

**Towards contextualising stakeholder relationship indicators for corporate-  
community relationships**

## **ABSTRACT**

*In circumstances that are substantially different from the norm, new ways of thinking about these alternative contexts are necessary. In the context of corporate governance and corporate social investment (CSI) the relationship between corporate donors and community organisations is regarded as important, but the indicators used to describe this relationship need revisiting. This article argues that context-specific indicators are needed to bring the true nature of the corporate-community-relationship to the fore and also suggest indicators that could be both rigorous and relevant in describing the relationship. In an interpretative, qualitative exploration of data from individual interviews it was revealed that well-known relationship indicators were inadequate to describe the relationship between corporate donors and community organisations accurately. The article could serve as the first steps in reviewing stakeholder relationship indicators from organisational communication research and adapting these indicators to a specific context.*

## **KEYWORDS**

*Stakeholder relationships, community organisations, corporate social investment, corporate governance, King III, social development, communication for development*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The stakeholder relationship approach is well established within the corporate communication domain (Hon and Grunig 1999, 2; Rawlins 2006, 13). Proof of the stakeholder theory's maturity in corporate communication research can be found in the existence of prolific and rigorous tools for defining, describing and measuring stakeholder relationship, developed by leading stakeholder relationship theorists including Grunig (2002), Hon and Grunig (1999) and Ledingham and Bruning (1998).

Despite the importance of a stakeholder approach in both corporate governance requirements and corporate communications, questions can be asked about the resiliency of stakeholder relationship indicators in the context of corporate-community-relationships in the developing society of South Africa. Community organisations in South Africa do not fit the blueprint of corporate stakeholders in the western world and the requirements of corporate governance and CSI practices further contextualise this specific relationship. The context of corporate-community relationships determines the relationship indicators to some extent and this must be reflected when describing these relationships.

It could thus be argued that due to the unique nature of corporate-community-relationships, the existing relationship indicators lack relevance for this specific relationship.

The main aim of this article is thus to redefine the constructs evaluating the relationship between social development community organisations and their donors. Specifically, the focus of this article is briefly outline the theoretical underpinnings of stakeholder relationship theory that guided the exploration; report on the findings of this enquiry and to describe the context of the corporate-community-relationship by referring to both the findings and literature on the context.

## **INDICATORS OF STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CORPORATE COMMUNICATION DOMAIN**

Freeman and Reed (1983, 91) formulated a double pronged definition of stakeholders by claiming that they could be groups / individuals that influence the attainment of organisational goals on which organisational survival depends while the survival of these groups / individuals also depend on their relations with the organisation. The basic argument of the relationship perspective is thus that the organisations must realise that they influence the lives of the stakeholders and *vice versa*. When both the parties realise their influence and dependency, a relationship emerges. This relationship can be described by the perceptions the parties have of each other (Bruning and Ledingham 1999, 159).

The indicators of reciprocity, trust, credibility, mutual legitimacy, investment, cooperation, shared goals, interdependence, adaptation, summative constructs, structural and social bonds and passion were added by Grunig, Grunig and Ehling (1992, 83).

One of the most used relationship indicators are the two types and four relationship indicators formulated by Hon and Grunig (1999, 3). The simplicity of Hon and Grunig's indicators, their solid reputation for award winning research in relationship measurement (IPR, 1999) motivated the selection of this model to be the conceptual starting point in the enquiry.

### **Exchange versus communal relationship**

For a relationship to be categorised as an exchange relationship the two parties in the relationship expect a benefit from their relations (Grunig 2002, 1). In contrast, communal relationships are formed because parties care about one another's welfare (Grunig 2002, 1). Unlike the strategic perspective of exchange relationships, communal relationships are in line with post-modern thinking where non-material dimensions are integrated with material ones (Burger 2009, 188).

### **Control mutuality**

Control mutuality represents the level of agreement regarding who holds a position of higher power and influence in the relationship (Hon and Grunig 1999, 3). The issue of power sharing has been identified as important indicator of stakeholder relationships by a variety of researchers (Jahansoozi 2002, 8; Ledingham and Bruning 1998, 58). Power imbalances are not uncommon, but some degree of control must be in the hands of both parties and they should be in agreement about this power balance.

### **Trust**

Trust is the relationship indicator upon which most relationship authors agree (Grunig 2002, 2; Jahansoozi, 2002, 15; Ledingham and Bruning 1998, 55; Ledingham 2003, 188-189). Grunig (1999, 3) operationalised the highly complex issue of trust, for the purpose of describing stakeholder relationships, as consisting of *integrity*, *dependability* and *competence*. Integrity refers to the belief that the other party is fair and just. Dependability indicates the conviction that the other party will make good on promises and competence implies that there is a belief that the other party has the ability to do what it says it will (Grunig 1999, 3).

## **Commitment**

Hon and Grunig (1999, 3) summarised commitment to be the extent of the parties' perception that the relationship is worth the energy spent to maintain and develop the relationship. Various other researchers also refer to commitment as an important relationship indicator (Bruning and Galloway 2003, 316; Ledingham and Bruning 1998, 55).

## **Satisfaction**

The extent, to which parties feel fulfilled because their positive convictions and expectations in the relationship are fulfilled, is known as the level of satisfaction in the relationship (Hon and Grunig 1999, 3). Enforced positive feelings then lead both parties to engage with each other positively and maintain and promote this relationship.

Guided by stakeholder relationship literature the enquiry reported in this article include the additional two indicators of *shared goals and expectations* and *time and resource constraints* as these indicators were prevalent in highly regarded publications on stakeholder relationships (Jahansoozi 2002, 8; Ledingham and Bruning 1998, 58; Ledingham 2003, 188), but not included in Hon and Grunig's (1999) model.

## **Shared goals and expectations**

This indicator is added to the Hon and Grunig (1999) model, for the sake of this enquiry, because donor expectation and the conflict between profit-goals and CSI regularly feature in governance and funding literature.

## **Time and resource constraints**

Short time frames and resource constraints on the side of the donors are regularly cited as being challenges for funding relationships and indicators of the state of the relationship (Rajesh 2000, 327; Smillie 1997, 567). Also mentioned by Ledingham (2003, 189), is the importance of the participants' opinions of time orientation. The perceptions of the influence of resource and time constraints on the relationship were also included in the investigation reported on in this article.

With the rigorous and popular relationship indicators of mainly Hon and Grunig (1999) as background, the research procedure in which these indicators were constructs is discussed.

## **EXPLORING CORPORATE-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**

The research for this article was conducted as part of an interpretative study that explored the perceptions of the various role-players in the CSI-environment regarding the relationship between corporate donors and recipient community organisations. The study highlighted possible problems in the theoretical basis of the measuring instrument used to analyse stakeholder relationships when applied in this specific context.

The sample was drawn purposively to include participants from all three groups (corporate donors, community organisations and CSI-consultants). The selection criteria were simple; participants should represent a corporate company, a social development community organisation or a CSI-consultant who are active in South Africa and have self-proclaimed experience on the relationships between corporate donors and the community organisations. Six participants were interviewed (two corporate participants, two community-participants and two consultants). The sample is small and it was not intended to draw inferences on how it compares with the target population (see Lindlof and Taylor 2002, 129).

For the partially structured interviews the measuring instrument designed by Grunig (2002) was adapted to include issues typically of organisations working in the social development sector, namely: expectations and time- and resource constraints. The data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis of the verbal transcriptions of the responses.

## **CORPORATE-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS IN CONTEXT**

The findings and resulting theoretical discussion are organised to report on the different contextual dynamics that frame the relationship between corporate donors and recipient community organisations.

### **The milieu of community organisations**

The South African society is one of multicultural abundance with eleven official languages and many more dialects and cultural groupings (South Africa info 2009). South Africans also live with some harsh realities; unemployment and poverty (Smith 2007), low levels of literacy and education (UNICEF 2008) and lacking government response to social ills (CASE 2003). Most of these social deficits are a result of South Africa's apartheid-past and many a corrective measure are in place in an attempt to bridge the socio-economic divides that are reality in South African society.

Due to government's limited ability to address all social problems (Fourie and Meyer 2010, 8), the private sector and civil society are required to fill this void (R.Rossouw, pers.comm). This brings the discussion to how the community organisation fits into the bigger societal context.

### ***Community organisations are needs-driven***

Community organisations, activities are driven by the needs in the recipient communities and the participation of those communities is vital for sustainability and success (Du Plessis and Steyn 2005, 4; Huesca 2002, 502; Jacobson and Kolluri 1999, 268).

Besides the complex and diverse environment in which community organisations function (Helmig, Jegers and Lapsley 2004, 101), they also face other challenges including donor dependence, mounting competition for limited resources and strains caused by the non-market nature of a community organisation.

### ***Community organisations are donor-dependent***

Financial sustainability is one of the biggest challenges facing community organisations in the development sector and therefore also contributes to defining the context specific relationship. Their dependence on donors for financial sustainability decreases a community organisations autonomy and the resulting demands from donors adds to the list of priorities for the management of the organisation (Byrne and Sahay 2007, 71; Helmig et al. 2004, 107; Hodge and Piccolo 2005, 175).

### ***Community organisations are not market-driven***

Another distinctive challenge community organisations have to face is their nonmarket nature and the difficult task of participating in the economy while deviating from the standard economic model (Helmig et al. 2004, 111). Apart from not distributing resources to owners and not having access to equity capital, the community organisation cannot depend on supply and demand to drive their survival. In the case of social development needs of a community, it is rather the demand (for social development by the community organisations) that drives the supply (intervention).

## **Contextual realities for relationship indicators**

The South African social development environment and the specific characteristics and challenges of community organisations in South Africa are clearly noticeable in the responses from important role players. The relationship indicators that are interpreted through the lens of context include control mutuality, trust and also time and resource constraints.

### ***Implicit power imbalance***

Regarding mutual control in the relationship, it could be concluded that community organisations voluntarily hand control to the corporate donors instead of striving for power balance in the relationship. This power surrender is not necessarily out of free will, but an attempt to secure further funding, thus a move from the community organisation to survive rather than claiming power in their relationship with their donors.

This is confirmed by both participants from the corporate sector as well the community organisations as is evident from the quotations taken from the interviews:

*It is donor-driven development - They sit in their offices and decide on what they think will work well and then they just drop it on you and say that this is what you must do if you want our funding – community organisation participant*

*We do what they say - they say jump, we ask how high... We do not have any control as an NGO; we do not even try to have – community organisation participant*

*There is a certain degree of control due to the agreements that we put in place which are legally binding – corporate participant*

The frank responses from participants representing community organisations and the confident tone in the response from the corporate participant is in line with the theoretical notion that community organisations are dependent on donors (corporate donors in this case) for survival and that this dependence partly defines the relationship between them.

### ***Perceptions of incompetence***

*Trust* is the second relationship indicator that is interpreted specifically to suit this context. Questions to the participants about the perceived competence (an element of trust) of the parties in the relationship were answered by a strong view that the corporate donors are generally competent while community organisations are generally incompetent. A lack of competence on the side of community organisations is part of each participant's perspective. A lack of skills, resources, access to technology, dependence on volunteers and exposure to environmental variables out of their control are of the noted reasons. These comments illustrate the point:

*It is sometimes circumstances that do not allow them (community organisations) to deliver on promises. One example that I can give you is [name of community organisation], they depend on government to give them money, they could not pay their staff and the staff went on strike. They are not always in control of whether they can deliver as promised – consultant participant*

*We work with local people in our company that also do not have the capacity. Corporate companies really do not understand that, they think that we should run just as smoothly as a department in their company where they pay very high salaries – community organisation participant*

Trust seems to be an important indicator of this relationship and defines it appropriately in part, but it seems that the element of *competence* is interpreted within context of the community organisations set of operational realities and cannot be properly reflected by the Hon and Grunig (1999) model. These realities include a lack of highly skilled staff, a heightened exposure to environmental changes and a lack of other crucial resources that make the community organisation incompetent (in corporate terms) from the start. This almost inherent incompetence needs to be taken into account when measuring trust in this relationship.

### ***Time and resource constraints***

Being less competent than their corporate counterparts could also be linked to the community organisations' *time management skills* and also highlights the dependence on donor funding that again play a part in constraining the relationship. The corporate and consultant-participants perceive the community organisations to be the cause of time constraints. They claim that time constraints could also result from a community overpromising the time that a project will take during the application phase in order to secure funding and then being unable to deliver on deadline, which again impacts on competence and by implication trust.

*It [development] is not predefined; it comes with enormous challenges, it doesn't happen, funny enough, in twelve month cycles - consultant participant*

*Then you start something and after a year they say sorry, we don't have funding for next year or cut your funding in half, then you are stuck.– community participant*

When the relationship between corporate donors and recipient community organisations are described, the context in which the community organisation functions and its specific role and unique challenges cannot be denied. The indicators by Hon and Grunig (1999) are not sufficient to take these special circumstances into consideration.

### **The functioning of CSI in corporate companies**

On the other end of the spectrum is the private sector that contributes to society by funding (among others) community organisations. CSI in corporate companies are largely driven by various legislative and normative rating scales and codes and forms part of the bigger requirement of corporate governance (R.Rossouw, pers.comm) and frame the context of the relationship the corporate companies have with recipient community organisations.

### ***Legislative and normative codes and guidelines govern CSI***

The King codes of governance for South Africa (King II and King III) form the touchstone regarding corporate governance requirements in this country and largely stimulated the efforts of the private sector to invest in the development of communities in which they operate. Especially important for the current article is the King III-report, is that all stakeholders need consideration from the company and not only those who are instrumental to the financial success of the company (IoDSA 2009, 11).

The Johannesburg Stock Exchanges' Socially Responsible Investment Index (JSE's SRI index) is a further governing code that consists of a set of criteria to measure the social and environmental responsibility of companies and also serves as a platform where potential investors can access the sustainability and responsibility of the companies' business practice (JSE 2010).

The third governing mechanism is the Companies Act 71 of 2008. The purpose of the Act, is to encourage transparency and high standards of corporate governance because of the significant role of companies within the social and economic life of South Africa and places high value on responsibility, transparency, accountability and integrity of enterprises in the country (SA 2009, 42).

Another Act that promotes CSI is the National Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) Act 53 of 2003 that has the broad aim of righting inequalities of apartheid by deliberate transferring of equities to the black community (Babarinde 2009, 360). The CSI-pillar of the BEE-scorecard even stipulates the amount of money companies must spend on CSI; a compliance target of 1% net profit after tax is set (SA 2007, 73).

These legal requirements and best-practice benchmarks support the idea that corporate South Africa should contribute to good societal change and compliance to them drives CSI.

### ***Corporate practices in CSI-departments***

The second factor from the corporate side that contextualises the relationship between corporate donors and recipient community organisations is the existence of specific practices in CSI-departments.

There is agreement amongst participants that the funding cycles set by the corporate CSI-departments regulate the timelines in this relationship. The community-participants feel that the funding cycle is something they do not even try to negotiate and the control corporate donors exert over time in the relationship.

Also prevalent in the responses on time and resource constraints are the strong critique against the current practices of monitoring and evaluation of projects. Community participants claim that reports are used to impress shareholders, customers and staff instead of really reporting on impact.

### **Contextual realities for relationship indicators**

A combination of literature and findings show that the codes and guidelines with which corporate donors operate and the specific practices of their CSI-departments are factors that determine the context of their relationship with recipient community organisations. These contextual factors were also visible in the responses from participants and clearly influences the way the relationship indicators *control mutuality* and *commitment* are viewed.

### ***Relationship dominance by corporate donor***

From the responses it is notable that the context of CSI is often cited by the participants to be important when looking at control in the relationship. Corporate donors feel that they themselves need to report in a certain way and comply with legislated requirements and therefore need to exert control.

*Corporates are only attentive to community organisations to the extent where their objectives and impact are at stake - consultant participant*

*We have clear outcomes that we wish to see and we require that they measure, track and report on them – corporate participant*

*Control mutuality* very clearly added to defining the relationship between corporate donors and their community recipients when looking at the data for this article. It seems, however, that control in this relationship is different from other stakeholder relationships because corporate donors, driven by compliance to regulations and codes. This almost implicit dominance need to be recognised when the relationship is described, but the current theoretical framework on stakeholder relationships does not provide for the unique circumstances in this context.

### ***Length of commitment in the relationship***

When reporting their perceptions of commitment to the relationship, the length of *commitment* proved to be a contentious issue to the participants. In an industry where funding cycles are an average of twelve months and a long-term commitment is three years, the sustainability of this CSI-practice is questioned and criticised by most of the participants. The participants had this to say about the sustainability that the most funding cycles allow:

*Sustainable impact does not come overnight and if you have annual funding cycles you cannot create sustainable impact with a child for instance – it is just a crazy expectation – consultant participant*

*You cannot create impact in twelve months and a million rand – consultant participant*

*Commitment* as a factor is extremely prevalent in this relationship, but the elements should be redefined specifically for this context because the situation demands the two parties to form relationships (CSI-framework) and the elements of commitment showing if the relationship is worth spending energy on becomes redundant while the duration of the commitment is a watershed indicator in the success of the relationship.

When combining the impressions of participants that the context of the community organisation as well as the context of corporate governance and social investment plays an important part in defining this relationship, a combination of these two contexts in a relationship provides yet another context, that of the relationship itself.

### **The context of the relationship itself**

With the community organisation's actions framed by the context in which they function and the corporate donor subject to the context of corporate governance and CSI, the relationship between these two parties is set to be context-specific.

The two contextual factors that are prevalent in both the findings as well as in the literature is that the relationship is formed for a cause (social development) and that it is not a voluntary relationship.

### ***The corporate-community relationship is a causative relationship***

This contextual factor in the relationship between corporate companies and the community organisations they fund is that the benefit of the relationship is not for either party in the relationship, but for the recipient community/greater good (Steurer 2006, 56). Stakeholder theorists have named this kind of relationship a conceptual relationship (Steurer 2006, 56) and this specific relationship can certainly be described as based on a particular concept.

Hon and Grunig (1999) differentiate between exchange and communal relationships. The responses on questions about exchange and communal relationships indicated some confusion among the participants. All parties were clear about a very definite exchange in this relationship; money flows from the corporate to the community organisation who acts as an implementation agent in the social development field.

From the responses it is clear that the type of relationship cannot possibly be defined as suggested by Hon and Grunig (1999) as the context of corporate-community relationships define this specific relationship where an exchange of resources takes place between two parties (corporate and community organisation) for the benefit of a third party (the community). The relationship includes elements of both exchange and communal relationships, but the context in which this relationship exists, determines the type of relationship and makes the difference between exchange and communal characteristics unnecessary in measuring it.

Another relationship indicator by Hon and Grunig (1999, 3) that appears to be redefined by the context of the relationship is satisfaction. Those participants who did respond to questions about their satisfaction, equalled satisfaction to the indicators of trust and commitment showing that satisfaction as in the fulfilment-sense takes a back seat in this relationship. Satisfaction might be important when the market model of supply and demand is present, but in this relationship the benefit of the community overshadows relationship satisfaction.

The fact that this corporate-community-relationship is contextualised by the greater cause that it serves is evident from the fact that the type of relationship cannot be described as either an exchange or communal relationship and the unimportance of relationship satisfaction.

### ***The corporate-community relationship is an obligatory relationship***

With corporate governance, and CSI, in South Africa being required from corporate companies by means of policy and legislation and the before mentioned dependence of community organisations on funding from donors, it is clear that this relationship is not a natural and voluntary relationship, but both parties are obliged to relate to each other.

Even though both parties should relate to the other it could be argued that the community organisations depend on corporate donors for survival, whereas the corporate donor does not face demise in the absence of the community organisations. However having a relationship with society would definitely influence the corporate company's organisational goal-attainment (Freeman et al. 2010, 12; Freeman and Reed 1983, 91) and also provide or deny the corporate company compliance to legislated and normative requirements.

### **Contextual realities for relationship indicators**

The contextual factors, comprising of the fact that corporate-community-relationships are formed to serve a cause and solely to the benefit of the parties in the relationship and that the relationship is obligatory, result in certain realities for the indicators that can be used to describe the relationship.

### ***Goals and expectations***

Aligned with the view that the parties in the relationship are required to relate with one another is a new take on the relationship indicator on shared goals and expectations. As argued earlier corporate donors and community organisations have very different organisational goals. One participant voiced the opinion of all of the participants by expressing they are from two different worlds. However, when participants discussed the various roles of the corporate donors and community organisations in social development, a whole new point of view emerged with the two parties no longer having unrelated goals, but in fact having related and supporting social development goals.

When participants shared their opinions and experiences of the special characteristics of this specific relationship, the responses told a story of nuanced expectations and motivations, sometimes shared, sometimes conflicting.

From the responses it is clear that the expectations from community organisations are the most divisive topic among participants. Corporate companies perceive that the community organisations demand a level of independence, but do not have sufficient skills to warrant independence.

Goals and expectations of the two parties are perceived to have great influence on the state of the relationship. Parties in this relationship understand that they must be in a relationship with one another, but their vastly different goals and expectations in this relationship are driven by the context and needs consideration when describing the state of the relationship.

### **RETHINKING THE STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP INDICATORS**

To be able to understand the true nature of these context-specific stakeholder relationships, context-specific indicators must be used to describe the relationship and perceptions of the parties on relevant issues must be discovered. As the first step to attempt such a contextualisation, context-specific indicators are displayed in the diagram below:

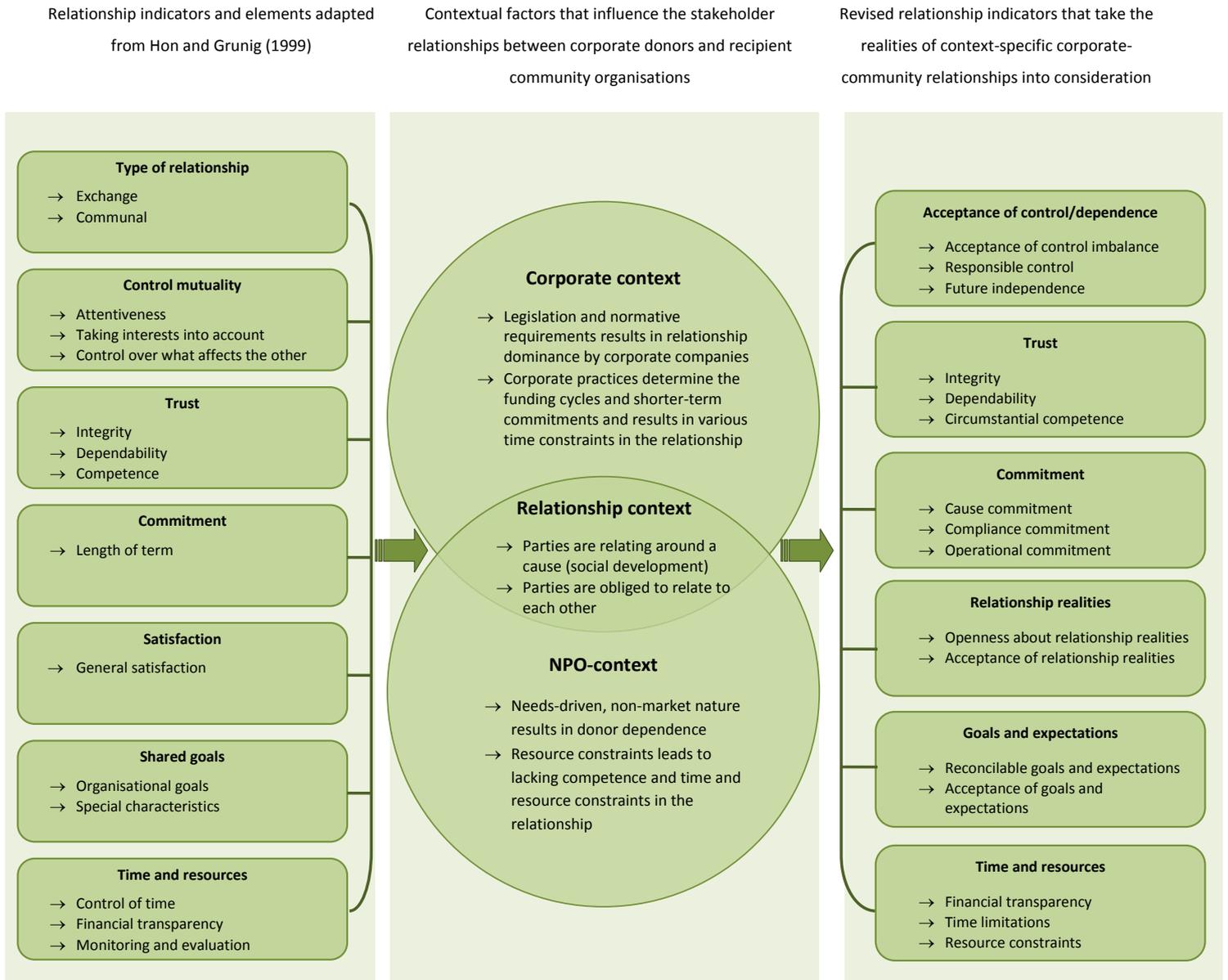


Figure 1: Stakeholder relationships within the context of corporate-community-relationships

### Acceptance of control/dependence

In this specific relationship the power imbalance is implicit to the context and rather than describing this imbalance, the perception regarding the level of acceptance of the control a corporate company has and the dependence of the community organisation on funding from that corporate would provide much more insight into the relationship. Another relevant element of the control imbalance could be the responsibility with which the corporate company accepts its dominance.

If a corporate company is perceived to act responsible in their powerful position by the community organisation a glimpse of the true nature of the relationship will be visible. Also regarding control/dependence could be the probability of the community organisation becoming more independent in the future. Perceptions of the possibility of future independence could inform the enquirer of relationship truths.

### **Trust**

Trust defines a part of this relationship appropriately, but it could be suggested that the element of competence is redefined for this context where community organisations and corporate donors function with a set of realities that is not taken into consideration in the current model. If emphasis is placed on the circumstances of either party when the competence of both parties is judged, a more relevant indication of what is perceived might transpire. Having less focus on operational competence and more emphasis on the successes of the community organisation despite challenging circumstances, will change the perception of competence in this specific relationship. Judging the competence of community organisations by looking at their competence in serving their community, their core business, could also result in a more just perception of overall competence.

### **Commitment**

Commitment as an indicator is prevalent in this relationship, but the indicator should be redefined specifically for this context. The situation demands the two parties to form relationships resulting in the elements of commitment (showing if the relationship is worth spending energy on) becomes redundant. However, the duration of the commitment is a watershed indicator in the success of the relationship. This duration of the commitment could be translated into the element operational commitment where the perception of to which extent the parties are committed in terms of duration of funding cycles.

Two other elements could be added to expand this indicator to represent perceptions on the level of commitment to the cause at hand and on the commitment towards compliance to governance

requirements. Perceptions about the commitment to both cause and compliance could provide relevant information about what the parties perceive to be worth their energy.

### **Relationship realities**

The extent to which parties are open and truthful about the realities they face and the acceptance of these realities could be a very relevant indicator of the state of said relationship. Perceptions about openness and acceptance of the reality in which both parties find themselves can reveal context-specific perceptions that are important for describing the relationship.

### **Goals and expectations**

Goals and expectations of the two parties are perceived to have great influence on the state of the relationship, but the meaning of *shared goals and expectations* is misleading. The familiar term could rather be substituted by the phrase *reconcilable goals and expectations* and should be defined to accommodate the differences between organisational goals and possibly even different relationship goals. It may also be important to define the level of acceptance the parties have with their obvious differences as this acceptance seems to influence the perception of the parties as well.

### **Time and resources**

The constraints due to timelines and resources seem to be very fitting in this relationship context and this indicator could be expanded on to also include details on different resources and time pressures from various origins. Perceptions on time and resource constraints will, especially together with perceptions on relationship realities, provide relevant indication of the state of the stakeholder relationship.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hon and Grunig (1999) and other relationship theorists designed indicators that have been proven by numerous researchers to be rigorous and accurate when describing stakeholder relationships. While these indicators might be ideal for stakeholder relationships in the corporate sector within a Western society, they are not resilient in the context of corporate-community relationships in South Africa. Themes emerging from data collected for this article suggest that context-specific indicators are necessary to accurately describe this relationship. Findings Holtzhausen and Fourie (2010, 12) and Greeff (2011, 113) support the notion that relationship indicators as defined by Western authors for corporate settings are not sufficient to define relationships in specific circumstances.

This article set out to identify instances where the data indicated shortcomings in the relationship indicators used to describe the stakeholder relationship in this specific context. The lack of relevance found in current indicators supported the notion that the context-specific nature of this relationship determines how the relationship should be described and offered suggestions as to what these indicators could possibly entail.

These suggested indicators could serve as a starting point to adapt measuring instruments and ultimately the way these relationships are perceived, measured and managed. Stakeholder theory resulted in numerous rigorous measuring instruments to the extent that the importance of this theory and its application cannot be denied in the organisational communication domain.

This challenge in South Africa is to move from using general tools that are focused on solving problems of general problems to developing new tools that are relevant to specific circumstances.

In the context of corporate-community relationship new tools are needed to highlight the true nature of this relationship. Understanding the character of the relationship between these two important drivers of social change could ultimately contribute to keeping corporate companies accountable and listening to the voices of the community.

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