a number of important bridging outcomes with regard to the Greenpeace-Foron alliance's enviropreneurial strategy, namely how Greenpeace (1) assisted the ailing firm technologically, (2) defended Foron from government and competitive threats, (3) marketed Foron's Clean Coolers, (4) coerced industry adoption of Greenfreeze, and (5) abandoned Foron. The Figure presents the dynamic stakeholder environment facing the Greenpeace-Foron alliance, illustrating the primary stakeholder relationships, their influences, and strategic bridges enacted by Greenpeace. Our analysis centers on how Greenpeace's actions affected partnership outcomes with regard to our proposed strategic bridging process contingencies and stakeholder engagement strategies.

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Plan of action for bridging activities. Bridging agents need to carefully evaluate problem domain constituents, consider different scenarios of stakeholder behaviors and feasible stakeholder engagement strategies, and adjust responses as initiatives unfold (cf. Freeman 1984; Polonsky 1996). With the signing of the Montreal Protocol in 1987, Greenpeace Germany set out to eliminate CFCs and HFCs from the German refrigeration industry. Compared to Greenpeace's traditional activist tactics, the Greenfreeze campaign was unique. Wolfgang Lohbeck, who spearheaded the campaign, believed Greenpeace would have greater credibility in the industry if the environmental group could propose a feasible alternative technological solution rather than if it simply protested the use of CFCs or HFCs. When Germany's dominant

appliance manufacturers refused to consider the alternative technology, however, Greenpeace turned to make enviropreneurial in-roads with Foron to demonstrate Greenfreeze's viability. "For the first time, Greenpeace attained its goals through technological discussion," noted Lohbeck, "... we didn't limit ourselves to just saying no or to pointing out weaknesses" (Best 1994, p. 26). In the end, however, Lohbeck admitted:

> "... it wasn't all planned the way it turned out. It was a piece of luck that this firm was there, that it was up to its neck in troubles, that Germany reunified, that the Treuhand had such a ridiculous policy, that DKK Scharfenstein still had its own compressor production and could develop the propane/butane prototype on its own. It was a piece of luck that we could win one company over to our way of thinking and that this firm could turn facts quickly into marketable realities" (Beste 1994, p. 29).

Greenpeace was savvy by seizing opportunities and building stakeholder linkages, which ultimately led to industry adoption of the technology. The Greenfreeze campaign was Greenpeace's first experience with corporate collaboration and a market-based approach to advance its environmental agenda, and it demonstrated that such enviropreneurial initiatives warrant overt stakeholder bridging and management (cf., Menon and Menon 1997).

Internal support for bridging activities. Environmentalist-business collaboration has been a controversial phenomenon within the environmental community (cf., Dowie 1995; Murphy and Bendell 1997). Close business ties can appear "improper" in light of an environmental group's traditional role as an industry "watch dog," especially among group members and financial supporters. Considering Greenpeace's traditional protest-orientation, the enviropreneurial Greenfreeze campaign requiring Greenpeace to work on behalf of Foron was a politically risky maneuver. Group leaders issued numerous statements to "educate" the public, the environmental community, and presumably its own membership about its new corporate eco-strategies. International Director Paul Guilding described the group's enviropreneurial actions as a means of "interfering in markets" to advance environmentalism (Levene 1994). Greenpeace

announced it would "create new alliances with sectors such as business and industries" (*Business & the Environment* 1994), advocating technological solutions to environmental problems (Corder 1997). To clarify its new political stance, spokesperson Richard Titchen declared:

> "We won't stop the actions that get much attention in the press and that have made Greenpeace famous, but now that people and companies have become more conscious of environmental problems, we consider it more effective to demonstrate solutions that are actually viable to industry" (*Business & the Environment* 1994).

Hartman and Stafford (1997) note that many environmental groups engage in both cooperative and adversarial tactics with businesses simultaneously to "encourage" corporate compliance to environmental initiatives and to preserve credibility among members and the public. In the Greenfreeze campaign, Greenpeace promoted the environmental refrigerator initially to its own members (through an *appeal* strategy), garnering over 70,000 pre-production orders within the first three months of the campaign (*Greenpeace Press Release* 1992). Hence, Greenpeace was able to secure broad support for its activities with Foron amongst both its own group and the environmental community.

Problem domain articulation among bridged external stakeholders. Although Greenpeace did not convince Germany's dominant appliance manufacturers of Greenfreeze's viability at first, it was successful in articulating an agenda for replacing CFCs and HFCs to three other key stakeholders: (1) the scientific community, (2) the media, and (3) the public. Its *appeals* won their support, which in turn, ignited a chain reaction among other stakeholders. As shown in the Figure, consumer interest in the Clean Coolers stimulated demand by appliance dealers for Greenfreeze refrigerators, and the media attention motivated the scientific community to align with Foron's technology. The scientific community's approval led the German Environmental Ministry to bestow its coveted "Blue Angel" award to Foron's product. Savage, *et al.* (1991) note that the building of stakeholder coalitions in support of an initiative can leverage other more resistant stakeholders (in this instance, other appliance manufacturers) to

acquiesce. When Foron's competitors recognized shifting social expectations and market demand, they adopted the hydrocarbon technology and fulfilled Greenpeace's environmental agenda. In essence, Greenpeace *coerced* Foron's competitors through successfully articulating its agenda among problem domain stakeholders to build coalition pressure.

Balance of self-interests with bridged stakeholders' needs. Strategic bridging infers that bridger compromise is necessary, particularly when other, divergent stakeholder interests must be linked (cf., Westley and Vredenburg 1991). By contrast, in the events surrounding the Greenpeace-Foron alliance, Greenpeace did not face diverging or conflicting stakeholders, reducing the need to compromise to build linkages. In this case, domain stakeholders divided rather swiftly into two camps, those who supported Greenfreeze (e.g., stakeholders with enviropreneurial interests) and those who did not (e.g., Foron's competitors). The broad support for Foron's products created social and market pressure for the industry to adopt Greenfreeze. Conceivably, if other environmentally-friendly refrigeration technologies were available, Greenpeace might have needed to bridge a more fragmented set of domain stakeholders (e.g., diverging consumer preferences and scientific opinions) to promote Greenfreeze; multiple alternative solutions would have complicated the problem domain, and bridger compromise might have been necessary to obtain stakeholder support. The absence of other viable alternatives to Greenfreeze, therefore, contributed to Greenpeace's ability to resist *compromise*.

Prior to the Foron partnership, Greenpeace did face one noteworthy opportunity to compromise, but refused. Claiming Greenfreeze was at that point infeasible, Mike Harris, a public relations manager for ICI Fluorochemicals, wrote to Greenpeace supporters:

> "Things will happen eventually... Can we all go back to the laboratory and spend the next ten years working on Greenpeace's ideas to see if they can be made to work in practice?" (Vidal 1992, p. 2)

Greenpeace *could* have viewed this entreaty as a concession, and in turn, moved to compromise its desire to see ICI convert to Greenfreeze immediately. Greenpeace, however, interpreted the

communique as disingenuous, sensing that ICI and other industry members were more concerned about recouping profits from HFC-134a rather than seriously consider Greenpeace's ecologically-preferable, but unpatentable alternative. Hence, Greenpeace dismissed the proposal, convinced that once proven, Greenfreeze's superiority could win immediate, broad market support. "We had something to offer," noted Lohbeck, "a specific environmentally-friendly product which was technically superior to boot, and that was what made us invincible" (Beste 1994, p. 29). Lohbeck's conviction to *defy* proved accurate.

The case suggests that two contingencies may allow a bridger to resist compromise when attempting to win stakeholder support: (1) the absence of other viable alternative solutions or positions within a problem domain that would fragment other stakeholders, and (2) the bridger's ability to discredit the targeted stakeholder's position among other broad constituencies (cf., Oliver 1991).

Coping with external threats. Defending one's agenda from opposing stakeholders is another critical strategic bridging task. Aside from Foron's competitors, Greenpeace and Foron faced another powerful external threat, the Treuhand. Greenpeace's rapid manipulation of the Treuhand through activism is perhaps the most pivotal bridging outcome of the case. Without it, Greenfreeze might never have been introduced in the marketplace. Racing against a liquidation time-table, Greenpeace and Foron fought a war of nerves with the Treuhand who tried to block the project. In *defiance*, Greenpeace launched an advertising campaign for the eco-refrigerator and instigated a press conference/product demonstration, both forbidden by the government agency (Kalke 1994). Before the assembled press, Greenpeace was able to discredit the Treuhand's intention to liquidate Foron, which ultimately *coerced* the Treuhand into allowing the Greenpeace-Foron project to proceed.

Defiance and *coercion* strategies against the Treuhand were appropriate for Greenpeace as the privatization agency's intentions imminently threatened Greenpeace's opportunity to market Greenfreeze. Further, Greenpeace's expertise in activism gave the group significant

bargaining power. Greenpeace was beyond the sphere of the Treuhand's legitimate regulatory authority, and the agency could not enforce its will onto the environmental group to *compromise*. More importantly, Greenpeace was able to stage a public attack on the Treuhand's position, generating awareness of its Greenfreeze agenda. Greenpeace made its insurrection a virtue, garnering support from others, and the threat of social disapproval for the Treuhand forced the agency to *acquiesce* (cf., Oliver 1991). Greenpeace's effective coping with external threats contributed significantly to its Greenfreeze campaign's success.

Linkage endurance. Strategic bridgers need to maintain their linkages with stakeholders long enough to achieve bridging objectives. Greenpeace was able to build a supportive coalition to achieve its own objective (industry adoption of Greenfreeze), but not for its partner's objective (market and financial stability). Foron's inability to leverage Greenpeace's influence among private investors before industry-wide acceptance of Greenfreeze ultimately led to the appliance manufacturer's bankruptcy. This outcome highlights an important managerial implication concerning the alignment of corporate and environmental objectives in green alliances, discussed next.

Managerial Implications

From a commercial perspective, perhaps the most ironic outcome of the Greenpeace-Foron case is Greenpeace's exit of the exclusive partnership after the industry adopted the ozone-safe technology; without Greenpeace, Foron lost its competitive advantage. The outcome of the green alliance was a victory for the environment, but not for the struggling marketer. This illustrates the complexities of *goal compatibility* between environmental groups and firms in green alliances for strategic bridging and collaboration (cf., Gray 1989). Over time, as partners' objectives are met, change, or diverge, the strategic bridging partner may become less willing to broker and negotiate linkages between the firm and other domain stakeholders, potentially jeopardizing the firm's competitive advantage (Westley and Vredenburg 1991). Because a

strategic bridger is motivated to collaborate and engage other stakeholders on behalf of its corporate partner through *forwarding its own agenda* (Westley and Vredenburg 1991), once its agenda is met or is no longer being served through collaboration, the bridger's commitment to its corporate partner will lessen.

Fundamentally, environmentalists and businesses hold diverging, if not conflicting, *terminal (or end-state) values* (cf., Rokeach 1973). For environmentalists, ecological goals are foremost, whereas for businesses, profit and market objectives are paramount for survival. Green alliances represent lower-level *instrumental (or means) values* for participants -- potentially desirable mechanisms for achieving their separate and unique terminal goals (cf., Lober 1997). Green alliances may be merely a common means for environmentalists and businesses to reach ultimately incompatible agendas. If a corporate partner has not achieved its terminal objectives before its environmental partner has reached its own, discontinuation of the relationship can place the firm's linkages to other critical stakeholders at risk. Though speculative, it is conceivable that Greenpeace *would* have assisted Foron in bridging and procuring necessary investors (possibly through *appeal* strategies) if establishing consumer-acceptance for Clean Coolers had taken longer or had the industry delayed its adoption of Greenfreeze; either scenario would have required Greenpeace to continue helping its cash-strapped partner by bridging necessary stakeholders, including investors, for initial product success. Perhaps Foron's products were *too successful* in that immediate market demand signaled competitors of Greenfreeze's market opportunities and constrained the time Foron needed to leverage Greenpeace's bridging capabilities to investors and remain competitive. Exclusively helping Foron after the industry-wide conversion to Greenfreeze was no longer instrumental to Greenpeace's agenda.

Corporate strategists need to monitor their own versus their environmental partner's progress toward goal fulfillment in enviropreneurial initiatives. Relying solely on a bridging agent's ability to establish a market advantage may be strategically myopic if competitors can

easily "copy" or improve upon the corporate partner's differential advantage (as in the case of Greenfreeze technology). Further, as demonstrated in the Greenpeace-Foron case, environmental groups are most interested in enacting industry-wide change, and the results of a green alliance with one firm are likely to be shared with competitors (Stafford and Hartman 1996). From a strategic perspective, corporate strategists should view green alliances as avenues for "early-mover" advantages where the firm can capitalize on an enviropreneurial opportunity before its competition (Porter and van der Linde 1995). Enviropreneurial initiatives that lead to complex eco-efficiencies, patented technologies, and products that are valued by customers and difficult for competitors to copy could provide firms a more sustainable competitive advantage compared to simple eco-processes or unpatentable products (cf., Barney 1991; Hart 1997). Such outcomes, however, would not meet environmental partner interests.

Conclusions and Research Directions

On balance, the Greenpeace-Foron alliance demonstrates the potential strategic advantages environmental groups can bring to corporate partners in terms of their ecological expertise and their strategic bridging capability to critical societal stakeholders for the development and marketing of green products. Compared to Westley and Vredenburg's (1991) case analysis of the Pollution Probe-Loblaws alliance, a partnership that suffered from internal dissension and external attacks on its legitimacy, our study illustrates some of the challenges that strategic bridging poses with regard to goal alignment and the timing of goal achievement between partners. Future research might further extend our framework by specifying contingencies to explain when an environmental partner's bridging motives and actions may positively or negatively affect its corporate partner's strategic position. This would contribute to the understanding of building mutually satisfying green alliance relationships. Additionally, effective strategic bridging warrants the construction of alternative "scenarios" to identify problem domain stakeholders, forecast stakeholder behaviors and interactions, and consider

stakeholder engagement strategies and outcomes (cf., Freeman 1984). Scenarios, hypothetical views of how the world may look in the future, allow corporate planners to consider strategic responses to likely opportunities and threats and potential outcomes (Schoemaker 1995). Incorporation of scenario analysis with regard to problem domain stakeholders could further elaborate strategic bridging both in theory and practice.

Although the role of strategic bridging has typically been ascribed to non-governmental, voluntary social-change organizations, such as environmental groups (Brown 1991; Westley and Vredenburg 1991), Sharma, *et al.* (1994) note that private firms can be strategic bridging agents, and research is needed to examine the potential bridges a firm might provide environmental groups and other stakeholders for environmental sustainability. The Greening of Industry Network has designated "partnerships" as a central research priority (Schot, Brand, and Fischer 1997). While this paper has focused only on the strategic bridging aspects of partnerships, a variety of other partnership issues warrant consideration including motivations, collaborative forms, contingencies facilitating partnership building, changes in production and consumption, and collaborative learning processes (see Schot, Brand, and Fischer 1997). Because environmentalist-business collaborations are new phenomena, involving complex stakeholder, relationship, and social processes, case research may be the most appropriate means for initial investigations of these issues (cf., Lober 1997; Yin 1994). Considering the increasing acceptance among environmentalists and firms to collaborate, researchers need to more fully examine collaborative processes if the environmental, economic, and social potential of green alliances is to be maximized.

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