



Partner selection for strategic alliances: case study insights from the maritime industry

Marina Z. Solesvik

*Bodø Graduate School of Business, Bodø, Norway and
Stord/Haugesund University College, Haugesund, Norway, and*

Paul Westhead

*Durham Business School, Durham University, Durham, UK and
Bodø Graduate School of Business, Bodø, Norway*

Partner selection
for strategic
alliances

841

Received 17 February 2009
Revised 23 March 2010
Accepted 5 April 2010

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the partner selection criteria reported by maritime firms in Norway. The study aims to analyze how a maritime firm's competitive advantage can be enhanced by the selection of the right partner with reference to a strategic alliance.

Design/methodology/approach – A multiple-case study methodology was used. Archival, survey and interview data were explored relating to the partner selection process reported by Norwegian maritime firms. Primary data were gathered from semi-structured personal interviews with managers of Norwegian maritime firms.

Findings – Case study evidence suggests that the strategic alliances were successful when partners had been carefully selected. As detected elsewhere, successful alliances were associated with partners that had managed to build trustful and honest relationships, had common strategic goals, and partners that supplied resources and competencies. Notably, it was detected that cyclicality in the maritime industry shaped the partner selection process. Trust between partners was used as mechanism to reduce uncertainty relating to the strategic alliance process. Firms seeking long-term alliances selected partners with substantial capital and financial stability to survive a market's downturn, as well as the resources required for expansion during a recession.

Practical implications – Presented findings have implications for practitioners, especially for managers of shipping firms, banks, shipyards, producers of ship equipment, ship design firms, and ship brokers. Practitioners need to be aware that the rationale for inter-firm collaboration change over time, and motives are linked to the phase of the maritime cycle. Inter-firm collaboration provides competitive advantage benefits to firms and collaboration can protect as well as create jobs and can create wealth in maritime communities.

Originality/value – A novel conceptual contribution is the exploration of links between maritime industrial cyclicality and the partner selection process relating to strategic alliances. The study also adds to debates relating to the profiles of internationalizing smaller firms.

Keywords Strategic alliances, Case studies, Partnership, Ships

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

Structural hole barriers (Burt, 1992; Doz *et al.*, 2000) to opportunity identification, pursuit and exploitation, as well as firm development can be addressed by firms that

Insightful comments and suggestions from two IMDS referees are warmly acknowledged.

Industrial Management & Data
Systems
Vol. 110 No. 6, 2010
pp. 841-860
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited
0263-5577
DOI 10.1108/02635571011055081

develop formal relationships with other actors, which can provide access to essential resources, competencies, knowledge and legitimacy. Strategic management scholars suggest that the selection of the right partner is a key determinant of strategic alliance success (Dong and Glaister, 2006; Shah and Swaminathan, 2008; Wu *et al.*, 2009). Despite a body of studies relating to partner selection criteria (Doherty, 2009; Evans, 2001; Holmberg and Cummings, 2009), there are still gaps in the knowledge base. Issues relating to the partner selection process relating to the maritime industry have generally been neglected. The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the partner selection criteria reported by maritime firms in Norway. The aim of the study is to analyze how a maritime firm's competitive advantage can be enhanced by the selection of the right partner with reference to a strategic alliance. The Norwegian maritime cluster consists of shipping companies, shipbuilding yards, producers of ship equipment, ship design firms, maritime insurance firms, ship brokers, and classification societies. Organizations included in the maritime cluster are diverse. This study focuses on the value chain relating to shipping companies, shipbuilding firms, ship design firms and suppliers of equipment.

There is a gap in the knowledge base relating to the resource acquisition strategies adopted by firms in cyclical industries (Alajoutsijärvi *et al.*, 2001). The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the partner selection criteria reported by maritime firms in Norway. This study analyzes how a maritime firm's competitive advantage can be enhanced by the selection of the right partner with reference to a strategic alliance. Guided by insights from the emerging dynamic strategic alliance perspective (Madhok and Tallman, 1998; Shah and Swaminathan, 2008; Holmberg and Cummings, 2009), this study provides fresh insights into when and why maritime firms select specific alliance partners with reference to the under-explored cyclical maritime context. Moreover, guided by insights from the resource based view (RBV) of the firm, the competence-based (CB) perspective, Geringer's (1991) classification of selection criteria, trust theory, and shipping and shipbuilding cycle theory this qualitative study explores the following research questions:

- (1) What criteria are used by maritime firms when they select a partner for a strategic alliance?
- (2) How do maritime firms choose partners for inter-firm collaboration?
- (3) Does maritime industrial cyclicity shape partner selection criteria?

A novel conceptual contribution is the exploration of links between maritime industrial cyclicity and the partner selection process relating to strategic alliances. Information from four maritime cases is used to build theory (Zahra and Newey, 2009) relating to the partner selection process. Several novel propositions linked to theory are proposed from the case study evidence. This study also adds to debates relating to the profiles of internationalizing smaller firms (Wright *et al.*, 2007). Several modes of internationalization are highlighted, which are linked to the resource pools and needs of Norwegian firms, as well the domestic environmental contexts of the foreign markets they are seeking to enter.

Practitioners need to be aware that the motivations of partners shape the strategic alliance process. Notably, maritime industrial cyclicity shapes the selection criteria considered by partners. Insights from the cases will enable scholars to develop more appropriate quantitative tools to facilitate appropriate decision-making relating to the

partner selection process. The partner selection criteria highlighted in the cases may be realized in expert systems that assist decision-makers to evaluate and select potential partners.

This paper is structured as follows. First, conceptual insights from prior studies that have focused on partner selection relating to strategic alliances are discussed. Insights from the RBV of the firm, the CB perspective, trust theory and theory relating to cyclicity in the maritime industry are highlighted in Section 2. Section 3 outlines the data and research methodology. In Section 4, an overview of the four cases is presented. In Section 5, the nature of partner selection in the maritime context is discussed, and findings are compared with prior studies. Finally, the implications of the study for further research and practitioners are discussed, and concluding comments are presented.

2. Conceptual insights from prior studies

2.1 *Partner selection issues and evaluation methods*

Studies have focused on the partner selection process, and the criteria for partner selection (Geringer, 1991; Hitt *et al.*, 2000; Tatoglu, 2000; Wang and Kess, 2006). Partner selection studies have focused on the motives that encourage firms to seek alliances (Schaan and Kelly, 2007), and these motives may shape the selection criteria considered during the partner evaluation stage. Due diligence needs to be conducted surrounding the advantages and disadvantages associated with each potential partner on the identified short list of partners. Specified selection criteria may be used to guide the evaluation and selection of an appropriate partner. A dynamic alliance partner selection process relating to the following issues can be exhibited: the need to align a firm's and a partners goals; the identification of set of selection criteria that can be used to evaluate each potential partner; the mapping of potential relating to prospective industries and partners; and the use of a tool to evaluate and select an appropriate partner (Holmberg and Cummings, 2009). For firms seeking to internationalize, partner selection issues can be linked to market selection issues (Doherty, 2009). Firms may systematically screen markets and potential partners to identify the best partner (Lambe *et al.*, 2002). Further, the alliance project type can shape the partner selection process, and the importance of trust, commitment, resource complementarity, and financial pay-off may vary if the alliance operation context changes (Shah and Swaminathan, 2008).

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to identify an appropriate partner (Brouthers *et al.*, 1995; Holmberg and Cummings, 2009; Schaan and Kelly, 2007; Wu, 2009). The following quantitative methods can be used to identify an appropriate partner: the analytic network process (Chen *et al.*, 2008; Meade *et al.*, 1997; Sarkis *et al.* 2007; Wu *et al.*, 2009), the analytic hierarchical process (Mikhailov, 2002), optimization modeling (Cao and Wang, 2007), and the goal programming technique (Hajidimitriou and Georgiou, 2002).

2.2 *Motives that promote an alliance with a partner*

A strategic alliance refers to "collaborative efforts between two or more firms in which the firms pool their *resources* in an effort to achieve mutually compatible goals that they could not achieve easily alone" (Lambe *et al.*, p.141). Child *et al.* (2005) identified the following motives reported by firms to form a strategic alliance: transaction-cost

motives; resource-based motives; strategic motivations with regard to competitive position of the firm; learning objectives; and motives relating to risk reduction, new market entry, and first-mover advantage. Strategic motives shape the selection criteria used by firms considering strategic alliances (Dong and Glaister, 2006). A firm may seek a strategic alliance in order to gain access to the resources and competencies owned by a potential partner. In some instances, a resource deficient firm cannot develop, or is not willing to internally develop required resources and competencies. It may be costly to acquire the required resources and competences, and they may be only required for a short period of time. Doz (1996) explored cooperation relating to strategic alliances with reference to five dimensions (i.e. goals, environment, task, process, and skills). He suggests that successful alliances are flexible and adaptive, and they are associated with committed partners, partners that build trustful links, and partners that exhibit learning with reference to the five dimensions.

RBV of the firm theorists suggest that a firm can be viewed as a bundle of unique resources and relationships (Barney, 1991). The source of a firm's competitive advantage can relate to the resources and capabilities it can accumulate and leverage. A firm needs to control tangible and intangible resources, which can be leveraged through an appropriate strategy to ensure competitive advantage (Barney and Hesterly, 2008). RBV theorists make two key assumptions relating to resources. They assume resource heterogeneity because firms have different bundles of resources. Also, they assume resource immobility. The heterogeneity of a firm's resources and capabilities might last for a long time, because it can be expensive to develop or acquire resources from other firms. RBV theorists suggest that inter-firm cooperation provides resource deficient firms with the opportunity to gain access to required resources (Chin *et al.*, 2008; Das and Teng, 2000). The RBV of strategic alliances postulates that both strategic aspects (i.e. competition and a firm's strategy) and social aspects (i.e. contacts, reputation and the position of a firm's top management) shape the partner selection process (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1996).

A competence is defined as a capability to manage available resources in a manner that allows a firm to achieve its goals, and to sustain its competitive advantage (Sanchez *et al.*, 1996). The CB perspective postulates that resources alone cannot ensure competitive advantage. CB theorists suggest that a firm's competitive advantage relates to its ability to manage resources better than its rivals. A firm can assemble a dynamic set of competencies, which can enable the firm to recognize, develop, obtain, organize and protect new resources (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Sanchez and Heene, 1996). A firm with competency deficiency may seek a formal alliance relationship with a partner to access and leverage a competency required to ensure its competitive advantage in existing and new markets.

The motives for strategic alliances reported by firms in a cyclical industry might be different from those reported by firms operating in a stable industry. A distinction can be made between exploitation (i.e. alliances that seek to refine, improve, or reduce the cost of existing resources used (March, 1991)) and exploration (i.e. innovation leading to the utilization of new resources and competences) motives for alliances. A firm operating in a cyclical industry context might report both exploitation and exploration motives for an alliance (Koza and Lewin, 1998).

2.3 Criteria used to evaluate and select a partner

Numerous selection criteria reported by firms relating to the evaluation and selection process have been highlighted. Partner selection criteria have been found to be associated with the superior performance of international joint ventures (Salavrakos and Stewart, 2006). Medcof (1997) identified the following partner selection criteria relating to inter-firm cooperation: strategic fit between prospective partners; the partner had the capability to perform an entrusted role; operational compatibility between the partners; each partner was committed to inter-firm cooperation; and each partner used appropriate control mechanisms. The importance of context (e.g. industry and country) (Dong and Glaister, 2006; Hitt *et al.*, 2000) and the need for geographical fit (Evans, 2001) are also viewed as key selection criteria. With regard to joint ventures (JVs) in the United States, Mowery *et al.* (1998) noted that technological overlap between partners both drawn from United States was lower than that reported by United States and non-United states partners. Thus, technological overlap can be an important selection criterion shaping partner selection relating to international collaboration.

Grounded in the RBV of the firm and the organizational learning perspective, the following criteria for assessing partners have been identified: a partner has financial and / or intangible resources available; there is complementarity of abilities between the partners; the partner has idiosyncratic competencies and industry appeal; the partner has managerial competence and the ability to provide quality products; the partner has knowledge relating to the market and has access to distribution channels; the partner has absorptive capacity and can quickly learn; the partner wants to share its expertise; the partner can leverage previous experience (and assets) relating to inter-firm cooperation; and the partner has technical capabilities and unique skills that can be accessed and leveraged (Hitt *et al.*, 2000). Thus, resource and competence issues can be key drivers shaping the partner selection process.

Geringer (1991) made a distinction between partner-related and task-related selection criteria. Partner-related criteria relate to strategic fit between the partners; trust between the top management teams; the good reputation and financial stability of the partner; the partners position (i.e. high status) within the industry; and the partners enthusiasm for the inter-firm collaboration. Task-related criteria relate to the partners product-specific knowledge; local and international market knowledge; knowledge of the partner's culture and internal standards; competence in new product / service development; links with major buyers, suppliers and distribution channels; pool of available capital and finance; local regulatory knowledge; political influence; and other criteria relating to industry goals.

Al-Khalifa and Petterson (1999) explored the applicability of Geringer's (1991) classification with regard to international JVs. Partner-related factors were viewed as being more important than task-related factors. They also noted that partner selection factors were not fixed, and they varied according to firm size and the nature of prior JV experience. Tatoglu (2000) explored partner and task-related criteria reported by Western firms seeking JVs with Turkish partners. Key partner-related selection criteria were trust between the top management teams, and the good reputation of the potential partner. Whilst key task-related selection criteria were potential partners knowledge of the local market, access to distribution channels, and familiarity with the local culture. Dong and Glaister (2006) explored the behavior of Chinese firms selecting

foreign partners. They noted that task-related partner selection criteria were strongly related to the strategic motives reported for international strategic alliance formation. Wang and Kess (2006) focused on the partner selection decisions made by Chinese and Finnish firms. They detected that task-related criteria relating to partner selection were more important for Finnish manufacturers, while partner-related criteria were more important for Chinese firms seeking partnerships with Western firms.

Trust between partners is widely viewed as a key issue within the partner selection process (Bierly III and Gallagher, 2007). Partners that had prior relationships before the strategic alliance may understand one another, and this may lead to less potential for conflict during the alliance, which may increase the probability of a successful alliance (Saxton, 1997). Partners may invest in establishing and maintaining links with one another. Initiatives to build mutual trust between partners can be viewed as a mechanism to reduce internal and external risk exposure, particularly if the partner is located in an emerging economy associated with legal and institutional volatility (Li and Ferreira, 2008).

Partner selection process shaped by cyclicity in the maritime industry

The partner selection process can be shaped by cyclicity in the maritime industry. A shipping cycle can influence the survival and development of shipping firms. Moreover, a shipbuilding cycle can influence the economic fortunes of shipbuilding yards, ship design firms, and producers of ship equipment. Shipping cycles are closely related to shipbuilding cycles. A shipbuilding cycle relates to a period between one production peak and another (Volk, 1994). The average duration of a shipbuilding cycle is eight years, whilst the average duration of a shipping cycle is seven years (Stopford, 2009). With reference to both shipping and shipbuilding cycles, a distinction can be made between peak, recession, trough and recovery phases.

During the peak phase in the shipping cycle, the existing fleet is fully utilized and customers will pay high prices to ensure their cargo is transported. Shipping firms benefiting from high profit margins and good cash-flows may seek to expand their capacity by ordering new vessels from shipyards, and/or they may purchase second-hand vessels. Shipbuilding yards with large order books benefit from substantial and growing orders, and this can lead to a corresponding shipbuilding cycle peak phase. Over time, the increased supply of vessels (and tonnage) may satisfy customer demands, but more ships may lead to a marked reduction in freight demand for some shipping firms. An oversupply of vessels (and tonnage) can push freight rates down. Shipping firms experiencing intense competition may be unable to attract sufficient customers to fill their old and new ships. The shipping industry may be associated with intense price cutting and lower profit margins to retain and attract new customers. New vessel construction is generally between one and two years, and it is difficult for shipyards to immediately curtail vessel production in line with reduced demand reported by shipping firms. New vessels are completed during the start of a shipping cycle recession phase, but the subsequent reduced demand for new vessels can lead to a shipbuilding cycle recession phase. To ensure shipyard survival, shipbuilding firms with smaller order books may seek to attract new customers by reducing their prices. A cost reduction strategy may be pursued that can lead to the laying off employees who are no longer required. In order to reduce costs, some maritime firms may seek to establish outsourcing links with partners in foreign

countries that benefit from lower production costs. Links with overseas partners may also be used as a mechanism to diversify business interests, reduce risk exposure, and to enter new markets with current or potential growing demand.

During a shipping cycle trough phase, freight rates for shipping services are extremely low. The demand for shipping services can also be low. Very old inefficient vessels are generally scrapped. During a shipbuilding cycle trough phase, on average, there is a fifty per cent reduction in production compared to the peak phase (Volk, 1994). Maritime firms with limited financial resources may seek partners to gain access to the resources required to take advantage of the anticipated increase in demand associated with the recovery phase, when the decreased supply of vessels can lead to freight rate increases, and subsequent increased demand for new vessels.

3. Research design and method

3.1 Research method

This exploratory study was positioned within an interpretive research paradigm. Research questions relating to the inter-firm collaboration process were explored with reference to four maritime firms located in Norway. Evidence from the in-depth cases is used to build theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) relating to the partner selection process, particularly with regard to how firms evaluate and select partners for collaboration. A multiple-case study method is used to explore the motivations for establishing collaborative relations between partners. Selection criteria highlighted in previous studies were explored with reference to the actual behavior of maritime firms' owners and managers. A qualitative case study method is appropriate because the aim of this study is to generate fresh and deeper insights into the partner selection process relating to maritime firms.

Case selection

A cluster of maritime firms in Norway was identified. Information was then collected from four firms based in Norway that were actively seeking to establish strategic alliances. The external validity of presented findings needs to be considered. Yin (2003) suggests the need to gather information from four to six cases. Four maritime firms seeking strategic alliances were identified. To ensure the anonymity of reported responses, each firm was allocated a case code descriptor. The demographic profiles of the firms surveyed in Norway are summarized in Table I. Cases A and D relate to firms with prior strategic alliance experience, while Cases B and C relate to firms that had no prior strategic alliance experience to leverage.

3.3 Data collection

The following stages were followed with regard to the identification of interviewees with knowledge relating to the strategic alliance partner selection process. Norwegian maritime firms were contacted and the focus of the study was discussed. If the maritime firm had been engaged in interfirm collaboration, the key participants were identified. Additionally, the snowball method was used to generate additional respondents from the cases and the alliance partner firms. Over the 2008 to 2009 period, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the owners and managers in four maritime firms located in Norway. In total, nine top managers from the four firms were interviewed. To ensure accurate information was provided, the participants were

Table I.
Profiles of the maritime
firms located in Norway

Case	Year of establishment	Number of employees	Type of business/ specialization	Prior alliance experience	Number of respondents from each firm	Motive for joining a strategic alliance
A	1964	1,000	Shipping	Yes	2 resp. 1: CEO; 2: Chief Financial Officer	Risk and investment sharing
B	1915	70	Production of ship machinery	No	2 resp. 1: Co-owner and CEO; 2: Co-owner and Sales Director	Cost reduction and new market entry
C	1999	15	Production of ship equipment	No	3 resp. 1: Co-owner & Managing Director; 2: Sales Director; 3: Production Chief	Cost reduction
D	1975	450	Ship design	Yes	2 resp. 1: Founder & CEO; 2: Technical Director	Cost reduction and new regional market entry

assured that their names and the companies' names would not be disclosed. Information was gathered from the chief executive officer (CEO), managing director (MD), technical director, sales director, and/or chief financial officer (Table I). Out of the nine respondents, only one was a female (i.e. the co-owner and CEO of Case C).

Each respondent was consistently asked to describe the strategic alliance process with regard to the motives for inter-firm collaboration; how partners for previous, existing and potential strategic alliances were selected; and what task-related and / or partner-related criteria were used to evaluate potential partners. Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes. Interviews were recorded and then immediately transcribed. The validity and reliability of presented responses was considered. Publicly available information on the internet and in archival documents was also collected relating to each firm. The latter information was then triangulated with the information gathered during the interviews. Responses from several respondents in the same firm were triangulated. Two to three owners and managers were interviewed with reference to each case (Table I). The material collected from the internet and the archival documents confirmed comments made in the interviews. There is no evidence to suggest that the reported comments are not valid.

3.4 Data analysis

Narrative accounts relating to the partner selection process were analyzed. Responses from owners and managers were transcribed the day after each interview. Comments were consistently coded, and most frequently reported partner-related and task-related criteria were identified. An iterative analysis relating to within-case analysis and then cross-case analysis was conducted (Eisenhardt, 1989). Data were compared with existing theory and the data was allowed to talk. Several propositions were derived from the comments made in the interviews.

Overview of cases

Case A

Case A is shipping company. It employs approximately 1,000 employees with regard to the 50 offshore vessels that it owns solely or through partnerships. Case A pursued strategic alliances with a ship's agency, an important customer, a competitor and a shipyard. Each alliance is discussed, in turn, below. This firm terminated two strategic alliances after its objectives had been achieved.

4.1.1 Joint venture with a ship's agency (case A1). The joint venture (JV) with a customer was established in 2003. Each party owns a fifty per cent share in the JV, which relates to a fleet of ten ships. The JV employs 240 people. Case A sought the alliance to remove barriers to entry with regard to a new market in the Asia-Pacific region. Prior to the alliance, Case A did not operate in this market and did not want to establish a subsidiary in Singapore. To ensure the interests of Case A were pursued the creation of a new venture relating to the JV was selected. Case A sought to reduce risk exposure whilst at the same time gathering sufficient resources to enter the new market. Notably, Case A reported the following partner-selection criteria: partner should have knowledge of the local market, and the partner should have existing good relations with actors in the maritime cluster in the region, especially with shipyards and financial institutions. A chief financial officer in Case A remarked:

We needed a local connection. It is important, because we, the same people, cannot sit in the same time here in Norway and Singapore. When we decided to build up a shipping company there, it was decided that it is easier and bears less risk to connect to an investor, which already was there. We could share investments, and also the investor will have an owner attitude to a new firm, not only an employee . . . We wish to start a new company. And the link here was a partner, which already had been there. He is Norwegian. He has been in Singapore for 10 to 12 years. He did not wish to compete with us. He is dedicated to building the new shipping company.

Case A reported trust as a major selection criterion. Also, the partner had to be financially strong. To reduce problems with shipping market cyclicity, complementarity with regard to resources, competencies and strategic fit were sought to ensure long-term cooperation. Thus, the JV should be able to survive during the recession and the trough phases of the shipbuilding cycle, and be able to expand during the recovery and the boom phases. Case A provided competence relating to the effective operating of offshore vessels and investment to the JV.

4.1.2 Joint venture with an important customer (case A2). Case A has a 50 percent stake in a JV with an important customer, which is engaged in offshore construction activities. The JV was established in 2006 to manufacture an expensive tailor-made ship to be used by the new partner for constructing oil platforms and drilling. Case A reported several motives for the JV. They wanted the partner to provide resources and commitment to the construction process in order to reduce their own exposure to risk. Further, Case A negotiated a long-term contract with its partner relating to the operation of the new vessel. The partner agreed not to use any vessels owned by the competitors of Case A, and Case A agreed not to charter the new ship to any competitors of its partner when the partner wanted to use the new vessel. The partner negotiated the availability of the vessel for 150 days a year to pursue its own independent business interests.

Case A reported the following partner-selection criteria: long-term commitment of the partner, trust, financial stability, capital, and strategic fit. The JV connected the core competencies of the two partners. Case A provided competence with regard to offshore shipping operation, while the partner firm provided competence in offshore construction. Additionally, both partners invested sizeable amounts of financial resources in the construction of the new vessel.

4.1.3 Joint venture with a competitor (case A3). In 2004, Case A established an equal equity stake JV with a competitor based in Norway, which was similar in terms of size and competencies. To facilitate entry for the first time into two regional markets Case A sought a JV to reduce its exposure to risk. Case A did not have the financial resources to enter the two new regional markets. The firm had to deal with the legal requirement that any offshore ships had to be built in a shipyard located in the host country of its customers. Case A sought a partner that could provide additional financial resources to deal with the potentially higher market entry costs.

Case A reported the following partner-selection criteria: solid financial position of the partner, sufficient capital provision, and trust between the owners and top managers in the two firms. From the outset, both partners had overlapping resources with regard to fleets of platform supply vessels. However, only Case A had a construction vessel. The JV lasted two years, and it was terminated when the partner acquired a company that owned a fleet of construction vessels. The alliance was

terminated for the additional following reasons. The partners had similar competencies and resources. Also, there was a lack of the strategic fit between the partners who had previously been competitors. Today, Case A controls operations and the fleet in one regional market, whilst the former partner controls operations and the fleet in the other regional market. Both former partners use the acquired competence generated during the former JV in their respective regional markets with reference to the branch network established in each regional market.

4.1.4 Joint ventures with a shipyard (case A4). Over the last 20 years, Case A has developed trustful relationships with a Norwegian shipyard that has constructed the majority of its new vessels. Two JVs have been formed with the shipyard. Case A owned a 51 percent ownership stake in the first JV to build three anchor handling vessels. This JV was terminated two years after the construction of the vessels, and Case A bought out the shipyard's share in the JV. Case A now has a 66 percent ownership stake in a new JV with the shipyard to build two construction vessels. In relation to both JVs Case A was responsible for operations. Case A reported similar motives for both JVs. The firm was motivated to share the investment and risks associated with the construction of expensive new vessels. The shipyard partner was kept busy by the building contracts, and after vessel construction they could share in a proportion of the profits generated by the new vessel exploitation contracts.

4.2 Case B

Case B was established in 1915 and it produces ship equipment for offshore and fishing vessels. The firm has built a well-known brand name relating to the ship winch and crane segment. Its customers are located in all the major shipbuilding centers such as Japan, South Korea, Germany, China, Norway, Chile and India. An outsourcing agreement in Poland and a JV with a Chinese are discussed, in turn, below.

4.2.1 Outsourcing agreement in Poland (case B1). After 2002, Case B has outsourced a large proportion of its production to a partner in Poland. Switching of some production from the high cost Norwegian market, to the relatively lower cost Polish labor market, has been associated with employment losses in Norway. Reduced production costs have enabled Case B to slightly reduce the price of its equipment. The firm has reported sales and profit growth. In 2009, Case B employed 110 employees in Norway and generated sales of approximately 300 million Norwegian crowns. The rationale for inter-firm collaboration with the Polish partner is linked to the phase of the shipbuilding cycle. During recovery and peak phases, inter-firm collaboration reduces Case B's resource and competence gaps when it requires additional production facilities to satisfy all the orders it is able to generate. Conversely, during recession and trough phases of the shipbuilding cycle, Case B can switch production to Poland in order to reduce its cost base. Due to lower steel, electricity and labor costs, the cost of production in Poland is 40 percent cheaper than in Norway.

Case B identified and evaluated three potential partners in Poland before selecting its partner. It placed small orders with the three firms in order to directly ascertain the quality of production, the level of managerial competence, and the quality of inter-firm communication. The partner was selected because the general manager of the Polish firm had developed good personal relations, and customers in Norway reported high satisfaction with the products that had been produced. The selected partner had learnt from prior experience dealing with the requirements of Norwegian customers, and had

accumulated competencies that enabled the firm to deliver a high quality service. Unlike many of its competitors in Poland, the partner replaced its out-of-date machines constructed in the 1970s with new state-of-the-art machines, to ensure consistent high quality production. Case B reported the following partner-selection criteria: trust, recommendation list relating to satisfied customers, low price, ability to deliver on time, high quality of production, easy communication, good English and Norwegian language proficiency, and the partner had a stable financial position.

Case B pursued a stepwise outsourcing strategy with its partner. Steel cutting and welding processes were outsourced to Poland. From the outset, the partner had core competence in these activities. Then painting and drilling operations were outsourced. However, the last stage of the production process relating to mechanical processing is still conducted in Norway.

4.2.2 Joint venture with a Chinese firm (case B2). To reduce the barriers to entry into the large and growing shipbuilding market in China, which is associated with high levels of regulation on the activities of foreign firms, Case B has recently established a JV with a Chinese firm. Case B holds a majority equity stake in the JV. To satisfy the requirements of potential customers in China, Case B sought a local partner that could address any potential language and cultural barriers to sales growth in China. In addition, the Chinese partner would service Case B's products in China. The selected partner is a well respected established firm that had previously provided highly satisfactory services to Case B. The following partner-selection criteria were reported by Case B: high engagement in cooperation, trust, the partner had a stable financial position, knowledge of the local market, and in-depth knowledge of local regulatory legislation. The partner generates lists of potential customers for Case B, and they help during the negotiation process with Chinese customers.

4.3 Case C

Case C produces equipment and spare parts for ships, and has more than ten years of experience in production. The firm employs 15 people in Norway. Ninety per cent of its production is exported, of which forty per cent is sold in Asia. To reduce production costs, Case C recently established a JV with a partner in Vietnam. Case C holds a major equity stake in the JV. A production plant is being built in Vietnam in order to more readily satisfy the requirements of customers in the Asia-Pacific region. To ensure high quality production, Case C has developed links with a local vocational school that will train workers to the same high standard of training provided in Norway.

Case C reported the following partner-selection criteria: knowledge of the local market, good local connections; complementarity of the two firms' competencies; knowledge of the laws and tax system in Vietnam; ability to provide and train a skilled workforce to Norwegian standards; and the ability to deal with the local bureaucracy. The CEO of Case C commented:

I have my own theory that a local firm from Vietnam with good local ties is a quicker way to come into the contact with the local market.

The chief technical officer of Case C also suggested that a special "chemistry" should exist between the partners to ensure effective collaboration. Both partners appreciate the need to gradually build up trustful relationships within one another.

4.4 Case D

Case D was established in 1975 and the firm is a world leader in ship design services. The firm employs 450 people throughout the world, and operates in several countries. Over the last ten years, Case D has reported significant growth and has entered several foreign markets. Subsidiaries have been established in a number of countries. In addition, foreign market entry has been pursued through a JV strategy involving investors and maritime firms in foreign countries. To reduce ship production costs, an outsourcing ship production JV with a large Bulgarian shipbuilding holding company was established.

To facilitate entry into the rapidly growing Indian market, Case D has established a JV with a large Indian company that owns and operates offshore construction vessels. In order to reduce production costs, Case D has outsourced production to its partner associated with a pool of highly skilled engineers that can ensure high quality production. The partner also has considerable local market knowledge. Case D reported the following partner-selection criteria relating to the JV in India: complementarity of partner's resource contribution; trust between the top management teams; skilled labor pool employed by the partner; and the strong financial status of the partner. In addition, the following second level criteria were reported: the reference list of prior projects successfully completed; English language proficiency; prior experience of inter-firm collaboration; and ability to learn from partner's employees.

During the recovery and boom phases of the shipbuilding cycle, Case D lacked resources and competencies to fulfil all the orders it was able to generate. To ameliorate this problem, Case D engages in horizontal cooperation with foreign ship design firms. Case D seeks short and medium-term cooperative relationships to deal with production issues. The following task-related criteria guide the firms selection of a partner: availability of skilled engineers; competence in ship design processes; competence in AutoCad, Nupas and CadMatic software; knowledge of the local culture; competence in strength and buoyancy calculations; and knowledge of Case D's internal standards. Key personnel in selected partner firms also need to speak English.

5. Analysis and discussion

In line with previous studies (Luo, 2002), the success of a strategic alliance was found to be shaped by goal congruence and resource complementarity between partners. The partner selection criteria for inter-firm collaboration reported by the four Norwegian maritime firms are summarized in Table II. All firms reported five out of the sixteen criteria listed. Task-related criteria relating to the importance of knowledge of the local market, capital/finance available, and complementarity of resources and competencies between partners were emphasized. In addition, partner-related criteria relating to trust between the top management teams and stable financial position of the partner were highlighted. Presented case evidence suggests that the partner selection process in the maritime industry is complex, and the reasons for inter-firm collaboration may be context as well as shipping and shipbuilding cycle specific.

Several common themes were detected between the four cases relating to their motives for inter-firm collaboration, which resonate with motives reported beyond the maritime industry (Dong and Glaister, 2006). To reduce production costs, Cases B, C and D established JVs with partners located in emerging economies. To ease entry

Table II.
Summary of the partner selection criteria reported by the four Norwegian firms

Partner selection criteria	Cases							
	A1	Case A		Case B		Case C	Case D	
		A2	A3	A4	B1	B2	C	D
<i>Task-related criteria</i>								
Knowledge of the local market	×					×	×	×
Local regulatory knowledge	×					×	×	
Links with major suppliers	×				×			
Links with major customers	×							
Links with financial institutions	×							
Access to production technology					×			
Capital/finance available	×	×	×	×				×
Complementarity of resources and competencies between partners	×	×			×	×	×	×
Strategic fit	×	×		×	×			×
Ability to learn					×			×
English/Norwegian language proficiency					×		×	×
<i>Partner-related criteria</i>								
Trust between the top management teams	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Stable financial position of the partner	×	×	×	×	×			×
Sufficient size of the partner's firm		×						
Good reputation of the partner	×		×					
Good reference list					×			×

barriers into growing foreign markets, Cases A, B and D pursued inter-firm collaboration with foreign partners. Further, Case A established several JVs in order to gain access to resources and to reduce its own exposure to risk, particularly when pursuing large capital intensive projects.

Cases A and D with prior strategic alliance experience were able to leverage their accumulated alliance competence. Respondents in both cases were more confident surrounding the benefits associated with strategic alliances, and they reported shorter time periods of partner evaluation. Drawing upon their experience, they recognized the benefits associated with preparing detailed JV agreements. These findings are in line with previous studies (Tyler and Steensma, 1998), which have noted that executives with prior successful alliance experience will search for new strategic alliances, and they will focus upon the benefits of interfirm collaboration. Cases B and C with no prior strategic alliance experience to leverage were generally more cautious. To reduce their risk and financial exposure, they built relations with foreign partners step-by-step over several years. On the downside, due to their inexperience and cautious behavior, they were unable to reap the full economic benefits associated with the “super-cycle” in the shipbuilding market between 2004 and 2008, and the rapid recent growth in the Chinese and Vietnamese shipbuilding markets. The co-owner and technical director of Case B remarked:

We are not a very good example of international collaboration. Our competitor who is a crane producer located in Bergen expanded in China. They had only a small office six years ago. Now they collaborate with a large shipyard in China that produces a wide range of ships machinery. They build cranes together under the brand name of the Norwegian firm. The cranes are good enough and they cost half price of German cranes.

As noted elsewhere (Dong and Glaister, 2006), industrial context shaped the partner selection process. Shipping and shipbuilding cycles were linked to the partner selection criteria reported by Norwegian maritime firms. To take advantage of boom and recovery phases, Cases A and D sought partners with substantial capital and strong financial positions. In addition, partners with the latter profiles were perceived to be reliable, particularly during the downturns, which are inevitable in the maritime industry. Reducing risk exposure is, therefore, a key concern. The MD of Case A asserted that strategic alliances are not initiated at the peak or the bottom of a cycle. They are usually established during the recovery phase. The MD of Case A also suggested that strategic alliances generated benefits for maritime firms with reference to recovery and peak phases:

None of these joint ventures started on the bottom of the cycle. They have not started on the top either. When the market is sky-high, you cannot see any limitations. You do not need a partner then. You can do everything yourself. When it is absolutely on the bottom, it is almost impossible to do something. You understand that you cannot do something by yourself, in the same time it should be a potential for growth and you share this potential with others.

There is, however, less agreement relating to the benefits associated with strategic alliances during trough and recession phases. Guided by insights from the emerging dynamic strategic alliance perspective, evidence from the cases suggests the following propositions:

- P1.* During the recovery phase of the shipbuilding cycle, to fulfill orders maritime firms with resource and competence shortages will seek inter-firm collaboration with foreign partners.
- P2.* Termination of a strategic alliance agreement is more likely during trough and recession phases of the shipbuilding cycle rather than recovery and peak phases.

Some previous studies have noted that task-related criteria for inter-firm collaboration were more important than partner-related criteria (Wang and Kess, 2006), whilst other studies have detected that partner-related criteria were more important (Al-Khalifa and Petterson, 1999). With reference to the Norwegian maritime context, Table II highlights that respondents reported both task and partner-related criteria for inter-firm collaboration. In contrast to previous studies, this exploratory study provides no conclusive evidence to suggest that task-related criteria were more important than partner-related criteria. The most frequently reported task-related criteria were knowledge of the local market, local regulatory knowledge, capital/finance available and complementarity of resources and competencies between partners. Trust between partners is a key partner selection criterion if the benefits of collaboration are uncertain (Shah and Swaminathan, 2008). In line with previous studies, the most frequently reported partner-related criteria were trust between the top management teams (Tatoglu, 2000), and the stable financial position of the partner (Table II). Trust between partners is, therefore, a mechanism used to reduce uncertainty in the cyclical maritime industry as well as more stable industries.

The co-owner and MD of Case B suggested that:

We can buy any services for money, but we cannot buy trust for money.

To develop production and sales, a stepwise strategy to build trust with partners was illustrated by Cases B and C. However, as detected elsewhere (Bierly III and Gallagher, 2007), trust was not the sole reason reported by respondents with reference to the partner selection process.

As noted elsewhere (Doherty, 2009), the partner selection process can be shaped by the perception of emerging opportunities and threats in the market. In line with expectation (Arino *et al.*, 1997), Norwegian firms entering emerging markets reporting rapid growth develop inter-firm collaboration with legitimate domestic partners that have good established track records. Respondents in Cases B and D, for example, reduced their exposure to risk by selecting partners with good reference lists.

This discussion suggests the following propositions:

- P3. Maritime firms entering new regional markets will seek partners with task-related profiles associated with knowledge of the local market, capital/finance available, and complementarity of resources and competencies between partners.
- P4. Maritime firms entering new regional markets will seek partners with partner-related profiles associated with trustful relationships and stable financial positions.

6. Conclusions and implications

This exploratory study explored the rationale for inter-firm collaboration with reference to the relatively neglected maritime industry. Insights from the RBV of the firm, the CB perspective, Geringer's (1991) classification of selection criteria, trust theory, and shipping and shipbuilding cycle theory provided a conceptual platform for this exploratory study. The insightful distinction between task and partner-related selection criteria was used to consistently explore the motivations of four Norwegian maritime firms. Analysis of archival data and information gathered during the interviews provide fresh insights into inter-firm collaborative agreements in the maritime industry. Case evidence highlights a considerable growth in the internationalization of Norwegian maritime firms, and the utilization of JV inter-firm collaboration to reduce costs, to gain access to resources and competencies that were not available and/or too expensive in Norway, and to ease barriers to entry into growing foreign markets. Notably, the decision to establish JVs was, in part, shaped by issues relating to the maritime cycle, which has generally been ignored.

The findings of this study have implications for practitioners, especially for managers of shipping firms, banks, shipyards, producers of ship equipment, ship design firms, and ship brokers. We detected that the rationale for inter-firm collaboration change over time, and motives are linked to the phase of the maritime cycle. Inter-firm collaboration provides competitive advantage benefits to firms and collaboration can protect (and create) jobs and wealth creation in maritime communities. Practitioners need to promote the benefits of inter-firm collaboration prior to the recovery phase. Assuming an interventionist stance, practitioners may need to play a role in reducing the attitudinal and resource barriers to inter-firm collaboration. To increase the take-up of inter-firm collaboration and to maximize the (assumed) benefits associated with strategic alliances, practitioners may need to provide more information, education and training, and examples of best practice

relating to successful inter-firm collaborative agreements. Experienced firms with good track records relating to inter-firm collaboration could be sponsored to mentor firms with no inter-firm collaboration experience.

Practitioners require an evidence base to guide their resource allocation decisions. Issues highlighted in this study need to be explored with regard to large and representative samples of firms engaged in the maritime industry. Barriers to inter-firm collaboration as well the motives, modes and benefits of inter-firm collaboration warrant additional research attention. Studies need to be conducted in a variety of locational and cultural contexts to enhance the generalizability of presented findings. Practitioners concerned with promoting (and protecting) the economic and social development of maritime communities in Norway, for example, require additional evidence relating to whether inter-firm collaboration by Norwegian maritime firms enhances the efficiency, productivity and competitive advantage of Norwegian firms, and does not lead to significant jobs losses in Norway, due to outsourcing arrangements and the establishment of subsidiaries and manufacturing plants in low cost labor markets.

This exploratory study is associated with several limitations. Information analyzed relates to four firms located in one country (i.e. Norway) and one industry (i.e. the cyclical maritime sector), and this limits the generalizability of the presented findings. Nevertheless, presented findings provide fresh insights into the resource acquisition strategies adopted by firms in cyclical industries. The latter context is generally under-researched. To increase the generalizability of the presented findings additional studies are warranted in several national, cultural and industrial contexts. Future studies need to gather information from all actors involved in the inter-firm collaboration process. Longitudinal rather than cross-sectional studies will provide additional insights relating to time-specific issues, which have been shown to be important in the maritime industry. Qualitative studies will provide more insights into important “why” and “how” questions, while quantitative studies guided by insights from theory will provide additional insights into the scale, nature, processes and costs and benefits associated with alternative inter-firm collaboration strategies. Whether firms learn from inter-firm collaboration warrants additional research attention, as well as how firms apply this learning with regard to subsequent inter-firm collaborative arrangements.

References

- Al-Khalifa, A.K. and Petterson, S.E. (1999), “The partner selection process in international joint ventures”, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 33 Nos 11/12, pp. 1064-81.
- Alajoutsijärvi, K., Hahtola, K., Klint, M.B. and Tikkanen, H. (2001), “Customer relationship strategies and the smoothing of industry-specific business cycles: the case of the global fine paper industry”, *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 30 No. 6, pp. 487-97.
- Arino, A., Abramov, M., Skorobogatykh, I., Rykounina, I. and Vila, J. (1997), “Partner selection and trust building in West European-Russian joint ventures”, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 19-37.
- Barney, J.B. (1991), “Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 99-120.
- Barney, J.B. and Hesterly, W.S. (2008), *Strategic Management and Competitive Advantage*, Pearson Education, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

- Bierly, P.E. III and Gallagher, S. (2007), "Explaining alliance partner selection: fit, trust and strategic expediency", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 134-53.
- Brouthers, K., Brouthers, L.E. and Wilkinson, T. (1995), "Strategic alliances: choose your partners", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 18-25.
- Burt, R. (1992), *Structural Holes: The Social Structure of Competition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Cao, Q. and Wang, Q. (2007), "Optimizing vendor selection in a two-stage outsourcing process", *Computers and Operations Research*, Vol. 34 No. 12, pp. 3757-68.
- Chen, S.-H., Lee, H.-T. and Wu, Y.-F. (2008), "Applying ANP approach to partner selection for strategic alliance", *Management Decision*, Vol. 46 No. 3, pp. 449-65.
- Child, J., Faulkner, D. and Tallman, S.B. (2005), *Cooperative Strategy: Managing Alliances, Networks, and Joint Ventures*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Chin, K.-S., Chan, B.L. and Lam, P.-K. (2008), "Identifying and prioritizing critical success factors for co-competition strategy", *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, Vol. 108 No. 4, pp. 437-54.
- Das, T.K. and Teng, B.-S. (2000), "A resource-based theory of strategic alliances", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 31-61.
- Doherty, A.M. (2009), "Market and partner selection processes in international retail franchising", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 62 No. 5, pp. 528-34.
- Dong, L. and Glaister, K.W. (2006), "Motives and partner selection criteria in international strategic alliances: perspectives of Chinese firms", *International Business Review*, Vol. 15 No. 6, pp. 577-600.
- Doz, Y.L. (1996), "The evolution of cooperation in strategic alliances: initial conditions or learning processes?", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 17, SPI, pp. 55-83.
- Doz, Y.L., Olk, P.M. and Ring, P.S. (2000), "Formation process of R&D consortia: which path to take? Where does it lead?", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 239-66.
- Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989), "Building theories from case study research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 532-50.
- Eisenhardt, K.M. and Schoonhoven, C.B. (1996), "Resource-based view of strategic alliance formation: strategic and social effects in entrepreneurial firms", *Organization Science*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 136-50.
- Evans, N. (2001), "Collaborative strategy: an analysis of the challenging world of international airline alliances", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 22, pp. 229-43.
- Geringer, J.M. (1991), "Strategic determinants of partner selection criteria in international joint ventures", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 41-62.
- Hajidimitriou, Y.A. and Georgiou, A.C. (2002), "A goal programming model for partner selection decisions in international joint ventures", *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol. 138 No. 3, pp. 649-62.
- Hitt, M.A., Dacin, M.T., Levitas, E., Arrregle, J.-L. and Borza, A. (2000), "Partner selection in emerging and developed market contexts: resource-based and organizational learning perspectives", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 3, pp. 449-67.
- Holmberg, S.R. and Cummings, J.L. (2009), "Building successful strategic alliances: strategic process and analytical tool for selecting partner industries and firms", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 42 No. 2, pp. 164-93.
- Koza, M.P. and Lewin, A.Y. (1998), "The co-evolution of strategic alliances", *Organization Science*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 255-64.

- Lambe, C.J., Spekman, R.E. and Hunt, S.D. (2002), "Alliance competence, resources, and alliance success: conceptualization, measurement, and initial test", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 141-58.
- Li, D. and Ferreira, M.P. (2008), "Partner selection for international strategic alliances in emerging economies", *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 308-19.
- Luo, Y. (2002), "Contract, cooperation, and performance in international joint ventures", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 23 No. 10, pp. 817-33.
- Madhok, A. and Tallman, S.B. (1998), "Resources, transactions and rents: managing value through interfirm collaborative relationships", *Organization Science*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 326-39.
- March, J.G. (1991), "Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning", *Organization Science*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 71-87.
- Meade, L.M., Liles, D.H. and Sarkis, J. (1997), "Justifying strategic alliances and partnering: a prerequisite for virtual enterprises", *Omega*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 29-42.
- Medcof, J.W. (1997), "Why do so many alliances end in divorce?", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 30 No. 5, pp. 718-32.
- Mikhailov, L. (2002), "Fuzzy analytical approach to partnership selection in formation of virtual enterprises", *Omega*, Vol. 30 No. 5, pp. 393-401.
- Mowery, D.C., Oxley, J.E. and Silverman, B.S. (1998), "Technological overlap and interfirm cooperation: implications for the resource-based view of the firm", *Research Policy*, Vol. 27 No. 5, pp. 507-23.
- Prahalad, C.K. and Hamel, G. (1990), "The core competence of the corporation", *Harvard Business Review*, May/June, pp. 79-91.
- Salavrakos, I.D. and Stewart, C. (2006), "Partner selection criteria as determinants of firm performance in joint ventures: evidence from Greek joint ventures in Eastern Europe", *Eastern European Economics*, Vol. 44 No. 3, pp. 60-78.
- Sanchez, R. and Heene, A. (1996), "A systems view of the firm in competence-based competition", in Sanchez, R., Heene, A. and Thomas, H. (Eds), *Dynamics of Competence-Based Competition – Theory and Practice in the New Strategic Management*, Elsevier, Oxford, pp. 39-62.
- Sanchez, R., Heene, A. and Thomas, H. (1996), *Dynamics of Competence-Based Competition – Theory and Practice in the New Strategic Management*, Elsevier, Oxford.
- Sarkis, J., Talluri, S. and Gunasekaran, A. (2007), "A strategic model for agile virtual enterprise partner selection", *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, Vol. 27 No. 11, pp. 1213-34.
- Saxton, T. (1997), "The effects of partner and relationship characteristics on alliance outcomes", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 443-61.
- Schaan, J.-L. and Kelly, M.J. (2007), *Cases in Alliance Management. Building Successful Alliances*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Shah, R.H. and Swaminathan, V. (2008), "Factors influencing partner selection in strategic alliances: the moderating role of alliance context", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 471-94.
- Stopford, M. (2009), *Maritime Economics*, Routledge, London.
- Tatoglu, E. (2000), "Western joint ventures in Turkey: strategic motives and partner selection criteria", *European Business Review*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 137-47.

- Tyler, B.B. and Steensma, H.K. (1998), "The effects of executives' experiences and perceptions on their assessment of potential technological alliances", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 19 No. 10, pp. 939-65.
- Volk, B. (1994), *The Shipbuilding Cycle – A Phenomenon Explained*, Institute of Shipping Economics and Logistics, Bremen.
- Wang, L. and Kess, P. (2006), "Partnering motives and partner selection: case studies of Finnish distributor relationships in China", *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 466-78.
- Wright, M., Westhead, P. and Ucbasaran, D. (2007), "The internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and international entrepreneurship: a critique and policy implications", *Regional Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 7, pp. 1013-29.
- Wu, L.Ch. (2009), "Supplier selection under uncertainty: a switching options perspective", *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, Vol. 109 No. 2, pp. 191-205.
- Wu, W.Y., Shih, H.-A. and Chan, H.-C. (2009), "The Analytic Network Process for partner selection criteria in strategic alliances", *Expert Systems with Applications*, Vol. 36 No. 3, pp. 4646-53.
- Yin, R.K. (2003), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Zahra, S.A. and Newey, L.R. (2009), "Maximizing the impact of organization science: theory-building at the intersection of disciplines and/or fields", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 46 No. 6, pp. 1059-75.

Corresponding author

Marina Z. Solesvik can be contacted at: mzs@hsh.no

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.