Relations between UK meeting planners and NTOs

An exploratory study of UK meeting planners' perspective on NTOs

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Supervisor: Szilvia Gyimóthy

Written by Peter Krusborg Pedersen and Maja Eva Kopalski

The distinction between which section has been written by which researcher, can be found in the appendix, which will only be available in the supervisor and examiner's versions, due to confidential information in the transcriptions.

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Preface

We would like to take the opportunity to thank several persons in this preface.

First and foremost we would like to thank our supervisor, Szilvia Gyimóthy, for her continuous engagement and advice, as well as challenging discussions.

Furthermore, we would like to thank Anja Hartung Sfyrla, Christian Mutschlechner, and Martin Sirk for taking their time to be interviewed.

We also owe Martin Lewis also needs great thanks for letting the researchers use the database of CAT Publications for sending out questionnaires.

We would also like to thank all the meeting planners who have participated in the survey, but in particular the three interviewees (Catherine Morris, Natalia Rozwadowska, and Nicola Foster) who participated in the researchers' explanatory interviews.

Last but not least, the researchers would like to thank their patient families and employers for all support.

Abstract

The present study examines the unexplored relations between National Tourism Organisations (NTO) in general and UK meeting planners, with a focus on how UK meeting planners perceive the NTO. More specifically, this study focuses on these meeting planners' perceptions of and expectations to the NTOs' service offerings, thus a tangible level and additionally a more abstract level is added by examining how legitimate the NTO is in the eyes of the meeting planners, and how the NTO can increase its potential to be perceived as a legitimate entity in the meeting industry. These aspects will be scrutinised in the light of the meeting industry's complex structures.

The methodical approach to this study is directed by the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collections; initially, three exploratory, elite interviews with experts from the meeting industry were conducted as a point of departure for the study. Subsequently, a quantitative survey with closed questions has been carried out, followed by explanatory qualitative interviews. These last two steps of the data collection have consisted solely of participation from UK meeting planners, due to the previously mentioned focus of the study, thus method triangulation directs the study in order to draw more exhaustive conclusions.

In order to examine and discuss the empirical findings, the researchers include different theoretical concepts, which have been extracted via theoretical assessments as well as empirical data collections applying a cyclical, abductive approach. In regard to the examination of UK meeting planners' perceptions and expectations to the NTO, theories from value creation literature are included. This way, the researchers are able to discuss how the meeting planners perceive and expect the NTOs to assist with their value creation and thereby how NTOs can approach UK meeting planners to optimise their effect on their value creation processes. To examine legitimacy issues and provide recommendations on how the NTO can manage its own legitimacy, theories on institutionalism, legitimacy and isomorphism are included. The application of theoretical concepts takes place, when deemed relevant throughout the analysis.

The results of the researchers' study of how the UK meeting planner relates to the NTO that NTOs, to some extent; need to reconsider how they approach this segment and what their identity should be, in order for them to not be deemed as a surplus and illegitimate player. The NTO is mainly appointed the role as informative supplier and country ambassador, but is by far the most used supplier and seemingly needs to be more transparent about its tasks, and make itself more relevant to the meeting planners. An interesting result is that

experienced meeting planners have difficulties with distinguishing the NTOs' tasks from other tourism suppliers and organisations, which appears to be a consequence of isomorphic tendencies in the meeting industry, and the mentioned lack of the transparency.

Since the present study overall is of exploratory character, the researchers advocate future studies to include a larger sample for more exhaustive conclusions. Nonetheless, the researchers believe to have contributed to this unexplored field of business tourism; and to have shed light on how an NTO is perceived by UK meeting planners, bringing about issues the meeting industry should be attentive to.

Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Although the meeting industry of today is cyclical and has to deal with challenges, such as digital meeting solutions and a continued slow world economy, the it is without a doubt still a vibrant and complex industry in constant change and development. An example of the latter can be seen in the innovative meeting solutions continuously brought forward by destinations and meeting experts. Since a variety of different stakeholders within the industry tend to offer similar service offerings, the meeting industry is not only constantly changing, but also very much a complex industry to navigate (MS, Appendix 4, p. 152). Although increasing numbers of hotels and venues are able to assist their clients directly in the meeting planning process[1] (Rob Davidson & Beulah Cope, 2003, p. 132 - 133), other players, such as professional conference organisers (PCO) and destination management companies (DMC) still play a significant part in the planning process and execution of many international programmes. In addition to privately held companies, another type of stakeholders also exist in the meeting industry; these are the public organisations whose general assignment it is to coordinate a joint marketing- and branding strategy for the city, region, or country they are representing, while further developing the internal structures of both the leisure and meeting industry (David Weaver & Laura Lawton, 2006, p. 214 - 216). Such governmental organisations are most often referred to as NTO, Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVB) or Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO) and they sometimes overlap the supplier tasks of the corporate companies mentioned. Apart from the stakeholders mentioned above, there is also a whole palette of corporate companies with interest in the meeting industry.[2]

The abovementioned changing structures, roles, and relations pointed out above, incited the researchers to examine if the changes influence the relation between two significant parties in the meeting industry; namely the NTO and the meeting planners. This is considered in a more generic light, focusing on the role of NTOs from the meeting planners' perspective, but as well, going into detail about the meeting planners' more specific relation to the NTOs' service offerings. The motive to focus on this particular relation will be described below.

A clarification of certain key words as they will be used and applied by the researchers in the present thesis can be found in appendix 2.

[1] For example the Hilton Hotel at Copenhagen airport - www.hilton-events.dk - or the Bella Center in Copenhagen - www.bellacenter.dk.

[2] An elaboration on the different players within the meeting industry will be presented in chapter three.

1.1 Problem area

1.1.1 Delimitation

As briefly touched upon earlier, today's meeting industry offers many relevant and complex issues to be further examined, such as the overlapping tendencies between PCOs and DMCs and between NTOs and CVBs (MS, appendix 4, p. 152). In the process of determining a focus for this study, the researchers investigated several issues within the complex structures of the industry, more precisely, the researchers explored issues concerned with the external and internal environments of the industry, such as internal networks between all stakeholders and external marketing and branding issues.

However, after taking two main arguments into consideration; namely determining which aspect could be empirically investigated with the researchers' resources, and what would be of interest for the industry, the researchers decided to focus this study on the NTO's role within the meeting industry. The aim is to examine the role of the NTO as seen through the eyes of meeting planners[3]. The researchers find that it could relevant to and beneficial for the concerned parties to look into how the meeting planners, as a target segment, relate to the NTO and view its role in the meeting industry. Although one could have decided to conduct longitudinal studies on the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planners, the researchers have decided to examine this area from a contemporary perspective.

Choosing to focus on the NTO's role within the meeting industry was furthermore based on the following reason: The literature, which the researchers behind the present study were able to find on issues referring to the role of an NTO, was almost completely limited to leisure tourism, such as destination branding of leisure tourism (Pike, 2009; Qu et al., 2011; Therkelsen & Halkier, 2008), and leisure tourism development (Xiao, 2006; Yasarata et al., 2010; Zhong et al., 2008). Although, as Anja Hartung Sfyrla (AHS)[4] points out in the researchers' exploratory interview with her (AHS, appendix 9, p. 164), elements of leisure tourism marketing are often transferred to business tourism, it does seem evident to have a specific approach to the business tourism segment, because of the specific needs of the players involved (CM, appendix 6, p. 155; MS, appendix 4, p. 153; AHS, appendix 9, p. 165 - 166). Gender roles within families, societal status, or a personal need to realise a dream can be some of the factors influencing the decision making process of segments within leisure tourism, while on the contrary, the decision making process for segments in business

[3] See section 1.1.3 for a detailed explanation of which meeting planners the present study focuses on.
[4] See section 1.1.2 for presentation of AHS.

tourism (as to which destination to select) is more likely to be influenced by another range of factors, such as development of long term relationships between supplier and buyer, and return on investment (ROI). The researchers therefore observe a certain need to explore how the NTO, in its efforts to establish B2B relations in business tourism, should approach meeting planners in a planning context and represent itself in the meeting industry.

1.1.2 An expert view

As a method to gain more knowledge about the meeting industry and relationship between NTOs and meeting planners, three exploratory, qualitative, elite interviews were conducted in the introductory phase. The intention was to investigate selected experts' perceptions of the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planners, as well as providing the researchers with a preliminary understanding of the level of consensus regarding the role of the previous mentioned players in the meeting industry. Moreover, the researchers felt it to be of importance to learn if a differentiation of meeting planners exists. The experts chosen were Anja Hartung Sfyrla (AHS), International Marketing Manager, Business Tourism, VisitDenmark (VDK)[5], Christian Mutschlechner (CM), CEO at the Vienna Convention Bureau and former President of ICCA[6], and Martin Sirk (MS), current CEO of ICCA. The argumentation for the choice of experts, the construction of the interviews and the conduction will be elaborated in chapter two.

When asked if an NTO needs to distinguish its approach to different types of meeting planners, the interviewees all concurred in highlighting the importance of a differentiated approach. According to CM, three different types of meeting planners exist in today's meeting industry; being the association meeting planners, the corporate meeting planners and the IGO meeting planners (CM, appendix 6, p. 155). Although not as specific in their segmentation, AHS and MS also express a need to identify and include more of the players involved in the decision making process – this is seen from a sales and marketing perspective.

The experts seem to share the same overall view on what the role of an NTO entails - according to them, the NTO should be marketing and selling the country in question and its

[5] www.visitdenmark.dk-a.

[6] ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association) is an international business networking platform with members from all parts of the meeting industry. Its purpose is to exchange ideas, education and generate more specific business opportunities - www.iccaworld.com.

meeting destinations. The marketing and sales approach should be able to meet the specific requirements of the meeting planners, which change with the continuous adding of new and innovative meeting solutions. This is probably also why some NTOs are continuously trying to further develop their marketing and sales strategy by implementing new features and concepts. As an example of this tendency, VDK implemented a new concept, named 'Meetovation' into their overall marketing and sales strategy in 2003 (Appendix 10). As explained by AHS, this concept is focused on co-creating innovative ideas for meeting solutions (AHS, appendix 9, p. 160 - 161 & 169).

In addition to being a sales and marketing organisation, the experts also agree that the NTO should be responsible for the construction, maintenance and further development of an internal network of stakeholders within the national meeting industry. Finally, MS also mentions that it is important for an NTO to conduct research projects to provide internal stakeholders with valuable information about the industry (MS, appendix 4, p. 153).

In regard to the NTO's role in today's meeting industry, MS and AHS both focus on the fact that a variety of different strategic approaches to the meeting planners can be found amongst today's NTOs. MS's view on the two different types of NTOs is that a gap exists between the NTOs who still have not understood the full economic potential of the meeting industry and the NTOs who have (MS, appendix 4, p. 153). Davidson & Cope (2003) support this view by pointing out that the NTOs are still mainly concentrated on leisure tourism promotion, and that the 'Conference & Incentive Travel's (C&IT)[7] surveys showed only one staff member in an NTO working on business travel related issues (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 117). MS argues that by not allocating funds and resources to designing a marketing and sales approach tailored to the decision making process of different meeting planning segments, the NTO is likely to lose business (MS, appendix 4, p. 153).

Whereas MS and AHS focus on the many different roles the NTO can have in today's meeting industry, CM questions the importance of the NTO instead, arguing that because of increase in the development of city and regional tourism structures, the NTO has become less important for the tourism sector (CM, appendix 6, p. 155). These statements further demonstrate the industry's complexity. Regarding the general understanding of the role of an NTO, and the relationship between an NTO and a meeting planner, the experts seem to agree.

[7] C&IT - www.citmagazine.com.

1.1.3 Focus segment

In an attempt to optimise the validity, reliability, and generalisability of the empirical data for this study, a decision has been made to focus on a specific segment of meeting planners; namely meeting planners in intermediary companies. In continuation of the meeting industry's complexity also follows the definitions of companies working with the planning of international programmes. Since these are numerous, 'intermediary company' will be used due to its inclusion of all companies working with planning international programmes. Although these companies are seldom the final decision makers, they are in charge of sourcing locations, presenting different options to the decision makers and coordinating the different elements of an international programme. It is therefore feasible, that it is important for a country's NTO to have good connections with meeting planners in intermediary companies to ensure positive feedback to their clients and in the end ensuring business to the country.

1.1.4 The UK meeting planners

The researchers have chosen to focus on meeting planners based in the UK for different reasons; one of them is the fact that the London area is a well-known hub for international associations and corporations, which tend to plan international programmes on a regular basis, and is thus a market of great interest to NTOs around the world, who are interested in attracting more international programmes to their country.

Another reason is linked to the researchers' accessibility to UK respondents for a quantitative survey and subsequent qualitative interviews. With assistance from CAT Publications[8], the researchers were able to reach out to approximately 11,000 meeting planners in the UK.

1.1.5 The theoretical challenge

From a theoretical view this field could have a variety of entry points. Internally, theoretical perspectives, such as network theory and supply chain management could be applied, and

[8] CAT Publications manages the portal meetpie.com, which provides information about jobs in the industry, education, venues, etc. It also operates the two magazines 'Meetings & Incentive Travel' and 'Association Meetings International' - www.meetpie.com/.

from an external perspective, one could discuss what seems to be an endless list of theoretical concepts within areas such as marketing, communication, and positioning.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, a decision was made to conduct exploratory, elite interviews with experts in the meeting industry and it is mostly from these interviews that the researchers gained valuable knowledge about the field in question, and observed what could create a theoretically founded discussion. Since we see a change in tourism suppliers and organisations' focus areas, it is relevant to investigate whether the meeting planners have an actual interest in cooperating with NTOs and how.

It seems that the relations between the meeting planner as customer and the NTO as supplier, ambassador, and network convener are changing. As a result of this change, it is of interest to work with legitimacy issues; detecting the NTO's legitimacy seen from the meeting planners' perspective and, moreover, through value creation, to understand how the NTO should meet the meeting planner; thus investigating how the meeting planner and NTO relate to each other in regard to more specific service offerings, as well as the overall role of the NTO.

The interviews with the experts made the researchers understand that the institutionalised roles of the players within the meeting industry are changing and therefore the relations between the two abovementioned players are interesting to examine. If the CVBs and the NTOs are on an isomorphic path it is furthermore relevant to investigate what the NTO can do in order to not be seen as equal to the CVB. That is, what resources and management initiative the NTO can apply in order to facilitate value creation in the relationship and that the NTO can be seen as a legitimate entity.

The experts seem to agree on the fact that a differentiated approach is essential in order to achieve successful marketing results. This shows the challenges that the NTOs face in relation to the meeting planners, and led the researchers to certain investigable theoretical concepts, such as value creation, institutionalism, isomorphism, and legitimacy.

The researchers found it of use to include different theoretical perspectives from the value creation literature. The intention behind this decision is to examine the opportunities and importance of the inclusion of the NTO in the meeting planner's value creation process; more specifically, the aim is to utilise this theoretical concept to examine how and if the NTOs will be able to optimise their marketing efforts, in regard to the meeting planners, in intermediary companies by changing their role in the meeting planners' value creation process.

The researchers also found it of great interest, as well as theoretically relevant, to include and discuss the legitimacy of the NTO's role from a meeting planner's perspective. The intention is not to discuss whether or not it is a legitimate organisation in the meeting industry, rather the intention is to discuss how and where the NTO can ensure its legitimacy in relation to the meeting planners. The sections below will present the problem statement and subsequent research questions for this study. Following these sections is a figure, which depicts a reading guide for the present thesis.

1.1.6 Problem statement

In today's changeable meeting industry meeting planners have multiple options when looking for assistance with planning international programmes. In this regard it is interesting to examine if the NTO has an effect on the meeting planners' value creation process, as well as examining the legitimacy the meeting planners appoint to the role of the NTO.

1.1.6.1 Research questions

Based on the area of interest for this study, as presented in the problem area and problem statement, the researchers wish to work with and answer the following research questions:

Overall research question

The overall research question reflects the point of departure, which the researchers have found most suitable for the later analysis and discussion of the relationship between the meeting planners and the NTO. The overall research question has been formulated as:

How does the meeting planner relate to the NTO?

1st research question

The intention behind the first research question is to establish what role the NTO has in today's meeting industry. To answer this question the researchers decided to use the perspective of the meeting planners to focus on a specific segment's perception of the NTO. This decision a decision was, as mentioned, made to use the perspective of the meeting planners to focus on a specific segment's perception of the NTO. This decision was also based on the researchers' wish to examine how the UK meeting planners perceive the NTO's effect on their value creation process. The first research question has therefore been formulated as:

From the meeting planner's perspective, what role does the NTO have in today's meeting industry?

2nd research question

Whereas the first question seeks to clarify the current role of an NTO from the meeting planner's perspective, the second question seeks to investigate what role the NTO should have in the meeting industry. Similarly to the first question, the researchers have found it interesting to include the perspective of the meeting planners to examine how and if the UK meeting planners seek to utilise NTOs in their value creation process. The second research question has therefore been formulated as:

What role should the NTO have in the meeting industry according to the meeting planner?

3rd research question

The third and final research question reflects the researchers' interest in examining more specifically how the NTO can gain, maintain, or repair its legitimacy in its relationship with the meeting planners. Again, the researchers have decided to include the perspective of the UK meeting planners. This has resulted in the following research question:

How can the NTO increase its potential to be perceived as a legitimate entity in the meeting industry?

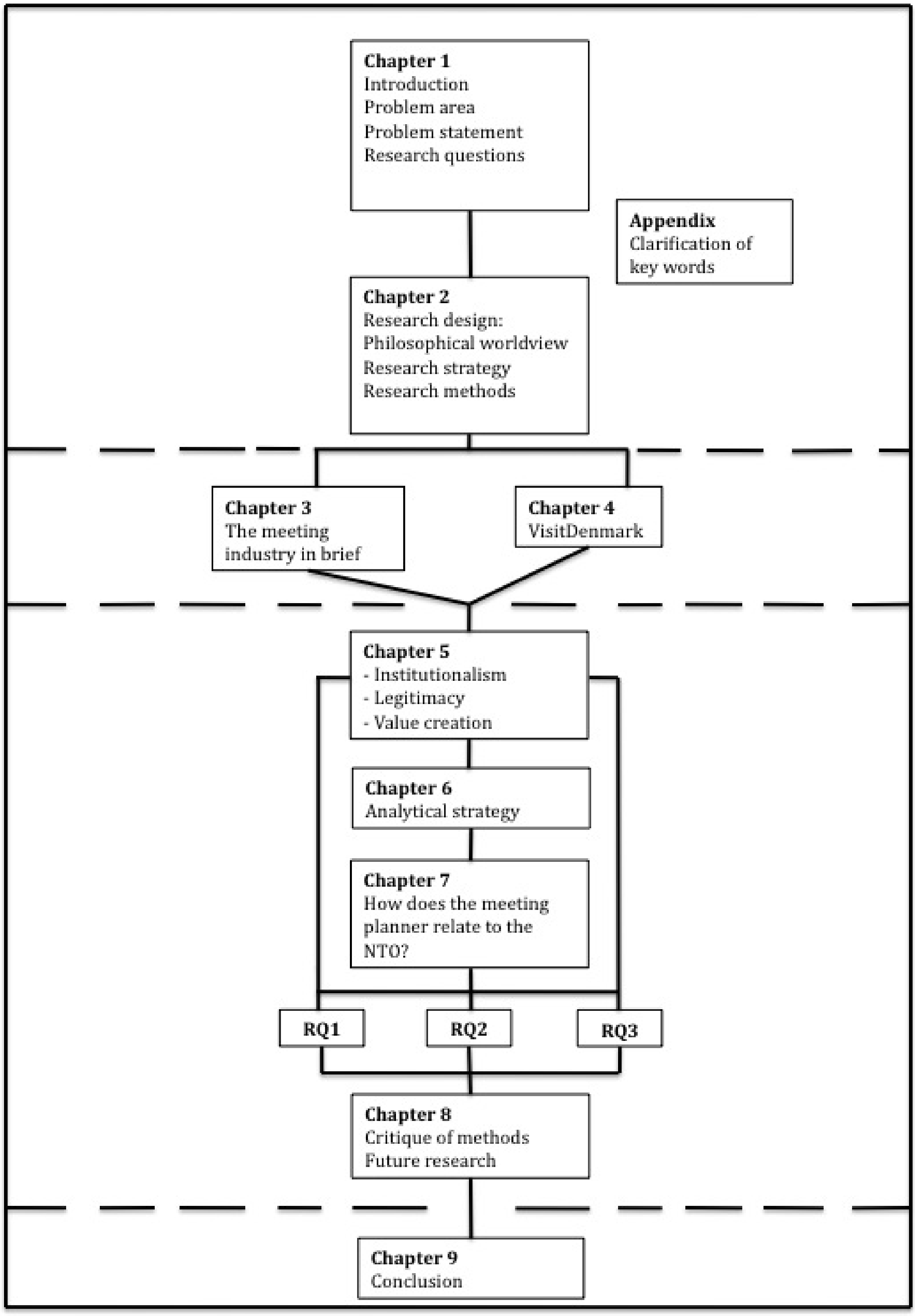


Figure 1 – Reading guide.

Chapter 2: Research design

The purpose of this chapter is to present the underlying methodological considerations of the thesis. The research design, which guides the thesis, consisting of theory of science, the choice of strategy inquiry, and the research methods according to Creswell (2009), is examined down to the details in these three parts. Validity, reliability and generalisability, which are three important verification concepts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 122), are shortly explained from a conceptual viewpoint in section 2.2, but are hereafter discussed in relation to the empirical methods chosen throughout the entire chapter. At the end of the chapter, the researchers will briefly present the selection of NTO to be used as an exemplifying organisation throughout chapter six and seven.

2.1 Philosophical worldview: Critical realism

A decision was made to focus on critical realism as the framework for the theory of science behind this study. In the following sections, the key elements of critical realism will be presented. Furthermore, the link between the chosen theory of science and the theoretical approach will also be discussed.

2.1.1 The transitive- and the intransitive dimension

Similar to the perspective of the empirical realists, the critical realists acknowledge the experiences of individuals as an important dimension when discussing science. This dimension is referred to as the transitive dimension (Nielsen & Buch-Hansen, 2005, p. 21). More specifically, this dimension takes on an epistemological approach; meaning that it refers to already existing knowledge and experiences (Ibid., p. 22). Relating to this study, examples of transitive objects could be the theoretical concepts presented in the theory of this study or the usage of already pre-existing data on the meeting industry.

Although critical realists acknowledge the experiences of individuals as an important dimension of science, they also argue for the existence of another even more important dimension (Ibid., p. 23); this dimension is known as the intransitive dimension and refers to the knowledge produced by scientific production processes (Ibid., p. 22). In other words, transitive objects, such as theoretical concepts, are to be viewed as the foundation for the production of intransitive objects – new knowledge (Ibid., p. 22). In this study, an example of an intransitive object could be the generated new knowledge on the meeting planners' opinion about the NTOs, which has been produced from pre-existing notions (transitive objects) about the field.

From a philosophical perspective, the objects of the two dimensions differ in the way that objects in the transitive dimension, as previously mentioned, are linked to epistemology, whereas the objects of the intransitive dimension are linked to ontology.

2.1.2 The three domains of reality

According to the critical realism's perspective on science, reality is divided into three different domains, known as the empirical-, actual-, and real domain (Ibid., p. 24). The first two domains refer to the "flat" worldview of the previously mentioned empirical realists by referring to transitive objects. The difference between these two domains lies in the type of transitive objects, which exist in the domains. Whereas the empirical domain consists of experiences and observations, the actual domain consists of existing phenomena and events. What is notable about the latter is that it consists of transitive objects, which can easily exist without the acknowledgement of individuals. However, a similar feature for all objects in both domains is that they need to be observable (Ibid., p. 24).

In contrast to the empirical- and actual domain, the real domain consists of intransitive objects, which are not directly observable by individuals. These objects contain a potential to cause a phenomena or event to occur in the actual domain (Ibid., p. 24).

The emphasis on intransitive objects by critical realists in the real domain signals an acknowledgement of the importance of objects outside what is directly observable. By acknowledging the existence of directly observable objects (the transitive dimension) as well as not directly observable objects (the intransitive dimension), critical realism provides the researcher with a much more in-depth scientific approach in comparison to empirical realism (Ibid., p. 24 - 25).

2.1.3 Causality

According to the empirical realists' view on causality the likelihood of an event or phenomena resulting in specific effects or outcomes is fairly high. In other words, it is achievable through the creation of scientific studies to determine a correlation between an event/phenomena (A) and a specific effect/outcome (B) (Ibid., p. 26). The reason being that an event/phenomena and its effect/outcome exists in a closed system. In contrast to this view, the critical realists view events/phenomena as having multiple potential outcomes because of its existence in an open system. What this means is that any given event has the potential to be influenced by a variety of different mechanisms, depending on its surroundings (Ibid., p. 26); whereas the closed system of empirical realism makes it possible for the researcher to determine certain correlations between an event/phenomena and its effects/outcomes, the open system of critical realism only makes it possible for the researcher to discuss the existence of specific tendencies in regards to an event or phenomena (Ibid., p. 27).

2.1.4 Why critical realism?

The decision to use critical realism as the theory of science is based on the researchers' aim to apply an abductive approach to the examination of the empirical data and theoretical perspectives included in this study. Instead of limiting the study to only focus on specific objects in the relationship between the meeting planner and the NTO, the researchers found it crucial to aim for an inclusion of both transitive and intransitive objects, the reason being that the researchers found it of interest to not only examine the directly observable objects in the relationship, but also to attempt to discover objects that seem to have a tendency to effect the relationship, but have not yet been brought forward through the production of science.

2.2 Validity, reliability, and generalisability

Even though these three verification concepts are components of the research methods, they are presented here with their conceptual meanings, but will be discussed and applied throughout the chapter in relation to the process of empirical data collection. The three concepts are of high importance and have therefore been kept in mind throughout the entire process of collecting, processing, and analysing the data. The first two concepts (validity and reliability) are the most significant, to ensure that the study has a certain legitimacy and quality (Olsen, 2005, p. 23), and are both relevant concepts for quantitative and qualitative studies. The third concept is included due to its relevance for the present study. As is implied in the words; the validity overall refers to whether the methods chosen by the researchers are relevant for what is being studied (Veal, 2006, p. 41) and is a concept that refers to quality control in the phases of data production and the succeeding application (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 276). Reliability is about the reproducibility of the study's findings

(Ibid., 2009, p. 271) and making clear how the study's results are interpreted. Generalisability refers to whether the findings can be transferred to other situations and a larger population or not (Thagaard, 2004, p. 177).

2.3 Research strategy

The overall research strategy chosen for this study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Creswell (2009) calls this combination 'A mixed methods approach', and the chosen mixed methods design is the 'Sequential Transformative Strategy' (Creswell, 2009, p. 212). There is one particularly good argument for choosing this approach in this specific study, when keeping in mind the research questions and problem area introduced in chapter one. The reason for combining the two methods lies mainly in the aspiration to provide a useful conclusion to various NTOs in their interaction with meeting planners. Hopefully, learning about a large group of meeting planners' stances towards and use of NTOs, as well as elaborations from individual meeting planners, can be useful for the NTOs, both in considering their more specific tasks, as well as their overall role in the meeting industry. The substance of the empirical data collected is vital, when intending to draw an exhaustive conclusion; not just to the advantage of one particular NTO, but for all NTOs with an interest in interacting most suitably with meeting planners. This substance of data collection is obtained through the combination of the two research methods mentioned, which is a less well-known strategy, but a design that can capture the best of both methods (Creswell, 2009, p. 203).

In order to relate the empirical findings to a specific NTO, VDK is used in chapter six and seven to exemplify relations between an NTO and the meeting planners. The focus is intentionally not concentrated on VDK throughout the entire thesis, as a single case study would not provide the above-mentioned broad and applicable conclusion for the NTOs, since the role and tasks of NTOs are not identically structured in the tourism industry thus the meeting planners are questioned about NTOs generally speaking. The group of meeting planners included in this study is based in the UK; and as such the results should give insight into UK meeting planners' thoughts and use of NTOs in general.

Each of the three methodical phases applied will be described in further details later, but first the overall methodical design of the thesis is presented below:

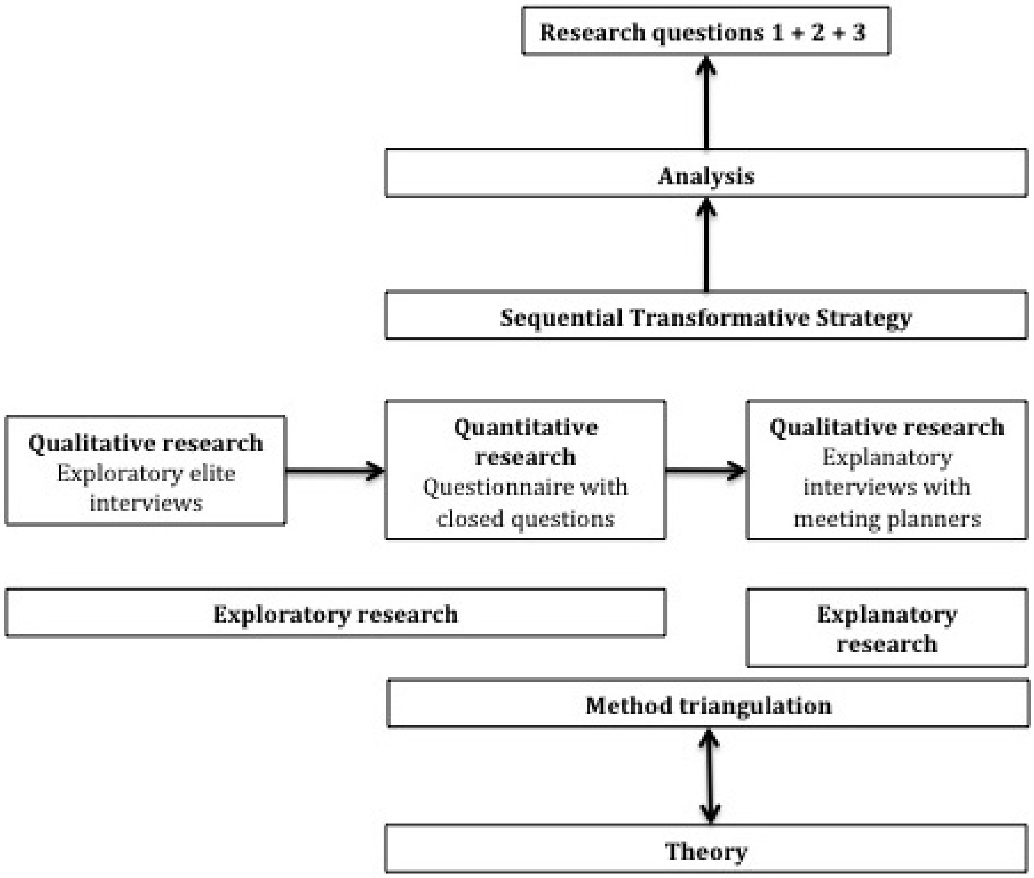


Figure 2 – Methodical design.

2.3.1 Preliminary data collection

A preliminary qualitative data collection phase was conducted, and this preliminary phase, consisting of three exploratory, elite interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 167) with AHS, CM, and MS respectively, was crucial for confirming the researchers' view that this rather untouched area of research could be of great relevance for NTOs and the meeting industry. It provided the researchers with the understanding that the role of an NTO is not an established entity, as presented in chapter one, and therefore this first phase assisted in directing the research and formulating the research questions, thus justifying and ensuring the validity for the further production of the questionnaire and thus having a justification and insurance of validity for the further production of the questionnaire. The exploratory interviews were also performed because of the researchers' rather low pre-understanding of the field of study and how the NTO was actually viewed by people from within the industry.

As mentioned, the literature on this particular field is almost non-existent and this also forced the researchers to acquire a pre-understanding elsewhere.

The selection of interviewees was based on research about the topic and through recommendations from persons in the industry. They had to possess comprehensive knowledge about the international meeting industry and the work of NTOs. Moreover, having an interviewee working in VDK on concrete initiatives towards meeting planners, knowing the reasoning for these, and knowing the current role of the Danish NTO is essential for justifying the use of VDK as an exemplifying NTO. Thus, AHS was chosen due to her position in the business tourism department in VDK, her knowledge about the NTO's work, and her daily work with meeting planners. CM was selected because of his exhaustive hands-on work in the meeting industry in ICCA and the Vienna CVB respectively. And finally, MS was chosen to have another expert's thoughts on the NTO and its interactions with meeting planners. The number of interviewees was, due to the function of the interviews, not very decisive, however three persons were selected with the intention to hopefully provide differing answers and thereby confirming that an interesting problem area was identified. The interview guides for the three interviews are presented in part 2.4.1.

As mentioned, this first phase was of exploratory character, seeking to build a basis of knowledge and clarification about whether or not an actual problem area was present. The commonly applied method for an exploratory phase is a qualitative methodical approach (Thagaard, 2004, p. 18), thus it was an obvious choice to conduct these initial qualitative interviews. Conducting the interviews provided the researchers with internal knowledge that might not have been achieved as effectively by studying individual NTOs to see if their work converged or not. This obtained knowledge obviously represents subjective standpoints of the interviewees, as *"Conversation is a good point of departure for knowledge of how single persons experience and reflect upon their own situation."*[9] (Ibid., p. 13), what gave concrete professional insight into perceptions of the NTOs' work and not only predominantly objective information that would have been derived from other sources, such as official documents and websites.

The decision to investigate the role of the NTO from the meeting planners' perspective was considered before the exploratory interviews, and the interviews supported the relevance of this choice. This initial exploratory approach led to the design of the questionnaire, which

[9] Quote translated by the researchers.

was also of predominantly exploratory nature. The findings from the two first exploratory phases led to the last explanatory phase, with three meeting planners elaborating on the researchers' findings from the quantitative survey. The number of interviewees was based on the aim to obtain either convergence or divergence of perspectives.

2.3.2 Sequential Transformative Strategy

The Sequential Transformative Strategy is a procedure with two distinct data collection phases, just as in the Sequential Explanatory- or Exploratory Strategy (Creswell, 2009, p. 211 - 212), but it is up to the researcher, which phase is performed first. It differs from the two other strategies when it comes to application of theory, as it guides the research and is given greater importance than in the aforementioned (Ibid., p. 212). In the present application of the Sequential Transformative Strategy, the quantitative phase was conducted first, followed by the qualitative. This procedure was selected in order to potentially provide a generalisable conclusion on the meeting planners' use, perception, and expectation of the NTO thereby providing the researchers with the ability to discuss the NTO's legitimacy in the meeting industry.

The subsequent follow-up with qualitative interviews with the three meeting planners was decided before the quantitative part was conducted, as it stood out as a natural continuation of the quantitative research that would provide the researchers with an elaboration of the quantitative results. The qualitative research provides a particularity as opposed to the generalisability (Creswell, 2009, p. 193), which is also valuable for further discussion of the meeting planners' opinions. The meeting planners were selected on the basis of their involvement in the planning of international programmes as well as their positions in different companies. The interviewees were Catherine Morris (CMS), Account Manager at Helms Briscoe; Natalia Rozwadowska (NR), Senior Project Manager at Imagination, and Nicola Foster (NF), Team Leader at Amex (American Express). Even though Creswell points out the length of time to gather data as a weakness of this particular sequence (Ibid., p. 211), it was the most logical approach, considering the research questions. The construction of the questionnaire and the interview design in the sequential procedure are further discussed in part 2.4.

The combination of different research methods, no matter sequence, is also named 'Triangulation', which means: *"Looking at the same phenomenon, or research question, from more than one source of data. Information coming from different angles can be used to* *corroborate, elaborate or illuminate the research problem."* (Decrop, 1999, p. 158). In this context, the triangulation is meant to provide an elaboration and explanation; that the responses to the questionnaire are exemplified and elaborated in the qualitative interviews, thereby creating a more extensive understanding of the meeting planners' perception and use of the NTO. Even though the interviews provide an explanatory aspect to the thesis, the overall nature of the thesis is still exploratory. Hence, the triangulation is, in the present study, performed as a method triangulation, which addresses all three research questions to achieve a more comprehensive conclusion and to avoid the potential weakness of only using one method (Veal, 2006). Decrop (1999) also emphasises that triangulation *"(…) opens the way for richer and potentially more valid interpretations."* (Decrop, 1999, p. 159). This is, of course, a positive strength to the study - that personal biases are better avoided and that the conclusion, due to this validation, is more credible.

The transformative part of the sequential strategy implies that a theoretical lens has been overarching the sequential procedures (Creswell, 2009, p. 212). The initial data collection phase assisted in illuminating the possible theoretical basis to investigate the relationship between the meeting planners and NTOs. However, throughout the sequential procedure, readings of legitimacy and relationship marketing have influenced the methodical constructions, but a purely deductive or inductive procedure has not been the intention, which can also be derived from the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collections, as these are traditionally linked to the previously mentioned procedures (Thagaard, 2004, p. 176). Testing and verifying theoretical assumptions through hypotheses (Creswell, 2009, p. 55) has not been the main goal, and neither has the approach of observation resulting in development of theory (Thagaard, 2004, p. 180 - 181). Rather, a cyclical exchange between the former deductive phase and the latter inductive phase has been applied; namely abduction. As Blaikie in Halkier (2001) describes it: *"(…) abduction constantly exchanges between empirical work and theoretical work in a continuous process, where the two elements inform each other in a search for empirically based and theoretically informed analytical knowledge."*[10] (Blaikie in Halkier, 2001, p. 44). The researchers' theoretical perspectives and research questions have been modified throughout the entire exchange process of theoretical readings, empirical data collection, and practical knowledge obtained through the present process, which is characteristic for abduction (Halkier, 2001, p. 44). Nevertheless, even though the combination of the two methods is enhanced, the

[10] Quote translated by the researchers.

intention to generate a generalisable, broad conclusion for NTOs is somewhat dominant; hence the focus is on the quantitative approach and results.

The validity is secured by explaining the various steps taken in the data collection process; the theoretical application, and the transcription procedure of the qualitative interviews[11]. Furthermore, the construction of the analysis will be explained in chapter six. The extensive description of the researchers' data collection process should ensure that the reader is convinced about the value of the results (Thagaard, 2004, p. 185).

Although the mixed methods approach is enhanced as a suitable approach, Brannen (2005) also points out that it does not necessarily give better research results and that *"Data collected from different methods cannot be simply added together to produce a unitary or rounded reality."* (Ibid., p. 176). For this reason, the relevance of each research method and their combination is kept in mind during every step of the research. Additional criticism has been expressed on the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods; primarily based on the argument that the worldviews of each of the approaches are incompatible (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil in Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007, p. 305). However, in the present study critical realism is selected as an overarching worldview that directs the choices regarding the research process. According to a critical realism worldview, the mixed methods approach is merely seen as a valuable research design.

2.4 Research methods

2.4.1 Qualitative data

2.4.1.1 Thematisation

Before conducting the initial interviews a thematisation ('why' – clarification of the purpose with the study, and 'what' – a prior knowledge of the subject to be investigated) and interview design ('how' – which technique to use to obtain the intended knowledge) was decided (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 125 & 129). The 'why' and 'what' have already been explained above, however, the thematisation was in the first interview with AHS partially linked to an initial research area, which was altered later in the process of the study. The majority of the interview could nevertheless still be applied and used in the researchers' reason for the choice of study. The thematisation in the next two interviews with CM and MS, which were conducted through e-mail correspondence (cf. appendices 3 & 5), was linked to

[11] The transcription procedure is found in appendix 8.

the current problem area of the NTO's role in the meeting industry, as seen from the meeting planners' perspective. This research subject (instead of the research questions) was "translated" into the interview questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 152), as the research questions were partly derived from these interviews.

The thematisation for the interviews with the three meeting planners was naturally linked to the same subject as mentioned above; nonetheless, these interviews addressed the subject from the perspective of the respondents. Furthermore, they were not conducted in an initial phase, but after the quantitative data collection, hence the thematisations were derived from the quantitative results; in order to obtain more detailed and complete thoughts from the meeting planners. The examination of thematisation and types of questions for these interviews will be presented after the quantitative presentation in section 2.4.2. How the interviews are analysed is described in chapter six (section 6.2).

2.4.1.2 Interview design

The interview guide for the exploratory interview with AHS and the interviews with the selected meeting planners was structured in accord with the Qualitative Research Interview, as it enhances a semi-structured approach (Thagaard, 2004, p. 87) with room for flexibility, change of sequence of questions, and taking a new direction of subject (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 143 - 144). The purpose of all the initial interviews was to identify new dimensions of the research topic and to create a pre-understanding of the research theme, for which the semi-structured interview was suitable. The semi-structured approach gave the interviewees the possibility to express themselves freely with regard to the themes posed, which enhanced the validity. Furthermore, the importance of having elaborate answers from the meeting planners was crucial, when considering the structure of the interview. However, the interviews with CM and MS were performed in an entirely structured manner due to the interviews taking place via email correspondence.

The exploratory interview with AHS took place at VDK's head office in the initiation of the research period[12], after having introduced her to the broad topic of the study beforehand via conversations. As for the interviews with CM and MS, questions were sent by e-mail[13] due to a busy schedule, and this not allow for new themes, but stuck to the predetermined

[12] The interview took place on March 18th, 2011.
[13] The questions were sent to Christian Mutschlechner on April 11th, 2011, and to Martin Sirk on April 20th, 2011.

questions. Even though the researchers missed out on the physical contact with CM and MS; namely the body language and the possibility to follow up on questions instantly, the written answers were still useful. Body language and gestures are lost when only making sound recordings, as was done in the case with AHS's interview. Naturally, the interviewer is observant of body language, but if the interview is not video recorded, the interviewer is forced to reconstruct the body language in his or her mind. However, in this context body language is not of big importance since it is not a delicate subject. The interviews with the meeting planners were only conducted by one of the researchers, as the meeting planners wished to have them conducted via phone instead of Skype.[14]

The interview with AHS was conducted in Danish to achieve a nuanced interview and to avoid misinterpretations.[15] The interview questions sent to CM and MS were in English due to their nationalities[16] and their daily work in international environments. The location for the interview with AHS was selected by AHS herself, thus the interview took place in well-known surroundings, which can assist in securing a comfortable atmosphere for the interview (Thagaard, 2004, p. 96). Since the interview is an interpersonal situation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 143), the role the interviewer possesses in relation to the interviewee, and vice versa, is important to keep in mind throughout the interview situation. If a good and trusting atmosphere is not created, it can result in a negative effect on the outcome of the interview (Thagaard, 2004, p. 102). The prior contact the interviewers had with AHS created a somewhat social proximity, which can be viewed as a positive aspect, because of the familiarity between the interviewee and the interviewer, but can also have a negative influence on the objectivity of the interview situation. Thagaard (2004) nonetheless also points out that, *"A research logic, which is based on the researcher being perceived as independent in relation to the informant, is not valid in studies where people relate to each other."*[17] (Thagaard, 2004, p. 185). In regard to the two e-mail interviews with CM and MS, the interaction was somewhat more limited, with only initial contact and one exchange of questions and answers. The selected meeting planners were contacted upon completion of the survey, were told about the researchers' interest in having their comments on the research topic, and subsequently the interviews were conducted. Due to the anonymity of the

[14] Due to physical distance and time frame the interviews could not be performed face to face. The explanatory interviews were conducted on September 23rd, 2011, and September 30th, 2011, respectively.
[15] Quotes from the interview will be translated into English.
[16] CM is from Austria and MS is from the Netherlands.
[17] Quote translated by the researchers.

respondents in the survey, the researchers cannot ensure that the meeting planners interviewed are part of the sample.

The interview with AHS started off with a short briefing of the subject; its purpose, and the procedure. The interview was concluded with a debriefing (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 89 & 149); asking for permission to quote the interviewee and explaining the transcription procedure. The possibility of securing anonymity and confidentiality was also informed. CM and MS were also informed of these matters by e-mail and they were also clarified during the interviews with the meeting planners. Hopefully these options have made the interviewees open up and feel comfortable revealing relevant information. All of the above-mentioned measurements were taken in order to secure proper, ethical guidelines (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 86).

2.4.1.3 Types of questions

The interview guide for AHS was different from the one for CM and MS and different again from the one for the meeting planners[18]; both due to her different position and also because of the alteration that was made to the study's focus from the first interview took place and until the following exploratory ones. Generally speaking, the interview guides consisted of open, descriptive questions that could generate descriptive and exhaustive answers from the interviewees on the thematisation posed. In all interviews, the first questions were of introductory character, however, in the interviews with CM and MS the questions were directed towards obtaining a greater insight into their daily work and their career courses.

All questions posed in the interviews were also related to the thematisation and were, in the case of AHS, divided into three overall aspects of the thematisation (Appendix 7). The first set of questions was directed towards obtaining a broad knowledge about VDK's overall role and its further segmentation of the business tourism segment (questions two & three). The next set of questions was of a more exploratory character; following up on earlier questions and focusing only on the business tourism segment, in order to provide more knowledge on an NTO's concrete methods to reach the meeting planners (questions four & seven). During the interview, follow-up questions or appreciative answers were posed to imply that further elaboration from the interviewee was appreciated, just as specification questions were brought up to avoid misunderstandings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 155 - 156). The last set of questions for AHS were focused on VDK's role in the Danish meeting industry, thus

[18] See interview guides in appendices 4 + 6 + 7.

questions of exploratory nature in order to know more about how VDK views its own work in comparison to other players in the meeting industry, and how it collaborates with various stakeholders.

The exploratory questions for CM and MS were focused on the NTO's overall role both presently (questions four – six), and how it has developed (question seven), as well as on its relationship to the meeting planners, which were also asked to be segmented by both CM and SM (question 3). The types of questions posed to the meeting planners are outlined in section 2.4.2.2.

2.4.1.4 Meaning condensation

The three exploratory, elite interviews were not of extensive length, however, they were interpreted through what Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) calls meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 227). As such, the statements of the interviewees were outlined (in the transcription and e-mails), and the researchers then summarised these to more simple assertions. When, for instance MS, explained about the tasks of PCOs and DMCs becoming blurred, and about the meeting industry being fragmented (MS, appendix 4, p. 152 –153), the researchers discerned the central themes that certain players are taking on similar tasks and that a fragmentation is occurring. Through this process, concepts such as isomorphism and legitimacy also came to life, as will be explained in section 5.1.

2.4.2 Quantitative data

The decision to include this quantitative approach was based on the researchers' wish, and intension to provide NTOs with a valuable, and preferably generalisable, conclusion and the potential to generalise results and conclusions to the UK meeting planners in intermediary companies was thus decisive. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), the common assumption is that a generalisation is not possible from a few qualitative interviews and as Boolsen (2008) points out about the survey *"(…) it is a study of a relatively large number of persons about a relatively limited amount of variables…(…)"*[19] (Boolsen, 2008, p. 14).

The quantitative questionnaire[20] was distributed to approximately 11,000 UK meeting planners, which constitute the total number of meeting planners working in intermediary companies, represented in the database of CAT Publications. The respondents were selected

[19] Quote translated by the researchers.
[20] See appendix 12.

through a simple, random selection (Boolsen, 2008, p. 121) from the database. The likelihood of being selected as a respondent was the same for all (since they were all chosen). The researchers were aware of the risk of having a small percentage of respondents, due to the survey's distribution by e-mail and the amount of questionnaires regularly being distributed. Boolsen (2008) states that, *"If there is to be generalised to a larger population, the selection of the sample must in other words take place "randomly" and the sample needs to have a certain size"*[21] (Boolsen, 2008, p. 121).

Access to the database was obtained via correspondence with the Managing Director at CAT Publications, Martin Lewis. CAT Publications was contacted due to its sizeable database for distribution of their magazines, and its long experience in the meeting industry. VDK sponsored a prize that four of the respondents, selected randomly upon completion of the survey, could win. The researchers were aware of the possibility that a respondent could answer several times, but the anonymity was weighed higher than guarding against duplicates. Meeting planners from the same companies can occur among the respondents; hence several of them can represent the same company. Because the focus is on the individual meeting planner and not the companies, the researchers did not see this as a problem.

The questionnaire was constructed during April, 2011 commented on by the Business Events department of VDK, UK, and the marketing department of CAT Publications, and then distributed via e-mail on June 6th, 2011. The survey was open for responses for a week and after this, a reminder was sent out in order to optimise the number of respondents (Hansen & Andersen, 2009, p. 91). Following the reminder, the survey was kept open for a week and then closed. Even though this way of distributing the questionnaire is known to have the largest drop-out rate (Hansen & Andersen, 2009, p. 91), it is still considered most effective in the present study due to its fast distribution to many respondents. The verification was not related to the actual content, but simply to ensure that the setup of the questionnaire was workable for subsequent analysis. This assessment from professionals possibly causes an enhancement of the quality of the survey. To ensure the reliability, a pilot test was made with a native English speaking person from the industry; testing how long it would take to respond to the questions, the potential language errors[22], and if terms such as 'meeting planner' would be comprehensible for the respondents. The survey was set up in Survey

[21] Quote translated by the researchers.
[22] Due to the questionnaire not being set up in the researchers' native language.

Xact[23] and distributed with a cover letter briefly explaining the purpose of the study, the anonymity secured, and describing where the respondents could see the results.[24]

2.4.2.1 Questionnaire construction

Throughout the construction of the questionnaire, the problem area and all research questions were in constant consideration in order to avoid irrelevant and surplus questions. Likewise, the respondents were also kept in mind in order to ensure their ability and willingness to answer the questions (Boolsen, 2008, p. 52). The first part of the questionnaire consisted of five factual questions, constituting the background variables (Ibid., p. 48). These background variables were related specifically to the respondents and their commitment in the meeting industry, and the purpose of including these questions was to extract any irrelevant respondents. It is important to have a respondent profile classified, and to ensure that the respondent can actually be categorised under the population for the research (meeting planners in intermediary companies) (Hansen & Andersen, 2009, p. 89).

Thus question one had three answer categories, to exclude potential meeting planners from corporate companies representing the end client, as well as individuals other than the target group located in the database. Subsequently these questions will be used in cross-tabulations (bivariate analyses) with questions from the questionnaire's second part. Hereby, it can be derived if there, for instance, is correlation between the size of international programmes planned by the meeting planner; and the knowledge and use of the NTO. The five background variables are thus also formulated with the purpose of identifying certain correlations for further analysis.

The questions in the second part of the questionnaire were divided into a first section, with questions directed at the meeting planners' more specific use of the NTO, and a second section directed at the meeting planners' expectations to and opinions about the NTO.[25] These categorisations and their sequence were deliberately formed to not confuse the respondent, and maintain the motivation for answering the questions. The background variables are factual questions that are quick to reply to, as is the first section in the questionnaire's second part, but with more abstract questions, they are better located at the end. The length of the questionnaire was deliberately kept to a minimum, which could still

[23] www.surveyxact.dk.

[24] See cover letter in appendix 11.

[25] These sections are not shown in the questionnaire itself, but the sequence of the questions has this division.

illuminate the problem area, in order to have as many respondents as possible (Olsen, 2005, p. 56 - 57).

One consistent type of questions does not seem to exist, but according to Hansen & Andersen (2009), the questions in a questionnaire are often constructed according to three dimensions; content dimension (factual & standpoint), time dimension (retrospective, present, and prospective), and answer dimension (open & closed) (Hansen & Andersen, 2009, p. 105). The questions posed in the present questionnaire are a mix of the above. Furthermore, the questions were formulated with Boolsen's (2008) 10 rules of 'what not to do' in mind (Boolsen, 2008, p. 58).

Apart from question ten in part two of the questionnaire, all questions were set up as closed questions. This was done primarily due to the expected large numbers of respondents, since strictly open questions would have required a much longer time frame for the study, having the subsequent time-consuming data processing in mind. Furthermore, operating with closed questions eases the comparability of the respondents' answers and potentially allows a generalisation of findings. As mentioned above, only one open question was posed at the end of the questionnaire (question ten) to present the meeting planner with the option of freely expressing feelings about the NTO's role that the respondent was not able to express through the closed questions. Unfortunately the closed questions reduce the validity, *"(…) because it is the researcher's answer categories, which are analysed and they can be different from those the respondents would have indicated."*[26] (Boolsen, 2008, p. 68). However, the researchers have taken this into account by using the mixed methods approach, and following up on the quantitative results with qualitative interviews with open-ended questions.

All questions in the questionnaire had a present or future time dimension, to capture a contemporary picture of the meeting planners' use and viewpoints of the NTOs. From the responses to the questions, both the more specific and the more abstract ones, it can also be derived, which specific tasks and initiatives the NTOs should focus on in the nearest future. Hence, the present time dimension provides the contemporary picture, giving recommendations for the future.

Closed questions are normally characterised by having a certain number of predetermined answer categories, which are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The construction of answer categories, for instance the inclusion of a neutral category in a standpoint question, is

[26] Quote translated by the researchers.

however, like the dimensions of questions, not agreed upon (Hansen & Andersen, 2009, p. 117; Olsen, 2005, p. 55). In the present questionnaire all categories are exhaustive and mutually exclusive (apart from question eight). Some of the questions were closed in the sense that the answer categories to certain standpoint questions were structured according to the five-point Likert-scale (Boolsen, 2008, p. 75); in this case ranging from 'very important' to 'not important' (question seven) and from 'disagree strongly' to agree strongly' (question six & nine). Using this scale, the researchers can obtain all possible opinions on the importance of the NTO in question seven, and have an exhaustive scale in regard to the agreement/disagreement on what the NTO should be able to provide, and what the current assistance possibilities are, when contacting an NTO.

Besides using the Likert-scale, a different, more simple 'yes-no' answer category was applied in question eight, which created a dichotomy scale. The researchers believed that a neutral 'don't know' category could be left out here, hence not having exhaustive answer categories, since the question asks if the respondent has a *clear* understanding of the tasks of an NTO. Therefore, the researchers believed that if the respondent was not sure, he or she would reply 'no'.

In the more factual questions like question one, two, three and five[27], the researchers added 'other' and 'never'-categories to cover all answer possibilities to the questions. However, if the respondent chooses the 'other'-category, it is not possible for the respondent to insert an elaboration on what the respondent thinks. The researchers deliberately made this choice (also for the same types of questions in part one) to have more compatible answers for analysis, and the possibility to make the cross-tabulations with the background variables. Nonetheless, it could have been suitable to convert these closed questions into semi-closed questions (Boolsen, 2008, p. 68 - 69) to give the opportunity of further elaboration, and then learn where else the meeting planner learns about the NTO (question one), or what kind of different position he might have (question one, part one), but due to the above-mentioned, this was opted out. The last answer category, applied to the closed questions, is built on an interval scale (questions two, four & five in part one).

[27] In the questionnaire's second part.

2.4.2.2 Thematisation and types of questions for explanatory interviews

In regard to the questions for the meeting planners, the quantitative results were not presented to the meeting planners interviewed to avoid leading questions, but the questions were based on the results, so the researchers could obtain elaborate perspectives. The questions were set up according to different themes (frequency, perception vs. expectation, choice of collaboration partner, understanding, and changes in the meeting industry) that were also dominant in the questionnaire[28]. However, in the interviews they were used because of the interesting quantitative results within the themes. Although the questions were asked separately to each theme, the answers will be combined in the analysis, just as they will be presented in the analytical strategy in chapter six. Some of the questions were repetitive from the questionnaire, which could not be avoided because of the purpose - to obtain elaborate answers.

The researchers started by posing the five introductory questions, which were equal to the background variables from the questionnaire, to obtain an impression of the interviewee and note how the interviewees correspond with the respondents of the questionnaire.

One of the themes, and the question related to this, focused on frequency; if a meeting planner uses the NTO and if so, how often and when in the process. This question was included, among other things, due to the interesting results which show that only 13,2% most often contact the NTO when planning an international programme compared to the other organisations and tourism suppliers[29], but still a cumulative percentage showed that actually 58,5% of the meeting planners from the sample use the NTO regularly and once in a while[30]. This showed that the NTO is used, but not as the organisation or tourism supplier used the most. This could indicate that the NTO might have some kind of legitimacy as a supplier, but the DMC, CVB, and other suppliers still outpace it in use.

In relation to the abovementioned, the question of choice of organisation or tourism supplier was also applied with a sub-question, focusing on the objectivity of the tourism supplier or organisation. The researchers noticed that the private companies (PCO, DMC, and other suppliers), obviously having a larger self-interest than the other supposedly neutral organisations, all together had the majority of the respondents (58,6%); hence a tendency of not prioritising objectivity seemed prominent among the respondents. However, a

[28] See interview guide in appendix 16.
[29] S_11:When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…
[30] S_7: How often do you use the services of an NTO, when planning your international programme?

respondent, in the open question of the questionnaire, commented that he or she would like to have objective assistance: *"It would be really great to get neutral noncommercial opinion of various venues, suppliers, etc."* (Appendix 22). Because of the conflicting result and comment, the researchers sought elaboration on this issue.

In further connection to the above, the themes of understanding and importance were included as well. We saw that the NTO was one of the least used organisations or tourism suppliers, however the researchers discerned that a cumulative percentage of 62,3% viewed the NTO as having a 'very important' or 'important role' in the meeting industry[31], thus an elaboration on this view is interesting. Another relevant result that the researchers wished to have elaborated was that 62,3% who feel they have a clear understanding of the NTO[32], 86,8% still do not mostly use the NTO, but go to the CVB, DMC, or supplier instead[33]. And in this regard, it is also intriguing that 15,2% who have a clear understanding of the tasks of the NTO do not have an opinion on its importance in the meeting industry[34].

A theme, which was of high relevance for further analysis and discussion, was perception vs. expectation relating to the meeting planner's experience of the NTO and how he or she believed the NTO could assist the meeting planner best possibly. Therefore the researchers firstly asked about the tasks of the NTO followed by; how the NTO assisted the meeting planner best possibly today, followed by how should the tasks of the NTO be today.

The researchers wanted these meeting planners' additional comments, to see if the groupings of the fact-oriented offerings; such as general information, familiarisation trips (fam. trips), and request for proposal (RFP) being those that the respondents experience, the NTO can and should be able to assist with, versus the newer offerings, such as ROI and online forums that are less wanted and experienced.[35]

A question that the researchers added at the end of the interview guide related to the changes in the meeting industry; if the single meeting planner has noticed any changes and if so, how the meeting planner has experienced these changes.

[31] S_8: In your mind how important a role does the NTO have in the meeting industry?
[32] S_10: Do you feel you have a clear understanding of the tasks of an NTO?
[33] S_11:When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…_
[34] Cross-tabulation of s:_8 and s_10.
[35] S_14: When contacting an NTO, my experience is that I can get assistance with… and s_13: An NTO should be able to…

2.5 Why include VDK as an exemplification?

The researchers felt it was important to be able to exemplify the findings of the empirical data collections by referring to a specific NTO. In order to refer the findings in this study to an actual NTO, a decision was made to include VDK throughout the theoretical and analytical chapter. The selection of VDK as an exemplification was based on three reasons; firstly of all, VDK was selected because of its historical track record of bringing new and innovative strategies forward,[36] secondly, VDK was selected because of the restructuring process that it is currently undergoing, a process towards making VDK a more structured marketing organisation.[37] Finally, the decision to use VDK as an exemplification was also based on the simple fact that VDK represents the country of origin of the two researchers behind this study.

[36] See appendix 10.
[37] See chapter four for elaboration.

Chapter 3: The meeting industry in short

The aforementioned complexity that characterises the meeting industry will be elaborated on here, to create an overview and ease the comprehension, when subsequently analysing and discussing the relationship between the NTO and meeting planners, thereby also including other stakeholders. This short overview should provide the reader with an understanding of the industry's composition and the many associations, tradeshows, and stakeholders that operate and handle meetings. The description of stakeholders will not be based on particular configurations, instead the various specifications of the stakeholders will be based on general, normative definitions. The researchers are aware, that even though rather normative definitions are applied, which definitions are used and in which context might vary among stakeholders working in the industry.

3.1 A short historical perspective

Meetings have existed since ancient Rome, and terms such as 'conference' and 'auditorium' even stem from the Latin language (Spiller in Weber & Chon, 2002, p. 3). However, the more organised and established meeting industry did not gain ground until around 6 decades ago; in the 1950s (Davidson & Cope, 2003; Spiller in Weber & Chon, 2002), starting in the United States, when new possibilities of commuting facilitated moving from A to B and companies started having more international touch. Furthermore, the growth of the tourism industry had its advent in the 1950s and 1960s (Weaver & Lawton, 2006, p. 67), which also influenced the development of business tourism.

Throughout the last two decades globalisation has intensified the competition among destinations for both leisure and business tourism, which makes it a comprehensive task for them to show themselves reputable and attractive. Today the meeting industry's configuration engages a wide range of buyers, suppliers, tourism organisations, and intermediaries; roughly said, and is one of the most diverse sectors in tourism (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 76). External issues, such as war, oil crises, and economic recession easily affect the meeting industry negatively since meetings are one of the first things companies cut back on, which makes it a fragile business and again, forces the stakeholders to make themselves irreplaceable and think creatively to not lose ground.

3.2 International industry associations

Within the meeting industry there are a couple of associations, who further the industry's recognition and usefulness to outsiders, but mainly strengthen the internal ties between the various stakeholders. One of the largest associations, with focus on association meetings, is the aforementioned ICCA. ICCA is an international association with four offices located around the world, and over 900 suppliers in their network. ICCA offers educational programmes and events to its members, but most importantly, it works on providing statistics on the meeting industry, along with the Union of International Associations (UIA)[38] (Ladkin in Weber & Chon, 2002, p. 109). UIA focuses on figures from annual meetings of international associations, whereas ICCA has a database of past and future meetings of international associations. Because the two above-mentioned associations use different methods in obtaining the statistics, the figures are not directly compatible (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 73).

Another international industry association is MPI[39], which is a global community for meeting planners, with more than 23,000 members who exchange information, knowledge, and network (mpiweb.org/home). MPI provides a forum where its members can discuss the newest trends and technologies within the industry, as well as offers training programmes.

Additionally, two other associations address the meeting planners' work; The International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO)[40] is an association that dates back to the 1960s and like the other associations, it gathers certain stakeholders from the meeting industry. An IAPCO membership can for PCOs be used as a sort of quality label for their clients, as an IAPCO membership is achieved by living up to certain standards, such as efficiency and financial responsibility, which the meeting planner has to maintain through an annual quality assessment (iapco.org). The World PCO Alliance[41] is a more recent and smaller association of currently 16 PCOs, who also collaborate on technology and information exchange. Apart from the previously mentioned associations, many more exist; particularly when including the national associations in each country.

[38] Union of International Associations (UIA) - www.uia.be/.
[39] Meeting Professionals International (MPI) – www.mpiweb.org/Home.
[40] International Association of Professional Congress Organisers (IAPCO) - www.iapco.org/.
[41] The World PCO Alliance - www.worldpco.org/.

3.3 Tradeshows

One of the larger tradeshows for the industry is the annual Exhibition for Incentive Business Travel and Meetings (EIBTM)[42] in Barcelona, Spain, with the American version, AIBTM, in Baltimore, Maryland. This exhibition, and the ones mentioned below, attract exhibitors consisting of suppliers and tourism organisations; for example airlines, travel agencies, and national tourism organisations, divided into geographical areas. Moreover, visitors and hosted buyers attend the exhibition. The hosted buyers are, for instance, meeting planners who are selected as being eligible to attend as hosted buyers; who have the opportunity to pre-arrange meetings with exhibitors. In 2010, the EIBTM in Barcelona had 3,125 exhibiting companies and tourism organisations (eibtm.com). Another exhibition is the annual IMEX[43] exhibition, which takes place in Frankfurt, Germany, and IMEX America in Las Vegas, Nevada. In 2011 the IMEX in Frankfurt had 3,500 exhibiting companies and tourism organisations (imex-frankfurt.com) compared to 11,163 exhibitors (itb-berlin.de) at the ITB Travel Trade Show in Berlin[44], which annually takes place in Berlin, Germany, and ITB Asia in Singapore. These two last exhibitions are organised according to the same concept as EIBTM with exhibitors, hosted buyers and visitors; but the three trade shows are not arranged by the same organisers. EIBTM, IMEX, and ITB often bring business to the attendees, hence the trade shows are the place to be in order to promote the services of a tourism supplier or organisation.

3.4 Stakeholders

The last component of the industry is the various stakeholders consisting of both private and public organisations as mentioned in chapter one. The private companies working as intermediaries on behalf of buyers in the meeting industry are primarily the PCOs and DMCs, which in contrast to the hotels and venues specialise in handling all aspects of meetings (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 114 - 116). The PCO concentrates on organising all the practical issues that arise, when an end client wants to have a larger meeting organised. The PCO can, for instance, handle bookkeeping and registration systems. Some PCOs only handle meetings in the country where their office is located, while others also take on tasks in other nations.

[42] Exhibition for Incentive Business Travel and Meeting (EIBTM) – www.eibtm.com/.
[43] Incentive travel, meetings- & events exhibition (IMEX) – www.imex-frankfurt.com/.
[44] ITB – www.itb-berlin.de/.

The DMC leans heavily against the tasks of PCOs, however the services offered are often more concentrated on the social aspects related to the meetings (Price & Becker in Weber & Chon, 2002, p. 121), thus the PCO will often collaborate with DMCs who handle these tasks. The DMC is most often located in the country where the meeting is to be held, and among other things, helps arrange pre- and post tours related to a meeting and especially assists with logistic issues. Nonetheless, as Smith (1990) emphasises in Davidson & Rob (2003): *"DMCs have traditionally not competed with PCOs, but tings are changing. Life is tougher and the grey area between the two is fading. Many PCOs will accept every aspect of an event – and so will some DMCs."* (Smith in Davidson & Rob, 2003, p. 116). Today we see many examples of companies combining the offerings of both company types mentioned (for instance International Conference Services (ICS)[45] and KW Conferences[46]). As indicated, some venue suppliers are trying to offer total solutions for buyers, however Upton (1999) states that buyers will not get objective advice when booking directly with the supplier (Upton in Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 132). According to Davidson & Cope (2003) this also counts when the intermediaries seek advise on behalf of the end client; then the NTO is considered capable of giving impartial advice (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 118). This is an aspect, which is also included in the present thesis' questionnaire.

Besides the above-mentioned intermediaries who work on the practical aspects of meetings, we also have the organisations that first and foremost are trying to attract the buyers - usually corporate companies[47] (usually for the smaller meetings) or associations[48] (with a larger number of delegates) (Crouch & Weber in Weber & Chon, 2002, p. 58 - 59), but also the intermediaries just mentioned, the focus of this thesis, since they work on behalf of the corporations and in some cases the associations. Especially the international associations have a great variety of sites to select from for their meetings, as they frequently change host countries. As such, they also have many criteria, which influence the choice of site for their meetings. Crouch & Ritchie (1998) grouped all the site selection factors and developed a model of the site selection process for associations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998, p. 61). Some of the factors can be influenced, while others are inherent, non-changeable characteristics.

The organisations, with the complicated tasks of influencing potential buyers (for some of them both leisure- and business segments and for others only concentrated on the business

[45] International Conference Services (ICS) – www.ics.dk/forside.
[46] KW Conferences – www.kwconferences.com.
[47] Corporate companies can be both small and big private companies.
[48] The associations are of different geographical scopes and represent different sectors; for instance the pharmaceutical industry.

segment) through all possible means; such as innovative branding- and marketing campaigns, developing the newest trends within the meeting industry and in the meantime assisting the aforementioned intermediaries (in the organisation's country) with gaining business, vary in composition and area of responsibility.

The organisation applied in the present thesis, the NTO, is probably the one with the most varying structure and tasks due to its broad target audience of both leisure- and business tourists and its geographical scope. This is also because of the different identities it has to conform to, as mentioned earlier: Being an ambassador for its country, a network convener between the stakeholders in the country's tourism industry, and a supplier for potential buyers. Choy (1993) stated that the NTOs' focus should be consistent with the destination's stage of development. For example, focusing more on marketing in the early stages and then, when having an established market, focusing on maintaining or reaching new markets (Choy, 1993, p. 363 – 364).

Thus, an NTO's work areas can span over areas such as promotion, product development, research, etc.; which was also emphasised by the experts in chapter one. Moreover, the NTO has to clarify how much energy is put into leisure and business respectively. How much the NTOs choose to focus on the meeting industry varies, since it often falls under the responsibility of the country's other tourism organisations to focus on this part and also depends on the financial possibilities of the NTO. The tourism organisation, which also sometimes focuses on both the meeting industry and leisure tourism, is the CVB, which can represent everything from a city to a region and even a country (Crouch & Weber in Weber & Chon, 2002, p. 70). Thus the researchers do not detect much difference between these two organisations; however, the CVBs seem to focus on smaller geographical regions more often than the NTO.

The work of an NTO is often governmentally financed, however, as Henderson (2004) states: "*Organisations are increasingly being asked to justify their existence and the notion that tourism deserves special treatment as an industry is under review. Many NTOs have seen cuts in funding and there has been a trend of entering into partnerships with the private sector (…)*" (Henderson, 2004, p. 171). In Denmark, the government annually adjusts the funds given to VDK (Visitdenmark.dk - b). When given funds from the government, it is VDK's responsibility to match this amount of money with funds from the private sector[49]. Other NTOs might be fully financed by the government. The CVBs are often partially financed by governments as

[49] See more on VDK in chapter four.

well, along with contributions from the corporate community. In Denmark, the largest CVB is Wonderful Copenhagen (WoCo)[50], which also focuses on both leisure and business tourism and cooperate closely with VDK. The CVBs assist the buyers and intermediaries with locating and suggesting the best venues, service providers (for instance PCOs and DMCs) and also assist with collecting bids from the various parties interested in arranging the buyer's meeting. By enhancing all the possibilities that the city, region or country has, the CVB also markets the destination. This, yet again, conflicts with the tasks and work areas of the NTO, which MS also points out (MS, appendix 4, p. 153).

Having gone over all these essential pieces, which constitute the meeting industry puzzle, it is obvious that it is a complex industry to navigate and that the NTO and meeting planners only constitute a small part of it.

[50] www.wonderfulcopenhagen.dk-a.

Chapter 4: VisitDenmark

VDK is the national tourism organisation (NTO) of Denmark. Taking into consideration the previous description of an NTO in chapter three, one would expect VDK's main focus to be divided between the further development of Danish tourism and marketing Denmark internationally. An interesting observation, in regard to this general notion, is the new main focus on international marketing, which VDK has decided to incorporate and is currently implementing throughout the structure of the organisation (Visitdenmark.com-a). Since the beginning of 2011, the management structure of VDK has experienced several changes, most significantly, VDK has welcomed Jan Boesen Olsen as the new CEO of VDK. As CEO, Olsen has been the primary force behind the shift in focus from a balance between internal development of the tourism sector and external marketing towards a strong focus on the latter. One of the first implications of the new direction of VDK can be linked to the change in vision. Today, the vision of the organisation is simply to become the world's best marketing organisation of a country (Visitdenmark.com-b). To strengthen the new vision of the organisation, the department for Strategic Marketing was established at the head office of VDK. Along with the establishment of the new department for Strategic Marketing, VDK has also created a marketing director position, which is a completely new addition to the organisation.

4.1 Market offices

Because VDK acknowledges the value of having a differentiated marketing approach to different markets around the world (AHS, appendix 9, p. 167 - 168), a decision has been made to place local market offices in strategic key positions to attract international tourism to Denmark. At present time, VDK has market offices in Sweden, Norway, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, Holland, USA, China, and Japan[51]. In addition to the physically established market offices around the world, VDK also has a department for the development of new markets, which focuses on specific markets of interest, without having an actual office located in the market. The efforts of this department are centralised at the head office in Copenhagen. The new markets that VDK is trying to gain in on are, among others, Brazil, Spain and Russia (Visitdenmark.com-c).

[51] Please note that the market offices in China and Japan are part of a joint venture with the Scandinavian Tourism Board.

4.2 VisitDenmark's approach to the tourism industry

In regard to the overall differentiation in the approach to different types of tourism, VDK focuses on two main areas; these areas are defined as leisure- and business tourism. As mentioned in chapter three, this approach follows the normative approach of an NTO. However, an interesting observation from the interview with AHS is the fact that the association market seems to be almost completely taken care of by CVBs such as WoCo (AHS, appendix 9, p. 172). With regard to the branding of the two aforementioned main areas of interest for VDK the same approach is used (AHS, appendix 9, p. 164), but the marketing approach differs. Whereas leisure tourism is highly focused on mass marketing campaigns, business tourism seems to be focused much more on relationship marketing. The argumentation for this is the fact that sales managers, whose objective it is to establish relationships with meeting planners, have been assigned to main market offices, such as the UK. This indicates a strong emphasis on building individual relationships with customers instead of reaching a mass audience with general marketing messages, as is the case with leisure tourism. This argumentation is supported by AHS, who, when talking about the meeting industry states: "*There is a great emphasis on trusting people who you get recommended, which is why relations are very, very important.*"[52] (AHS, appendix 9, p. 165).

4.3 Business partnerships

From a financial perspective, VDK is meant to be financed equally by the government and the private tourism industry in Denmark. Every year, VDK receives approximately 135.000.000 DKK from the government to create growth in the Danish tourism industry (Visitdenmark.com-d) and it is then VDK's objective to match this with financial support from tourism stakeholders in the Danish tourism industry, such as the Scandinavian Airlines (Visitdenmark.com-e). This is done by inviting tourism stakeholders to take financial part in international marketing activities. Additionally, VDK is also beginning to work with non-tourism partners, such as the Danish shoe company ECCO, on its international marketing campaigns (Visitdenmark.com-f).

[52] Quote translated by the researchers.

Chapter 5: Theoretical chapter

5.1 Choice of theories and concepts

The theoretical framework is, as mentioned in chapter two, dominated by the abductive approach of having a continuous interaction between the empirical data and theoretical readings. As briefly pointed out in chapter one, the theoretical framework for the present thesis will be combined of the concept of value creation, taken from the fields of relationship marketing, service marketing, as well as management literature, and the concept of legitimacy, which is closely related to institutionalism; a subtopic to organisational studies. The emphasis on the service act between the NTO and meeting planners brings focus to the relations between them, hence the relevance of discussing value creation, and the possibilities of co-creation of value becomes highly applicable to the context.

The concept of legitimacy will be approached from a strategic and institutional viewpoint (Sociologist Mark Suchman, 1996), in order to attend the more practical aspect of working with legitimacy, as well as the viewpoint of legitimacy being a more inherent set of beliefs. Parts of new-institutional theory, from the sociological approach, will also be introduced due to its relevance, when analysing the relationship between the meeting planners and the NTO, hence the inclusion of a discussion of the expectations from the meeting planners navigating the institutional environment's settings (the meeting industry). In combination with institutional theory, the concept of isomorphism[53] (homogenisation) will also be applied.

Thus, focus is on the external environment's settings and players, and how the organisation navigates and responds to these. One can say that focus is on what Henry Mintzberg et al. (2009) call the Environmental school[54]. This school of strategic management states that the organisations' way of operating strategically is reactions to the environment surrounding it, either in the present time or when establishing the organisation (Mintzberg et al., 2009, p. 302 – 304), hence the environment is the central entity. The researchers have taken this notion and will discussing the external environment and the players operating within it. Apart from including these theories and conceptual perspectives, the meeting industry's composition reviewed in chapter three, will also contribute to the examinations.

[53] *"Institutional similarity, called institutional isomorphism in the academic literature, is the emergence of a common structure and approach among organizations in the same field."* (Daft, 2007, p. 103).

[54] Mintzberg et al. (2009) describe ten different schools that each take point of departure in different ontological understandings, which each direct what is important in an organisation's strategic management. The different schools can however be combined (Mintzberg et al., 2009, p. 231).

Although the two concepts of value creation and legitimacy will be presented separately in the following sections, they will nonetheless be intertwined at the end of the present chapter, and throughout chapter seven. To the researchers' knowledge, these two concepts have, as of yet, not been used in an intertwining manner in this context, but the researchers see the usefulness and potential in the combination although, as will be mentioned, they have divergent ontological stances. How can the organisation increase value and does this have an effect on the legitimacy of the organisation? Is co-creation of value and legitimacy a resource and asset to the organisation? These are issues that the researchers will attend to.

By going about the field of research with various analytical perspectives, creating a theoretical framework of differed theoretical entry points, the researchers hope to bring about a broader understanding and clarification of what role the NTO plays, and should play, in the meeting industry (seen through the eyes of the meeting planners). Furthermore, this will create a beneficial discussion of how the NTOs best are able to meet the requirements of the meeting planners.

At the end of the present chapter the researchers will insert a summative box with the relevant key concepts, which will be applied in the forthcoming analysis. The concepts are not only derived from the theoretical discussions below, but also from the interviews conducted, as mentioned in section 2.4.1.4. The theories have contributed with more specific concepts, whereas the interviewees have not necessarily articulated them, but the researchers have, through interpretation, reached a conceptualisation.

5.2 Institutionalism and its connection to the problem area

As briefly introduced, new-institutional theory will be applied due to its highlighted connection to isomorphism and legitimacy. Furthermore, it constitutes a sort of basis for taking up discussions of how the institutional environment, consisting of norms and values from different stakeholders (Robert L. Daft, 2007, p. 100) is influencing the formation of organisations, if the organisations should live up to the institutional environment in order to obtain legitimacy, and maybe how the organisations can even have an influence on changing the institutional environment to their advantage. The institutionalised practises, which can be of legislative nature, norms and values and overall expectations, can help illuminate how the NTOs act in relation to the meeting planners and how they maybe should act. The conditions under which the meeting planners and NTOs operate are interesting to include in the discussions, in order to interpret the NTOs' possibilities of acting in accordance with requirements of the meeting planners, and where and how the NTO can ensure its legitimacy in the relationship. Hence, the focus here is on structures and the players operating within them. As professor Peter A. Hall & sociologist Rosemary C. R. Taylor (1996) state: *"Central to any institutional analysis is the question: how do institutions affect the behaviour of individuals?"* (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 939). In this context focus is transferred from the individual to organisational level. NTOs have a natural stake in complying with the meeting planners' requirements and thoughts of what role the NTO should fill, and therefore it is of significance to include theories and concepts, which can explore and clarify what environmental frames the NTO is dealing with and has to adjust to.

5.2.1 Sociological new-institutionalism

Several of the theorists who discuss the thoughts comprising what institutionalism and new-institutionalism is about, put forward divergent understandings and perspectives (Hall & Taylor, 1996; sociologists Paul J. DiMaggio & Walter W. Powell, 1991), however not all of them will be scrutinised in this thesis. In the 1960s thoughts of open systems[55] began to be incorporated into the study of organisations (Sociologist Richard W. Scott, 2001, p. xx), although with a focus on the technical environment[56] as opposed to the institutional environment, which was brought into focus about a decade later by sociologist John W. Meyer & Brian Rowan, who among other things works with organisation theory (1977) (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 11), hereby introducing new-institutionalism.

In order to take a stand, and to a large extent follow the viewpoints of theorists with the same principles, the most applicable approach of institutionalism is the one by Hall & Taylor (1996) called Sociological institutionalism; an approach which is related to organisation theory (Scott in Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 164) and advanced by Hall & Taylor (1996) as a subfield of organisation theory, as mentioned above. This institutional approach namely emphasises how organisations relate to the institutional environment, and how institutions influence their behaviour by taking a point of departure in what Hall & Taylor (1996) describe as the cultural approach (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 939).

This approach highlights that institutions contain deeply rooted routines, symbols, and scripts, which are supported by important constituents and public opinion (Meyer & Rowan,

[55] Open systems focusing on the surrounding environment's influence on the formation of organisations as opposed to isolated systems.

[56] By technical environment is meant a focus on the organisation's production system and outputs, hence its efficiency (Scott in DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 167).

1977, p. 341 & 343), making some institutions conventional or taken-for-granted (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 940). These conventions direct how individuals should behave and that individuals' actions will follow these presented patterns due to how individuals will normally follow familiar patterns and due to their role *"(...) as satisfiers, rather than utility maximizers(...)"* (Ibid., p. 939). However, Hall & Taylor (1996) highlight that individuals or organisations can also be goal-oriented and purposive, but that they are *"(...) seeking to define and express their identity in socially appropriate ways."* (Ibid., p. 949). Scott supports this view by pointing out that organisations are not only passive players (Scott in Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, p. 170).

The level of analysis that this new-institutional perspective takes, has a focus on what DiMaggio & Powell call 'The organisational field' (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148; Scott, 2001, p. 83), which constitutes the organisations working in the same industry, but also adds regulators, exchange partners, and competitors. Every stakeholder in this field is then assigned to the rationalities mentioned and focus is on the macro-level (Scott, 2001, p. 43).

5.2.2 Efficiency vs. cultural compliance

With the new emphasis on the institutional environment, discussions changed subject to be more about intangible elements, but with the sociological new-institutionalism focus turned more towards scripts and beliefs (the cognitive dimension), moving away from a focus on norms and values (the normative dimension)[57] (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 948), and their effect on organisations' formal structures and their conformity to them. Nonetheless, this focus on cultural aspects should not, according to Scott (1991), exclude the technical environment completely, as many organisations are under pressure from both environments (Scott in DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 168). However, Meyer & Rowan (1977) express that:

> "(...) conformity to institutionalized rules often conflicts sharply with efficiency criteria and, conversely, to coordinate and control activity in order to promote efficiency undermines an organization's ceremonial conformity and sacrifices its support and legitimacy." (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340 - 341).

[57] The different theorists distinguish between three dimensions vital to institutions; the normative, the cognitive, and the regulative (e.g. laws and sanctions exerted differently) (Scott, 2001, p. 51). The sociological dimension enhances a shift from the normative to the cognitive, bringing focus to how institutions influence the identity and self-image of individuals (organisations) (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 948). The regulative dimension will always be present to some extent, however some theorists weigh its presence in institutions more than others (Scott, 2001, p. 54).

Hence, according to these theorists, it can be complicated and conflicting for the organisation to combine both requirements as well as coping with the rationalities that might be conflicting due to their origin from different parts of the environment (Ibid., p. 355 - 356). The NTO can be classified as being under both pressures, as it is somewhat expected of this organisation to bring about concrete business (efficiency) for the country it represents, such as attracting an increasing number of leisure- and business tourists and intending to ensure that they have high expenditure, by means of for instance branding strategies and innovative products as mentioned. This efficiency should also be performed in conformity to the institutionalised rules, which, according to the institutional viewpoint, are of predominance. This could be the frames that the Danish government expects VDK to operate within or how the stakeholders in the tourism industry see the NTO to operating to their benefit as well. Due to the many stakeholders from various organisations and private companies, with divergent rules and beliefs, the NTO can be placed in a dilemma of whose scripts to follow. A way to get around the difficulty of complying with institutional rules, and in the meantime display the organisation's efficiency, is to 'decouple' the formal structures from the outputs (Ibid., p. 356). This way the organisation can "keep up appearances" if the technical activities are not stable. Christine Oliver (1991) mentions this strategic response as a way of avoiding evaluation (Oliver, 1991, p. 154 – 155).[58]

5.2.3 Do organisations always comply with embedded structures?

The collective rationalities can also include more formal rules, such as laws, and as a consequence of the embeddedness of all the rationalities, they can be difficult to transform, and a divergence from them can cause the organisation in question to be viewed as illegitimate (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 345). The elements of formal structures, institutionally embedded, which can also be termed to function as rationalised myths as by Meyer & Rowan (Ibid., p. 343), means that new institutions or institutional changes will always take place within the already existing institutional frames (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 953). Nonetheless, as Thomas B. Lawrence et al. (1997) point out, about the (at the time) relatively new industry of eco-tourism, the absence of institutionalised rules and scripts can be the issue and when it occurs, a problem of obtaining legitimacy arises (Lawrence et al.,

[58] Christine Oliver (1991) mentions five different strategies that organisations can take in order to cope with institutional pressures (acquiescence, compromise, avoid, defy, and manipulate). She argues that the institutional theorists can learn to take on a more active approach rather than passive (Oliver, 1991).

1997, p. 315). In the meeting industry, the changes that occur in its composition can make it difficult to navigate and realise to whom one should comply. The instabilities in the external environment can make rules and scripts change frequently and therefore make it a more complex issue for the NTO. Today the NTOs cooperate with many internal private stakeholders, both to have a broader support in the industry, but also to ensure financial support, hence the NTOs need to guarantee that they operate for the benefit of them all. For emerging industries it might not always be easy to take root, and even though some industries have existed for years, such as the tourism industry, it might still not be acknowledged in some countries, which can make it difficult to navigate the organisational field.

5.3 New-institutionalism and isomorphism

An interesting result, an outcome of an institutionalisation processes and the practice to become recognised by the institutional environment, as scrutinised above, is what is primarily highlighted by DiMaggio & Powell (1983), as isomorphism. This concept is thus closely linked to legitimacy, which will be examined more in depth in section 5.4. Isomorphism was earlier, in the 1960s, emphasised to be a result of competitive environments where different organisations acquired the same organisational forms to survive (Scott, 2001, p. 153; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 147). However, new-institutionalists, with DiMaggio & Powell in the front, assert that isomorphism originates from organisations' wish to structurally conform to the institutional environment and hereby obtain legitimacy. If organisations thus follow the same structures because they want to appear as legitimate as the other already "accepted" organisations in their field, then an institutional similarity arises. DiMaggio & Powell express that: *"Once a field becomes well established, however, there is an inexorable push towards homogenization."* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148), because a field, which is less established, does not operate with the same rules and beliefs as the more structurally embedded ones.

Meyer & Rowan (1977) follow the same path and state that an obvious connection between legitimating practices and isomorphism exist: *"Independent of their productive efficiency, organizations which exist in highly elaborated institutional environments and succeed in becoming isomorphic with these environments gain the legitimacy and resources needed to survive."* (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 352). DiMaggio & Powell (1983) set up three mechanisms by which this alignment of organisations appears[59], however they will not be elaborated here. By conforming to the institutional environment, the organisations appear to the stakeholders as reputable and attractive to the stakeholders, but it does not guarantee that they are necessarily more efficient than those organisations not conforming to the institutional environment.

5.3.1 Outcomes of isomorphism

These thoughts about homogenisation with the purpose of being considered legitimate and reputable might still be relevant today 25 years after DiMaggio & Powell's article. However, we see that organisations, which engage in entrepreneurship and innovative practices, do not necessarily conform to institutionalised beliefs about the formal structures - and yet they still have positive response. An example of innovative practice could be when some of Cimber Sterling's employees took advantage of Norwegian's bargain of flight tickets for 1 DKK and bought them without using them (borsen.dk); thus ruining Norwegian's marketing campaign. This was not seen as a positive action, but the company still maintains its legitimacy.

Efficiency might actually have more influence on stakeholders than assumed by this institutional view. The meeting planners working under the competitive conditions mentioned, as well as the NTOs, need to have concrete specifications to work after, thus knowing what each other can offer, in order to keep the machinery running. As described in chapter one and three, some organisations operating in the meeting industry take on similar tasks, and the distinction between them can be described as somewhat blurred; hence, to some extent a homogenisation is taking place in the industry. The NTOs and CVBs appear to have overlapping tasks and the DMCs and PCOs as well. This can very likely be a result of mimetic forces due to the meeting industry's intensive ups and downs causing the urge or even necessity to mimic other players. Thus, it is not necessarily an attempt to conform to institutionalised organisations, but perhaps more an attempt to mimic their successful business offerings which brings profit. Or, if a nation's NTO and CVB have a strong collaboration, isomorphism between those two players can also be a result of normative forces and filtering personnel (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152 - 153). However, this

[59] Mimetic isomorphism – Isomorphism results from uncertainty; Coercive isomorphism – happens through political influence and normative forces – from professionalization. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150; Daft, 2007, p. 103 - 105).

conformation might not be an intentional action in order to achieve either legitimacy or efficiency, still, the NTOs' tasks still differ from country to country and it is therefore interesting to investigate if the meeting planners have specific ideas of how the NTOs should operate and if a uniform opinion of their tasks exists.

Moreover, complying with the institutional environment can put an organisation in a position where it is less capable of responding to change, due to its embeddedness and isomorphic behaviour, thereby losing out on its legitimacy (R. L. Jepperson in Suchman, 1995, p. 594), and then the above-mentioned entrepreneurs can gain ground. Being capable of responding to institutions is significant due to their often heterogeneous constellation and change (Jepperson in DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 152).

Guido Palazzo & Andreas Scherer (2006) criticise the standpoint of homogenous cultural beliefs and put forward the notion of *"(…) pluralization of the modern society"* (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 74) and that the pragmatic legitimacy of compliance to stakeholders' self-interest and the cognitive legitimacy will be opted out by the moral legitimacy[60]. They believe that the taken-for-grantedness of the organisation's societal background does not portray today's reality, which is more fragmented due to globalisation and individualisation. This is an interesting contrasting viewpoint to the above for the and it will be incorporated in later discussions.

5.4 Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a peculiar concept, which can be applied to all actions of private individuals as well as larger entities, but might often be something that is not thought of until the individual or entity in question acts in an illegitimate manner (Professor of organisational behaviour Jeffrey Pfeffer & the late Gerald R. Salancik, former professor of organisational studies, 2003, p. 194). Copenhagen is being branded by WoCo as an open city with the brand 'cOPENhagen – Open for You'[61] and VDK uses the brand 'Feel Free'[62], thus the obvious purpose for these organisations is to promote Copenhagen and Denmark as being open in various respects, such as; long opening hours, open-mindedness, and openness for foreigners. However, when Danish film director Lars Von Trier, at a press conference in Cannes for the annual film festival in 2011, proclaimed that he does not like Jews (Enggaard, 2011, kpn.dk), he did not

[60] These will be explained below.
[61] www.wonderfulcopenhagen.dk-b.
[62] www.citmagazine.com.

exactly support this notion of openness,[63] and a foreigner could misinterpret this opinion to correlate with the rest of the Danish population. In such a situation, the Danish tourism organisations are put in a position where they need to justify their presentation of Denmark as being an open-minded country and thus also repairing its legitimacy as an open country. This could have ended up as a severe situation had people not more or less known that Lars Von Trier is somewhat eccentric.

Legitimacy is also relevant in issues that do not necessarily regard ethical behaviour, and as reputation and legitimacy are two often confused concepts, as pointed out by Deephouse & Carter (2005), the present thesis' focus is on legitimacy due to its focus on acceptance rather than esteem. Contrary to the discussions of institutionalism, the discussions on legitimacy will be kept on an organisational level in order to discuss legitimating practices of the NTOs towards the meeting planners.

5.4.1 Why focus on legitimacy?

Anne Marie Bülow (2011) points out that: *"If we assume that success hinges on the ability to be accepted by the relevant stakeholders, it must be a major concern for each company to establish legitimacy (…)"* (Bülow, 2011, paragraph 3). Lawrence et al. (1997) and Management professor Blake Ashforth & Strategy & Marketing specialist Barrie W. Gibbs (1990) present a similar view by stating that possessing legitimacy will give access to the necessary resources and support from stakeholders (Lawrence et al., 1997, p. 307; Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 177). Legitimacy is thus being highlighted as a crucial possession in order to operate successfully in an organisational field, and the researchers therefore find it highly relevant to bring up this concept in the context of meeting planners and NTOs. This is especially seen in the light of the conditions and complexities they work under, and the lack of knowledge of how the relationship between them should actually be constructed.

The concept of legitimacy has been mentioned a few times in the previous sections because of how the new-institutional theorists emphasise a natural linkage between institutional theory, homogenisation, and legitimacy. However, in order to answer the research questions posed in chapter one, the researchers see the need to incorporate a more managerial approach to legitimacy, and thus showing the NTOs a possible course of action as to how legitimacy can be attempted secured, at least when it comes to their relationship with the meeting planners.

[63] Whether or not Lars Von Trier was serious about this statement is to be discussed in a different forum.

Before proceeding the discussion about the many aspects of legitimacy, the following definition is one of the most cited ones by the theorist Suchman, will be presented, because he manages to capture the vital aspects of legitimacy: *"Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, and definitions."* (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Legitimacy is thus pointed out to be congruence between the social environment and the organisation in question, both by those theorists working with the concept from an institutional standpoint, and those who do not (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; John Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003), nonetheless the different approaches to legitimacy will, to some extent, be described below.

Suchman notes that an organisation can deviate from the societal norms of smaller entities, but still maintain its overall legitimacy, because the focus is on the larger societal group (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Pfeffer & Salancik (2003) however, make an interesting point; that legitimacy does not necessarily have to be evaluated by the entire society: *"(...) it is not clear how large a part of the social system must confer its approval for an organization or its practices to be considered legitimate. We suspect that legitimacy need not be conferred by a large segment of society for the organization to prosper."* (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003, p. 194). As they point out, an organisation need only be legitimate to relevant stakeholders, and that those who evaluate an organisation's legitimacy cannot be the same for each organisation, as it depends on the organisation in question (Ibid., p. 24). Nonetheless, the number of stakeholders to whom an organisation needs to appear legitimate can still be numerous if one takes all the "sub-groups" of stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, legislative institutions, etc. into account. This is important, to keep in mind, when analysing and discussing this study's empirical findings and discussing the NTO's legitimacy as perceived by the meeting planners.

5.4.2 Legitimacy as constitutive beliefs, resource, or constraint?

The researchers will make use of Suchman's thoughts on legitimacy as a point of departure and framework for the discussion of legitimacy, with a focus on the strategic approach (which Suchman also mainly leans against), with inclusion of other relevant theorists. Above was mentioned that legitimacy is largely seen as a means of ensuring resources and stakeholder support. However, legitimacy itself is frequently emphasised as a resource by theorists, such as Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) and Dowling & Pfeffer (1975), who are considered to focus on the more strategic approach to legitimacy. This is due to how it can expose an organisation's conformation to the rules and beliefs set up by the institutional environment and thus how it assists, by being an actual asset, in ensuring the organisation's survival (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, p. 125). According to Suchman (1995) these theorists hold an instrumental view on legitimacy, and thus believe that organisations themselves can manage and influence the process of legitimisation (Suchman, 1995, p. 576) through what Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) call either symbolic- or substantive management[64] (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Palazzo & Scherer, 2006). Contrary to this is the institutional approach, which views legitimacy as a set of constitutive beliefs that the institutional environment imposes on organisations (Oliver, 1991, p. 148) and Suchman propounds that this approach understands legitimacy and institutionalisation as synonymous (Suchman, 1995, p. 576). The organisation thus just follows the beliefs of society in a taken-for-granted manner; not giving it much consideration (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 73). Ensuring that ones' organisation is considered legitimate can be easier said than done and therefore the legitimating processes, which mainly follows a strategic viewpoint, for gaining, maintaining and repairing legitimacy, will be discussed below.

As noted above, both Dowling & Pfeffer (1975) and Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) point out the positive aspects of legitimacy; however, they also mention that it is a problematic entity for organisations to operate. They point out that it can be a constraint on the organisation's management, because the organisation constantly needs to be aware of and follow the social values and beliefs, as they keep changing. Dowling & Pfeffer (1975) formulate the hypothesis that: *"(…) organizations that are larger, and organizations that receive more political and social benefits would tend to engage more heavily in legitimating behavior."* (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, p. 133). Obviously, this could be due to the certain obligations that an organisation can have, to the financial contributor, for instance, but also because of the many stakeholders relying on the organisation. As mentioned, VDK is supported by both private stakeholders and governmental funds, and thus has obligations to these contributors. Hence, legitimacy can be a resource and an asset, but it also puts some restrictions on the organisation's free movement.

[64] Substantive management concerns more thorough changes to organisational goals, structures, and processes and by symbolic management is meant more superficial initiatives (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 178 – 182).

Another aspect, which can also complicate an organisation's management of legitimacy, is the fact that many organisations today operate on an international scale, and must thus comply not only with various stakeholders, but also various stakeholders from different institutional environments. These environments can shift from country to country; as they are not homogenous, hence making it a complex case for the organisation to control (Tatiana Kostova & Srilata Zaheer, 1999).

5.4.3 Three types of legitimacy (Moral, cognitive, and pragmatic legitimacy)

For the further discussion of legitimacy and legitimating activities of the NTOs, the researchers wish to emphasise the different types of legitimacy that Suchman (1995) presents, which other theorists have then later referred to (for instance Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Brad Long & Cathy Driscoll, 2008). He distinguishes between pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and cognitive legitimacy[65], and notes that organisations normally do not strive to have all three types of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995, p. 586).

Pragmatic legitimacy is the type of legitimacy that includes the stakeholders, so to speak. Their self-interest is what decides if they perceive a specific organisation to be legitimate or not, and therefore it is up to the organisation to meet the stakeholders' requirements (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006) through what was mentioned by Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) as the symbolic- or substantive management. However, they note that stakeholders prefer the substantive management, whereas the managers prefer the use of symbolic management (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 182). Suchman (1995) points out that it can be viewed as an exchange legitimacy: *"Thus, at the simplest level, pragmatic legitimacy boils down to a sort of exchange legitimacy – support for an organizational policy based on that policy's expected value to a particular set of constituents (…)"* (Suchman, 1995, p. 578). He takes this notion further and notes that legitimacy can also be obtained if the organisation lets itself be influenced by the constituents' standards of performance or structures (Ibid., p. 578). Palazzo & Scherer (2006) accentuate that a link between the strategic approach to legitimacy and pragmatic legitimacy is indicated, because of how the organisations intend to influence constituents and thereby manage the process of legitimacy (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 74).

Moral legitimacy has an opposite focus compared to the pragmatic legitimacy, as it is directed more towards the societal norms and the organisation's compliance to these. The

[65] Suchman (1995) moreover presents several subtypes of legitimacy to the three overall types, however the researchers will not be distinguishing between all of these.

organisation needs to behave according to those constraints imposed by the stakeholders in the institutional environment, in order to be considered legitimate and not just consider the stakeholders with self-interest (Long & Driscoll, 2008, p. 174 – 175; Scott, 2001, p. 59). Suchman says it very clearly: *"(…) it rests not on judgements about whether a given activity benefits the evaluator, but rather on judgements about whether the activity is "the right thing to do"."* (Suchman, 1995, p. 579). Suchman (1995), in his discussion of sub-types of moral legitimacy, mentions that moral legitimacy can be judged by the organisation's output or performance giving consequential legitimacy, but the organisation's procedures and means can also show if an organisation acts according to the institutional settings. This not only in concrete procedures to specific outcomes, but also in regard to the organisation's overall operation of certain aspects, such as whether or not the organisation has a quality control department (Ibid., p. 581). This type of legitimacy, as well as the above-mentioned pragmatic legitimacy, both rest on evaluative notions contrasting the last type of legitimacy that Suchman (1995) discusses.

This last type of legitimacy pointed out by Suchman (1995) is the cognitive legitimacy. This type of legitimacy has the same focus on the overall societal environment as the moral legitimacy; however, it is gained in a different manner. It is not as explicit as the two other types thus this kind is practised on a more unspoken and sub-conscious level (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 72). Suchman (1995) points out that an organisation can be taken-for-granted as being the one that can handle a task most efficiently. It eliminates all competitors, because no alternative is detected and it is given that the specific organisation is the best. Obtaining or having this type of legitimacy is thus described as being the ultimate kind of legitimacy (Suchman, 1995, p. 583). Another interesting aspect of cognitive legitimacy rests on the perception of comprehensibility. Since organisations are operating in a complex environment, it is the organisation's task to bring about relevance and understanding, thus making oneself relevant in the context in which you operate.

5.4.4 Gaining, maintaining, and repairing legitimacy

Apart from depicting the different types of legitimacy, Suchman (1995) also draws attention to the importance of the organisation in question to manage its activities in order to be acknowledged as conforming to societal expectations. Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) too, before Suchman (1995), pointed out the importance of activities to obtain this congruence, but noted that different practices will need to take place depending on whether the organisation wishes to extend, maintain, or defend its legitimacy[66] (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 182). These managerial approaches are seen as very significant by the researchers, in order to detect where and how the NTOs should work with legitimating practices, taking into consideration the meeting planners' view on whether or not the NTOs' current activities are seen as legitimate or if legitimacy must be created. The managerial theorists (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975; Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Suchman, 1995) all point to strategies that an organisation can adopt in order to gain legitimacy, and Suchman (1995) also explains how the three types of legitimacy can be gained, maintained or repaired[67].

Both Suchman (1995) and Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) point out that an organisation is in a situation where gaining legitimacy is of relevance, when, for example, it is a completely novice in an already established sector, one is starting up in a new sector, or when the organisation changes its activities or processes (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 182; Suchman, 1995, p. 586 - 587). The organisation can gain legitimacy by adapting its activities to the needs of stakeholders through substantive management, or by conforming to the institutional principles, not thinking so much about the instrumental demands. These activities can be done by the previously mentioned symbolic management and thus try to appear as if conforming to the societal ideals (Suchman, 1995, p. 588; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003, p. 20). An NTO can for instance try to gain pragmatic legitimacy by meeting the needs of meeting planners via a customised or personalised approach, thus using more substantive management. If the NTO succeeds using this approach, it could be a step closer to gain legitimacy from this segment. A different, less plausible way to gain legitimacy can be through the alteration of what constitutes legitimacy (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975, p. 127). This is an approach taken by organisations that do not fit the already set frames, but this is almost an impossible manipulation due to the amount of resources necessary (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003, p. 196 & 266 -267). The last option, according to these theorists, is for the organisation to locate an institutional environment where the organisation can fit in without necessarily having to change its operational activities and rather find stakeholders, which will accept the activities as they are (Suchman, 1995, p. 589). Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) point out that this can be seen as a proactive manner of managing legitimacy, but not without difficulties (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 182).

[66] As mentioned earlier, Suchman (1995) names these diverse legitimating activities gaining, maintaining, and repairing, as just a different way of terming the same procedures.
[67] This distinction will not be made here due to space constraints, but will be incorporated in the following sections if found useful for discussions of the legitimacy of NTOs.

Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) point out that the legitimating activities at this point, of maintaining ones legitimate position, is low and unproblematic since the organisation can almost be taken-for-granted as legitimate if it just continues its 'usual' way of operating in relation to the stakeholders. The organisation can take on symbolic activities to demonstrate that everything is fine (Ibid., p. 183), but Suchman (1995) also suggests that the organisation must be preventive by monitoring the external environment; for instance, noticing change in the stakeholders' requirements (Suchman, 1995, p. 594 – 595). This can, of course, be a practice, which requires a comprehensive amount of resources, but still to the advantage of the organisation. A different approach to secure a continuous acceptance is to protect the organisation's achievements through what was accentuated above by Ashforth & Gibbs (1990), and moreover, to stay consistent towards stakeholders. To secure moral legitimacy, the organisation should ensure that focus is not only on the above-mentioned instrumental concerns, not to mention the cognitive legitimacy; the legitimacy should just be natural and continuous (Suchman, 1995, p. 596). In the meeting industry, the NTO can be conscious about changes by attempting to monitor the development in the meeting planners' requirements in connection to the planning of international programmes and by following the latest trends. In order to maintain legitimacy, the NTO can also make an effort to preserve its relations to meeting planners by having a continuous, balanced interaction, making the NTO stand out as being a coordinated and valuable asset to the meeting planner. This will be elaborated later in the value creation section of this theoretical chapter.

A last legitimating activity, which is somewhat more problematic than the one discussed above, is how an organisation can repair its legitimacy. This procedure is what the Danish tourism organisations, mentioned earlier in the case of Lars Von Trier, might need to perform in order to re-establish acceptance from stakeholders, such as tourists and business investors. They will have to react to the situation most often through symbolic actions as the legitimacy is likely an already established entity that just needs to be adjusted. This can be done through an explanatory press release from the NTO, but if the organisation has low legitimacy beforehand, the activities might need to be more substantial (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 183 - 187), for instance an optimisation of the NTO's marketing activities that state the message the organisation wants to portray. However, Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) also note that organisations trying to repair their legitimacy can end up being considered as trying too hard and that the activities should rather be understated (Ibid., p. 184 – 187). Both Suchman (1995) and Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) note that an illegitimate activity can influence stakeholders not involved in the actual incident (Ibid., p. 183) and Suchman states that: *"Because legitimation is frequently mutualistic, the risk of negative contagion may drive even long-standing allies to disassociate themselves from a troubled counterpart (…)"* (Suchman, 1995, p. 597). Therefore, an important activity is to make sure that the incident in question is separated from the rest of the organisation's activities (Ibid., p. 598). When VDK, for instance, launched the less successful viral campaign about 'Karen'[68], in an effort to do something innovative and to avoid the institutionalised way of operating (Oliver, 1991, p. 154), VDK withdrew the video to avoid damaging VDK's and Denmark's overall reputation (Pedersen, 2009, ekstrabladet.dk).

Another way this flawed legitimacy is addressed, is what is by Management professor Suresh Sethi termed the 'legitimacy gap' (Sethi in Lawrence et al., 1997, p. 312). He believes that the legitimacy gap arises, when for instance the societal expectations change, and if it is noted by the public that the organisation is acting in one way, but claiming something different. The gap can, according to Sethi, be closed via activities already mentioned, such as trying to change the societal expectations and symbolic management (Ibid., p. 312).

The actions discussed above, that an NTO could carry out either to gain, maintain, or repair its legitimacy, are of course not as simple as described, and an organisation can be in a situation where it needs to both gain and maintain legitimacy. As mentioned, an NTO is confronted with many different stakeholders, with contrasting demands and maybe even from various institutional settings, and also takes on different identities, thus it might need to operate with several different legitimating activities at the same time. Furthermore, the NTO needs to navigate attentively as the institutional settings change, which again can require change of the legitimating activities performed. An aspect, which has not been mentioned, is how the internal structures of an organisation can also affect an organisation's legitimacy outwardly. However, this is a discussion for a different study, looking at intra-organisational issues.

5.5 Value creation

This section aims to present and discuss the theoretical concept of value creation, which lies within the relationship- and service marketing and management literature. More specifically, the intention is to create a theoretical framework from which the researchers can analyse

[68] VDK launched a viral campaign on YouTube with a single mother, 'Karen', looking for her baby's father, whom she met on a night out in Copenhagen – Larsen, 2009 - www.markedsforing.dk.

and discuss the empirical findings in regard to the marketing approach directed at the meeting planner segment. The selected literature for this section presents different perspectives on how value creation is created in B2B and B2C relationships, and how the supplier and customer both can influence the process of value creation. The process of value creation will here be approached from a contemporary standpoint, and not as a longitudinal study of its development in the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner.

However, as pointed out by the professors in marketing Stephen L. Vargo & Robert F. Lusch (2008), one does not need to differentiate between B2B and B2C relationships when discussing supplier-customer structures, as the supplier will always address a customer as an individual, whether it is in the private or business sphere of the customer's life (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, p. 255). Because the researchers have found it important to highlight that the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner represents two distinctive roles, a decision has been made to continuously refer to the relationship as a B2C relationship in the following discussion of value creation and the remaining chapters of this study.

5.5.1 The NTO as supplier

In this chapter the NTO will be considered as a supplier/service provider. The argument for appointing the NTO this role is the fact that most NTOs offer to assist meeting planners with different aspects of their planning of international programmes, thus the perception of the NTO is as a supplier of services. Although the researchers feel that an argument can be made for appointing the NTO with this role, the researchers also acknowledge that the complexity of the overall role of the NTO makes this organisation unable to have the same mobility to navigate as other, privately held tourism suppliers. As mentioned in chapter one and above, the NTO has to consider its relationship with the meeting planners and the competitors in its environment, as well as being attentive of internal stakeholders, governmental institutions, and the public opinion.

Because the NTO has to consider internal stakeholders in its work, one could argue that the NTO is not just viewed as a supplier of services, but also as a network convener. However, based on the fact that this study does not include sufficient empirical data from the internal environment of a country's tourism industry, the researchers will not look further into this matter in the current study, as mentioned in section 5.4.4. Instead, the researchers will focus on the NTO's role as a supplier of services to the meeting planners.

5.5.2 The meeting planner's value creation process

Because this study focuses on the meeting planner's value creation process and how the NTO can influence this process, the researchers find it necessary to clarify the type of value being exchanged, as well the type of services. The content of the value generated in the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner seems to be non-financial, rather, the value meeting planners can seek to obtain by using the services of an NTO seem to consist of other, non-materialistic values, such as saving time, knowledge, inspiration, and looking professional in the eyes of the end client. When arguing that the values generated in the relationship are of a non-materialistic nature, it is, of course, important to remember that all of the above-mentioned values are meant to support the meeting planners' standing in regard to their end clients. Thus, one can argue for the inclusion of a thin, red, economic line through the whole value creation process, despite the fact that, usually, no actual economic transaction takes place between the NTO and the meeting planner.

With regard to the services, the NTO can assist with different aspects of the meeting planners' process of planning a programme; such as general information, fam. trips or ROI on international programmes, through suggestions on how to create exciting and innovative meeting structures. However, it is important to stress that the services facilitated to a meeting planner can differ significantly from one NTO to another, which makes it even more relevant to examine which, if any, of the NTOs' services have an effect on the meeting planner's value creation process.

5.5.3 Changing the process of value creation

According to C.K. Prahalad former professor of corporate strategy & Marketing professor Venkat Ramaswamy (2000 & 2004), the process of value creation is changing. Traditionally, the value creation in a B2C relationship is pre-determined by the supplier's product; making the relationship between the supplier and customer a B2C relationship (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 79). Today, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) argue that the process of value creation is changing, from being a supplier oriented process to a process mainly influenced by the customer, thus the B2C approach to value creation has now shifted to a C2B approach (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 5 - 7). This view is supported by Marketing professor Adrian F. Payne et al. (2008), who argue that the way suppliers interact with costumers has shifted, from an inside-out to an outside-in perspective; meaning that today the suppliers are mainly focused on modifying their production or services to best fit the requirements of their customers' value creation (Payne et al., 2008, p. 89). This perspective is further emphasised in a recent article on branding from the Danish network of marketing professionals[69]. A quote states that *"It belongs to a time when the companies dictated trends and design and the consumers simply were customers hereof. But that era is over."*[70] (Boye, 2011, p. 36). Boye explains that the shift of power, bringing power to the customers, brings about a need for companies to be driven by an outside-in perspective (Boye, 2011, p. 36). The focus on the customer has, according to Boye (2011), arrived due to the competition caused by globalisation, and because the consumers are making themselves heard. Furthermore, this change in value creation seems to be caused by the general increase in the usage of the Internet. The argument for the link between the Internet and other new, technological communication platforms, and the shift towards a more customer influenced value creation process, is that these new communication channels, in a variety of different ways, encourage the user to interact with the product or service, presented to them (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 80; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 2 - 5; Payne et al., 2008, p. 88). Today, the customer has easy access to forums, where they can discuss product or service experiences with peers. The settings for these forums are provided by social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and industry associations are known to establish such forums and events for industry discussions to take place. An example of one of these digital media platforms within the meeting industry is Meet Pie, which is a digital forum created by CAT Publications for meeting planners and other players to be updated and discuss trends in the meeting industry.

5.5.4 Moving from a goods to a service logic

Other theorists, such as Service- and marketing specialist Christian Grönroos (2008 & 2011), Vargo & Lusch (2004 & 2008) and David Ballantyne & Richard J. Varey (2006), seem to overall agree with Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004 & 2004a) and Payne et al. (2008) in their perception of today's value creation as being much more customer oriented. However, whereas Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) and Payne et al. (2008) address the relationship between the supplier and customer (B2C vs. C2B), this group of theorists describe the changes in value creation through a business logic perspective.

[69] Huset Markedsføring – www.markedsforing.dk.
[70] Quote translated by the researchers.

In the traditional process of value creation, the supplier perceived the relationship with customers from what can be viewed as a goods logic[71] (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 13; Vargo et al., 2008, p. 146; Vargo et al., 2007, p. 6; Grönroos, 2011, p. 241), which focused on creating value in the production process. Following this business logic, the supplier created value by ensuring that the product met the technical requirements of the customer's operational efficiency. It was then up to the customer to ensure full utilisation of the product in their own production process. Grönroos (2011) defines this way of perceiving value creation as: *"A goods logic can be described as a business logic, where resources are provided to a given usage process for the customer's use in order to support that particular process in the value-creating way."* (Grönroos, 2011, p. 241).

Since the 1990s, a discussion of the way in which value creation is produced, has emerged in the management and marketing literature, and this discussion has challenged the traditional understanding of value creation as being goods dominant – value-in-exchange – by introducing a service business logic perspective – value creation-in-use (Grönroos & Annika Ravald, 2010, p. 7; Vargo et al., 2008, p. 146). An interesting observation, when viewing the notion of value creation-in-use, is that the value creation process does not commence until during the customer's usage of the product or service, thus making the customer the value creator (Grönroos, 2011, p. 243; Vargo et al., 2008, p. 149). As such, the supplier is forced to change his or her approach to the customer in order to ensure successful value creation. Following the notion of value creation-in-use, a sole focus on meeting the customer's technical requirements for the usage of a product is thus insufficient. Instead, the supplier also has to support the customer's usage and experience of the product, to ensure that a satisfying value creation process takes place (Grönroos, 2011, p. 242). In other words, the supplier not only has to focus on complying with the customer's technical requirements (operational efficiency), but also needs to ensure an added value to the revenue of the customer's business (business efficiency) by supporting the customer's usage of the product. This can be achieved by offering additional goods or services, which support the customer's usage phase.

Ballantyne & Varey (2006) elaborate on this view by arguing for the existence of three main enablers of value creation in the service logic approach; knowledge renewal, communicative

[71] In this study, it has been decided to refer to goods dominant logic (G-D logic) and service dominant logic (S-D logic) as goods and service logic.

interaction, and relationship development, activities, which the supplier can utilise to enable value creation (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006, p. 343).

An example of a service enabler, which is intended to support the customer in the use of a certain product, could be online help and support forums[72].

The management professors Richard Normann and Rafael Ramírez (1993) summarise, what seems to be the overall consensus among the above-mentioned theoretical perspectives on the shift in value creation, by stating: "*The goal is not to create value for customers, but to mobilize customers to create their own value from the company's various offerings."* (Normann & Ramírez, 1993, p. 69).

5.5.4.1 Non-interactive value facilitation

Considering the usage of a service logic in a B2C relationship, Grönroos (2011) and Vargo & Lusch (2004) differentiate between non-interactive and interactive relationships, arguing that the level of interaction has direct effects on the possibilities for a co-creation of value process to occur.

When discussing non-interactive B2C relationships, Grönroos (2011) supports Vargo & Lusch's (2004) notion of the supplier and customer as being independently capable of influencing the value-generating process differently (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 11) by stating: *"Production takes place in the supplier's sphere. Value creation, on the other hand, takes place in the customers' value-creating processes."* (Grönroos, 2011, p. 243). In such relationships, the customer is referred to as the sole value creator; the creation of value can only occur through use of resources, such as products, services or a combination of both. This process can be referred to as creation of value-in-use (Ibid., 2011, p. 242), that is, it is only through the use of a certain resource, or certain combinations of resources that value can be created; thus the emphasis is on the customer as the value creator. When in a non-interactive relationship with the customer, it is impossible for the supplier to have direct influence on the creation of value. The supplier then functions as a value facilitator; meaning that the supplier can optimise the chances for the customer to have a successful creation of value-in-use by facilitating certain required resources (Ibid., p. 244). When an NTO invites a meeting planner on a fam. trip to meet with suppliers and to familiarise themselves with the locations, the NTO is facilitating certain resources for the meeting planner to create value-in-

[72] For instance at Scandinavian Airlines - www.sas.dk/.

use. In this case, it is not the NTO who creates the value, instead it is up to the meeting planner to create the value of the trip; hence the term creation of value-in-use.

Despite the clear differentiation between the way in which the NTO and the meeting planner can influence the value generating process in a non-interactive relationship, one can question if this argument correlates with the reality of the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner. It could be argued that apart from being able to influence the value generating process, the NTO and the meeting planner both possess alternative approaches to influence the process without interaction. For instance, if one NTO learns that another NTO is having success with a certain innovative service offering, the first NTO might try to incorporate this service into its own offerings. In this example, the meeting planners have an indirect influence on the production process of the services of the NTO, without any direct interaction.

5.5.4.2 Interactive co-creation of value

The opposite of a non-interactive relationship - the interactive relationship gives, the supplier an opportunity to interact with the customer through various sub-processes, such as corresponding with the customer, and handling complaints. If dealt with correctly, this will have a positive value-creating impact on the customer's business efficiency (Ibid, p. 241). Furthermore, it gives the supplier an opportunity to continuously modify its production processes to fit the needs of the customer, and as such, a greater potential for a successful facilitation of resources to support the customer's value-creation process (Ibid, p. 244). Although Grönroos (2011) emphasises that the customer is the main value creator in B2C relationships, he acknowledges that a supplier, in an interactive B2C relationship, can have an impact on the value-creation process, by interacting with the customer, the supplier creates the opportunity for a co-production process as well as a co-creation of value process (Ibid, p. 244). Although interactive relationships provide the supplier with a great opportunity to have an impact on the value creation process, it also means, a risk of damaging the standard quality level of any given product because of the consideration of individual needs. Additionally, the consideration of individual needs also means a great risk of removing resources from parts of the production process, which again has an influence on the quality level of the product. Thus the importance for any supplier to not just strengthen the possibility for value creation through interaction with the customer, but also to allocate the appropriate amount of resources to the production process in order to ensure a certain quality level.

5.5.4.3 Critique of the Business logic perspective

The business logic approaches to value creation present different relevant perspectives on how NTOs can influence the meeting planner's value creation process. However, it does seem that a key aspect in regard to this specific type of relationship is not being paid any attention, and instead of only focusing on how the NTO should engage in its dyadic relationship with the meeting planners and their value creation processes, Daft (2007) suggests that one should also take into consideration the question of resource dependency versus collaborative networks. As mentioned in chapter one and three several different players offer the same services as the NTO, which creates the relevance of looking into how the NTO structures its offerings, instead of only focusing on the NTO's potential influence on the meeting planners' value creation process. Specifically, it could be of interest to examine whether or not the NTO is offering its services in collaboration with other players or mostly focuses on an independent approach. Although the researchers find this perspective to be of interest for the examination of the NTOs role in the meeting industry, the decision to focus on empirical data from meeting planners has brought the researchers to the conclusion that the analysis of this study will not be able to carry a discussion about this theoretical perspective.

5.5.5 Customised vs. personalised experiences

To support the notion of the customer taking a much more active role, Payne et al. (2008) argue that the customer is becoming more individual in his or her orientation, which forces the supplier to personalise their offerings in order to ensure a satisfying customer experience (Payne et al., 2008, p. 88 - 89). Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2000) support Payne's argument and add: *"It is important to distinguish personalization from customization."* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 83). By customisation is to be understood that the customer has the possibility to customise a product or experience from a range of different features created by the supplier. The presumption is that the features correlate with the needs and requirements of the customer (Ibid., p. 83 - 84). For instance, consider the informational function of an NTO: Traditionally, the function was to provide meeting planners with information on tourism suppliers and intermediaries located in the country represented, thus supplying the meeting planners with informational service to support their learning process about a destination from specific information channels. Today, NTOs, such as VDK, have extended their services to meeting planners by having a variety of different platforms, such as workshops, digital applications, and social media platforms, from where the NTO can communicate and interact with the meeting planner, thus making it possible for the meeting planner to customise his or her learning process from a range of precreated platforms. What makes these platforms part of a much more customised experience for the meeting planner, is the fact that it is up to the individual meeting planner to decide the level of communication, learning, and interaction when using these platforms. This means that the meeting planner/customer is now able to create a customised experience of the learning process of a country, region, or city by having the opportunity to create the most desirable way of obtaining the required knowledge, based on an individual selection of how to use the options put created by the NTO.

Similar to customisation, personalised experiences also refer to the individualisation of a product or service. However, personalised experiences offer another way of customer involvement by including the customer as a co-creator of the structures behind the services of an NTO. Instead of creating a range of options for the meeting planner to choose from when using the services of an NTO, a personalised approach will invite the meeting planner to become a co-producer of these options (Ibid., 84). As an example, a personalised experience could include the involvement of meeting planners in the construction of a LinkedIn profile for an NTO. Although it is here being argued that personalisation of services has its advantages in attracting the meeting planners to use the NTO, it is important to accentuate that there are certain risks attached to pursuing personalisation seen from a supplier's perspective. The researchers will elaborate on these risks in the following section.

5.5.6 The DART-model

In addition to the theoretical perspectives on customised vs. personalised experiences, the researchers have also found it relevant for the discussion of the relationship between the meeting planner and the NTO, to include the DART-model, as presented and discussed by Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004). It seems essential for Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) to view creation of value in a business relationship from a co-creation perspective. They state that: *"The use of interaction as a basis for co-creation is at the crux of our emerging reality."* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, p. 5). Taking a point of departure in the example of the

Sumerset Company, which builds customised houseboats, Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) identify four key building blocks, which they find essential for the co-creation of value; a process which they believe is successfully achieved through a personalisation of the supplier's approach to the customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 19 - 22). The four key building blocks are: Dialogue, Access, Risk assessment, and Transparency as key elements in the interaction between supplier and customer (Ibid., p. 23).

In this context dialogue is not simply to be understood as communication between supplier and customer, or the supplier's ability to listen to the requirements of the customer base. It also refers to a mutual, continuous learning and problem solving process of problems in the relationship, as well as problems caused by the surrounding environment (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, p. 6). Similar to this perspective, the environmental school of strategy also points to the consideration of an organisation's environment, when allocating resources, as a crucial element in securing its success (Mintzberg et al., 2009, p. 305 - 306).

In a tourism context, an example of a problem in the surrounding environment, with potential effect on both customer and supplier, could be the re-establishment of the Danish borders[73]. In order for the dialogue to reach its potential, it is important to focus the dialogue on mutually relevant subjects for all parties involved, and to ensure proper settings for the communication to take place. An interesting observation in regard to Prahalad & Ramaswamy's understanding of dialogue is that a successful dialogue should result in the supplier and the customer being equally involved in solving potential problems (Ibid., p. 23).

Access is another key element of interaction in the DART-model. As explained by Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004), the traditional notion of access in a supplier-customer relationship refers to the customer's access to a product through ownership. However, it seems that today's customers are increasingly more interested in accessing experiences, without necessarily obtaining ownership of a certain product (Ibid., 2004, p. 25). This view already correlates with the tourism sector's focus on providing its customers with different temporary experiences. According to Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004), there are already several examples of corporate companies who have implemented this new way of thinking by offering temporary experiences without the necessity of ownership (Ibid., p. 26 - 27).

[73] The re-establishment of the Danish border control has produced a wave of international news stories, which do not seem to project the openness that Danish tourism organisations are trying to bring forward in their marketing campaigns (see section 5.4). An example of an international news story – www.thelocal.de.

The third element of the DART-model is concerned with the issue of risk assessment, in regard to the customer's use of a certain product. It is Prahalad & Ramaswamy's (2004) understanding that today's customer is becoming more and more active in the debate on risk factors involved with the consumption of different products. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly more essential for suppliers to ensure a disclosure of potential risk factors, in order to not be deemed unreliable by their customer base (Ibid., p. 27 - 30). Although Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) only highlight an increase in customer participation in the debate on risk assessment of products from a private health and safety concern, one can argue for the existence of the same trend emerging in B2C relationships. It is reasonable to assume that customers, with a tendency to participate in the debate on risk factors, would appreciate the same level of disclosure of potential risk factors regardless of the product being purchased, as a private or professional commodity. In a business tourism context, an example could be for a hotel sales manager to disclose the advantages and disadvantages of booking a conference at the hotel.

The last of the key elements of interaction, to strengthen the possibilities of co-creation of value, is transparency. This element refers to the customer's opportunity to monitor all steps of the production process, through free access to information about the supplier, the product, and the development process, and in return, the supplier's opportunity to gain valuable information about the customer base increases, through different types of dialogue (Ibid., p. 31). An example of dialogue created by transparency could be online forums, where customers would be provided with in-depth information about a product, while sharing their own thoughts on the product or product development.

As in the example, which combined dialogue and transparency, it is important to point out that it is through a combination of the different elements of the DART- model that a supplier has the most potential to optimise its value to the customer. The different elements are thus not to be viewed as independent elements of the interaction in B2C relationships, but more as different parts of the interaction, which need to be addressed in order to ensure a successful co-creation of value process through the inclusion of the customer's perspective (Ibid., p. 31).

At the same time, as Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) also point out, one should remember that the DART-model does not imply for the supplier to outsource or transfer activities to the customer in the co-creation process. What they see as the co-creation of value is far more

sophisticated than having simple B2C events for customers, instead it refers to the personalised experience, which satisfies the needs and requirements of each individual customer (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, p. 6).
Although the DART-model in this section has been examined with focus on creating value for the customer, it is also important to remember that the supplier needs to continuously assess its own value creation (Ibid., p. 6). One example could be the dialogue, which the DART-model suggests as one of the main building blocks of co-creation of value. Depending on the customer base and its needs to engage in an interaction with the supplier, an invitation to such interactions could, potentially, have a negative effect on the operational efficiency of the supplier. By inviting the individual customers to express their opinion and to be involved in the production process, the customer base is changing from a homogenous to a heterogeneous group. By tending to the individual needs of each customer, the supplier is taking away resources from its production process, which presents a risk of a negative effect on the supplier's operational efficiency. Furthermore, by including the perspective and opinion of each individual customer in the production process, the supplier also risks a negative effect on the general quality of the product, and less control in the production process (Ibid., p. 6). Therefore, the supplier needs to not only seek co-creation of value through the building blocks of the DART-model, but also to continuously balance the use of these blocks to ensure a positive outcome for themselves, and to ensure a certain level of quality in its product.

5.5.6.1 Critique of the DART-model

Although the DART-model touches on contemporary aspects in regard to what creating and maintaining a successful relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner entails, it does seem to be a somewhat narrow approach. Although the model brings up relevant issues to considered about the relationship, it completely ignores the different developmental stages in any relationship, thus the DART-model has a pre-conceived notion of a dyadic relationship already existing. In other words, the DART-model disregards the lifecycle perspective of relationships. This is a perspective, which according to other relationship-marketing theorists, such as Thomas Powers & William R. Reagan (2007), Troy Heffernan (2004), and Robert F. Dwyer et al. (1987), is crucial to consider in any relationship. Taking this into account, one could argue that the DART-model fails to be a sufficient descriptive and management tool in regard to the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner.

However, because this study is focused on a contemporary, exploratory examination of the relationship between NTOs and meeting planners, it has been decided not to include theoretical perspectives on the implications of longitudinal relationships.

5.5.7 Summary

Considering the perspectives on co-creation of value, as presented above, it seems evident that the supplier has to view the relationship with its customers from a customer-centric perspective. To focus on the product as the value creator is no longer considered a sustainable approach for a supplier to ensure value creation, and so the supplier has to implement the needs of the individual customer into the product production and service offers. Although great emphasis has been placed on customer involvement in this chapter, it is just as important to stress the fact that too much customer involvement can have a negative outcome as well. It is true that some companies, who specialise in customised or personalised solutions, will most likely not be negatively affected by a high degree of customer involvement, however, organisations or companies with a broader customer base, will most likely experience that a high degree of attention to individual needs can remove crucial resources from the production process and service functions, which, presumably, will result in a negative outcome.

As such, it seems essential that the supplier does not discard its own processes in order to focus solely on the needs and inputs of individual customers, but instead integrates customer involvement as a part of its preexisting processes.

5.6 Summary of value creation and legitimacy

After having discussed the different relevant theories and theoretical concepts to the research questions posed, the researchers wish to present a joint summary of the two theoretical concepts value creation and legitimacy.

Legitimacy has connections to institutional theory, and thus emphasises the importance of the environment's broader acceptance. It is related to the environmental school, as mentioned in section 5.1, and focuses on the larger context, and thus takes a macro perspective and focuses on how the institutional conditions and rules can affect relations. As discussed above, different types of legitimacy can be gained, maintained, or repaired, but overall legitimacy is about an organisation being accepted, so it can operate with its proof of reason for existing in place. It can be done in a taken-for-granted manner, or in a more strategic way, as noted above. Legitimacy thus takes a point of departure in how two entities view each other; the organisation across from those who constitute and operate in the institutional environment.

On a more tangible note, the concept of value creation can either take place in the supplier's sphere, the customer's sphere, or as a co-creation process between the organisation and the customer. The customer is a representative of the institutional environment, a stakeholder with a stake in the organisation, and the organisation tries to comply with the customer's requirements. This view is derived from a more resource-based and simplified view, which contrary to the environmental school's ontological stance, focuses on resources that the company has access to. These resources can be found within or outside the organisation, and can then be used and exploited. Hence, focus is on the relationship between the provider and supplier, and how the relation between them can be optimised in order to optimise the mutual resources.

Value creation focuses on the customer as the value creator in the interaction process (Grönroos, 2011, p. 242), and the importance for an organisation to support the customer's experience through customisation or personalisation of products and other supportive activities. Thus, the organisation has to address the needs and requirements of its stakeholders in order to ensure that value is created. Whether co-creation of value or value facilitation is the way to go about the meeting planners, will be analysed in the following sections.

If the organisation succeeds in supporting the customer properly in its process of value creation, it might make the stakeholders perceive the organisation as a legitimate player. As such, it can be a win-win situation that can create goodwill for the organisation, and a satisfied customer who feels supported in its value creation process. In this context is not only interesting to detect if the NTO's approach to the meeting planners is viewed as legitimate, but also in which way the NTO should operate, in order to reach this acceptance. Is it through co-creation of value, which is emphasised as a "best practice" above, or does the meeting planner seek something different? The theorists who take on a more managerial approach, see legitimacy as a resource; a resource that could be managed in different ways, thus even though legitimacy is an abstract entity, perhaps it can be seen as a resource that the organisation can provide to the customer, and hopefully detect that the customer can apply it in his or her own value creation process. Therefore, when the customer collaborates with a legitimate organisation, there is also a chance for the customer to be viewed as legitimate, but again, it is up to customer to ensure this.

An example of how value creation and legitimacy can be related could be, when the organisation works on maintaining its legitimacy. The institutional environment's settings keep changing and the organisation needs to be able to comply with these changes so as not to be viewed as illegitimate. This could be done by co-creating value in relation with the customer, following the customer's needs, and not only, as the goods logic emphasises, focusing on own opinions of what constitutes "the best for the customer". The theoretical scrutiny in the foregoing sections, as well as the exploratory interviews, have brought about the concepts below, which will be used to communicate the composition of chapter seven, in chapter six:

Goods logic vs. service logic
Co-creation of value vs. value facilitation
Non-interactive vs. interactive relationships
Creation of value-in-use
DART-model
Pragmatic legitimacy
Cognitive legitimacy
Moral legitimacy
Isomorphism
Cultural compliance vs. business efficiency
Objectivity vs. subjectivity

Chapter 6: Analytical strategy

This chapter will bring clarity to the structure of the following analysis. As mentioned earlier, the researchers have decided to apply a critical realism perspective, with an abductive approach to the analysis of this study. This chapter will be utilised to describe how the key concepts, as outlined in chapter five, will be combined with the theoretical part of this study, as well the quantitative and qualitative empirical data to investigate the three research questions.

Similar to the approach that will be used in the analysis itself, the analytical strategy will be divided into three sub sections. Each sub-section will be dedicated to present the analytical approach to each of the research questions, and the results of the analysis will be concluded in relation to the overall research question in the concluding chapter (chapter nine). The analysis of the research questions will, in some cases, overlap. The researchers do not view this as a problem, but rather as an advantage, which secures a coherent red line through the entire analysis.

In addition to conducting an analysis of the three research questions, as presented in section 1.6.1, the researchers will also include a discussion of their own interpretations of the empirical findings. With consideration towards ensuring a flow in the analysis, the researchers have decided to incorporate the discussion in the analysis of each of the study's three research questions.

Before embarking on the analysis of the research questions, the researchers will (in section 7.1) commence with a review of the sample[74]. The five background variables[75] will be examined to present the meeting planners who have participated in the survey and also to have an outline of the variables' showings, which will be used in cross-tabulations (bivariate analyses) with the rest of the variables. To investigate if significant correlation between the variables in the cross-tabulations exists, the researchers will examine the P-value in regard to each of the cross-tabulations. Because the researchers have decided to work with $P < 0{,}05$, all cross-tabulations with a P-value $P > 0{,}05$ will be considered to have a non-significant value.

[74] See appendix 21 for an overview of the survey results used in the present chapter and chapter seven, and also a list of the names of the variables in appendix 20.

[75] S_1: What is your current position?; s_2: How long have you worked in the meetings industry?; s_3: How often do you plan international programmes?; s_4: On average, how many delegates participate in your international programmes?; s_5: How many employees are working in your company?

The researchers have chosen to only include those respondents, who replied to all questions in the questionnaire, thus, 53 valid answers will be applied in the subsequent analysis, instead of the total of 59 respondents, as six of the respondents only finished some of the questions. Generalisable conclusions are, due to the amount of respondents, unfortunately not possible, instead the researchers will discuss tendencies and indications of the present samples and subsequent interviewees' answers, hopefully giving inspiration to other researchers to follow up on the results in future research.

Furthermore, the researchers have decided to include all respondents in the analysis, regardless of their reply in background variable (s_1)[76], thus disregarding their current position. This is based on two aspects: The total number of respondents for analysis turned out to be low and also, the spread of the respondents in variable (s_1) was unforeseen by the researchers (cf. section 7.1) due to the choice of database earlier in the course (cf. section 1.1.4). However, the researchers believe that all the respondents can be included in the current discussion, as they are all registered in a database, which consists of meeting planners. Although it would have been ideal to only focus on the meeting planners in intermediary companies (cf. section 1.1.3), the researchers decided to prioritise a greater sample, and focus on the respondents' identities as meeting planners as the common denominator for the sample. In the sections below, the researchers will describe how they will proceed with the findings from the quantitative survey. Subsequently, the incorporation of the explanatory interviews will be explained.

6.1 Interpretation of quantitative results

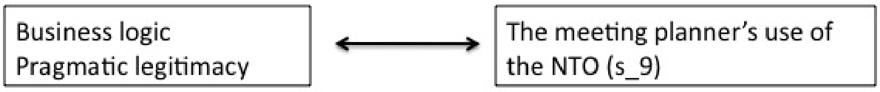
6.1.1 RQ 1: *From the meeting planner's perspective, what role does the NTO have in today's meeting industry?*

The aim of this research question is to investigate how the UK meeting planners from the sample perceive the role of the NTO, primarily from a value creation perspective. More specifically, the researchers will investigate if the UK meeting planners utilise the offerings of the NTO in their work, and if so, in which ways.

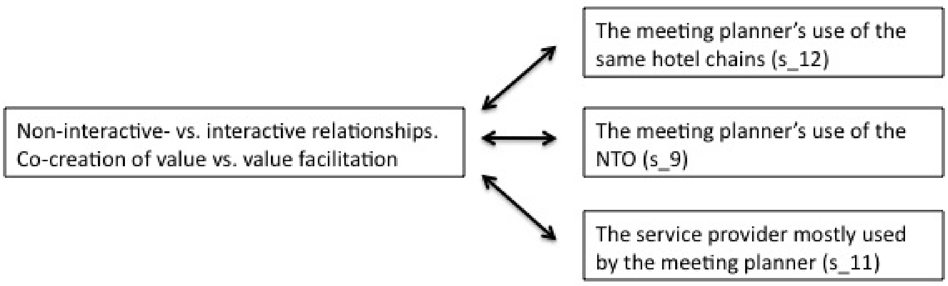
As a starting point for the analysis of the first research question, the researchers will examine the results of the (s_9) variable, regarding when the meeting planners use the NTO in their planning process of an international programme in an univariate analysis. By taking

[76] S_1: What is your current position?

a point of departure in this variable, the researchers will be able to describe, when the assistance of an NTO used the most in the process of planning international programmes. This will indicate if the services of an NTO are more important during some stages of the process than others. The researchers will use the business logic perspective (cf. section 5.5.4), and pragmatic legitimacy (cf. section 5.4.3) to elaborate on the findings from this variable. The reason for this is that these concepts will allow the researchers to suggest what the results of variable (s_9) could mean in terms of the meeting planners' perception of an NTO. A clearer view of how the researchers intend to examine this variable in the context of research question one can be seen in the figure below:



Following the examination of the meeting planners' use of the services of an NTO the researchers will examine their findings from a value creation perspective. Variables (s_9)[77], (s_11)[78] & (s_12)[79] will be utilised to investigate the relationship between the meeting planners and the NTO, as perceived by the meeting planners in the sample of this survey. The aim will be to examine if the meeting planners generally perceive the NTO as an interactive co-creator of value, or more as a non-interactive value facilitator (cf. sections 5.5.4.1 & 5.5.4.2). The approach to investigate the aforementioned relationship can be viewed in the figure below:

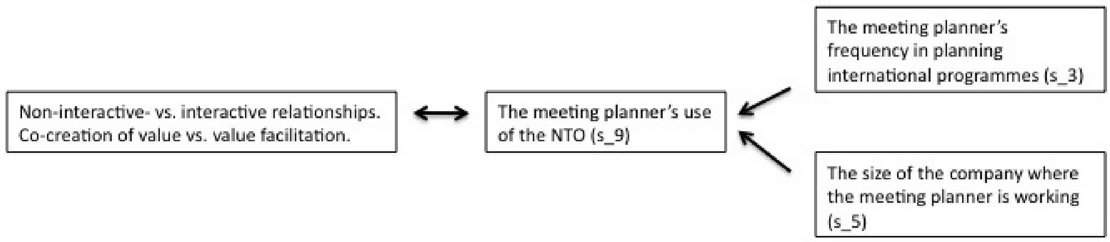


It would also have been interesting to cross-tabulate the primary variable (s_9), with the background variable relating to how many years the meeting planner has worked in the industry (s_2), to investigate if there is a correlation between work experience and use. Due to the spread, having almost 80% of the respondents working in the industry for more than

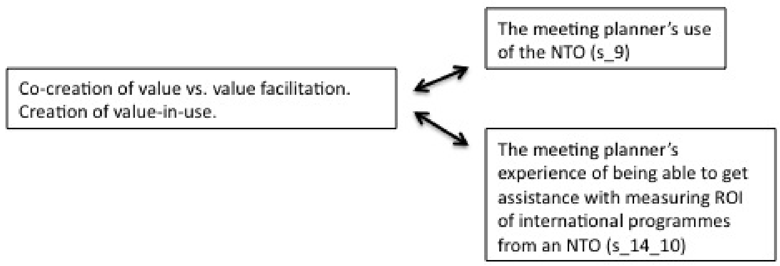
[77] S_9: When, in your planning of an international programme, do you use the services of an NTO?
[78] S_11: When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…
[79] S_12: When planning an international programme, do you use the same international hotel chains?

six years, and having five answer categories in the primary variable, this was considered to be an irrelevant and unsatisfactory comparison.

Instead, the researchers will cross-tabulate background variable (s_3)[80] with (s_9) in order to detect if there is any correlation between when in the planning process the NTO is used and how often the meeting planner organises international programmes. Also, variable (s_9) will be cross-tabulated with variable (s_5), regarding the number of employees in the meeting planner's company. The researchers will cross-tabulate these variables to see if experience and size of a meeting planner's company has an effect on the individual meeting planner's use of the services of an NTO. Both cross-tabulations can be put into context in the figure below:



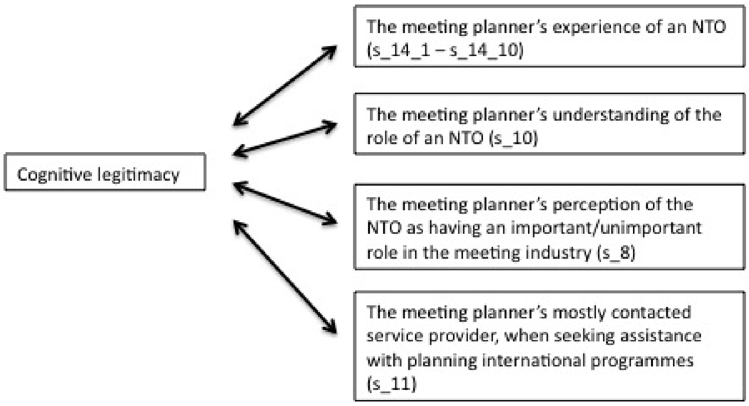
In addition to the correlations, which will be investigated in the figure shown above, the researchers will also examine what role ROI plays as an evaluative service. In particular, the researchers intend to examine how, or if, these meeting planners' perceive the NTO as a service provider, who assists meeting planners in optimising their argumentations to their clients for why a certain programme was a success. Here, variable (s_9) and (s_14_10)[81] will be used along with a theoretical focus on value facilitation vs. co-creation of value, as well as creation of value-in-use, to examine the meeting planners' experience of the NTO as a service provider assisting with measuring ROI. This is illustrated in the figure below:



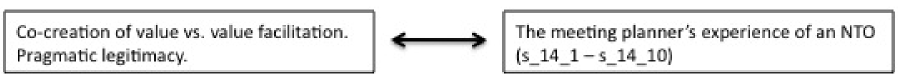
[80] S_3: How often do you plan international programmes?

[81] S_14_10: When contacting an NTO, my experience is that I can get assistance with measuring the ROI of my event(s) in the NTO's country

Additionally, the researchers will examine the meeting planners' perception of the NTO from a cognitive legitimacy perspective (cf. section 5.4.3). The reason for including cognitive legitimacy in this discussion is to investigate the meeting planners' perception of the NTO from an institutionalisation perspective, and later in the analysis to see if this legitimacy aspect is one that needs to be altered. Cognitive legitimacy, as presented in the theoretical part of this study, will be applied more specifically to the analysis of the primary variables regarding these meeting planners' experience of an NTO (s_14_1 – s_14_10), understanding of the role of an NTO (s_10), importance of the role of an NTO (s_8), and who the meeting planners' mostly contact when planning international programmes (s_11). By including these variables, it is the researchers' aim to create a nuanced analysis of the cognitive legitimacy, to detect if the NTOs are appointed this by the meeting planners in the sample. An outline of how the researchers intend to approach this part of the analysis can be viewed in the figure below:



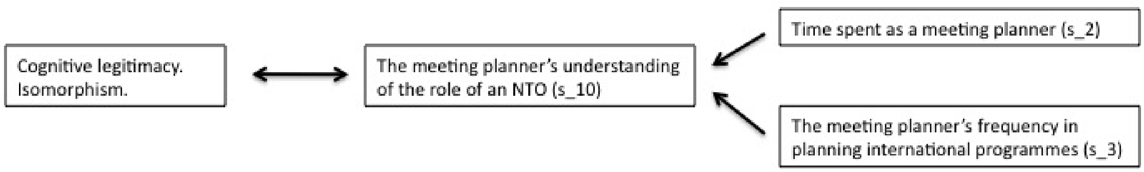
The variables regarding these meeting planners' experience of what the NTO is able to provide them with in terms of services, will also be included in a discussion of the NTO, as either a value facilitator or value co-creator. In this discussion the researchers will look into the theories on value facilitation, co-creation of value (cf. section 5.5.4), and pragmatic legitimacy (cf. section 5.4.3), as demonstrated in the figure below:



In addition to the above-mentioned different approaches to the examination of RQ1, the researchers wish to further investigate these meeting planners' understanding of the role of the NTO. This will be done by cross-tabulating variable (s_10)[82] with background variables

[82] S_10: Do you feel you have a clear understanding of the tasks of an NTO?

(s_2)[83] and (s_3)[84], to look into whether or not work experience as a meeting planner, and the frequency in planning international programmes, has an affect on the meeting planner's understanding of the NTO. In the first bivariate analysis, the researchers make use of background variable (s_2) because variable (s_10) only has two answer possibilities, which produces a more simple spread of the respondents. The decision to go into a more in-depth examination of the meeting planner's understanding of the NTO, is based on the researchers' intention to examine if these meeting planners feel that they have a strong understanding of the NTO, since this will provide the researchers with knowledge about the NTOs ability to communicate their functions to their target groups. Furthermore, this discussion may also assist in clarifying some of the other results brought to light in the analysis. The researchers will briefly apply the theoretical concepts of cognitive legitimacy and isomorphism to the discussion of these meeting planners' understanding of the NTO. An overview of the approach to the examination of the meeting planners' understanding of the NTO can be viewed in the figure below:

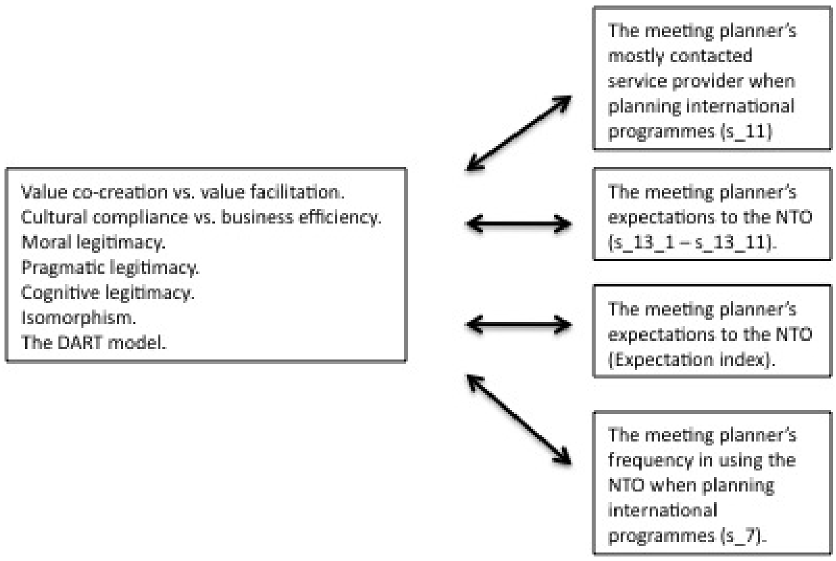


6.1.2 RQ 2: *What role should the NTO have in the meeting industry according to the meeting planner?*

Again the focus is on the value creation processes, but whereas the previous research question focused on the current value creation process in the relationship between an NTO and the UK meeting planners from the sample, this research question seeks to examine how these UK meeting planners *would like* the NTO to function, in order to optimise their value creation. To examine this research question, the researchers will mainly use the 11 variables (s_13_1 – s_13_11) relating to questions, which are all based on the meeting planners' expectations to the services provided by an NTO. Furthermore, the primary variables (s_11)[85] and (s_7)[86] will be included in the examination of RQ2 to supplement the variables regarding the meeting planners expectations. By using these variables, the researchers will be able to examine whether or not there seems to be a tendency among these meeting

[83] S_2: How long have you worked in the meetings industry?
[84] S_3: How often do you plan international programmes?
[85] S_11: When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…
[86] S_7:How often do you use the service of an NTO when planning your international programmes?

planners to have a more personalised experience of the value creation process, and therefore also if there seems to be an opportunity for NTOs to enter into the value creation process as a co-creator. The examination of RQ2 will be discussed using several of the theoretical concepts presented in chapter five, that is, the examination of RQ2 will focus on these meeting planners' expectations to the NTO from a value creation and legitimacy perspective. Put into a figure, the examination of the variables can be viewed in the following way:



6.1.3 RQ 3: *How can the NTO increase its potential to be perceived as a legitimate entity in the meeting industry?*

Whereas question one and two mainly focus on the NTO's potential effect on the UK meeting planners' current and future value creation processes, question three focuses more on what is required of the NTO to be legitimised by these UK meeting planners. In order to examine this question, the researchers have found it imperative to include one key variable. This variable relates to a simple, but crucial question, regarding the individual UK meeting planner's perception of the NTO as either being important or not important (s_8). By cross-tabulating this variable with a range of different background- and primary variables (s_3[87], s_5[88], s_7[89], s_11[90], s_10[91]), the researchers' aim is to examine if these variables have an

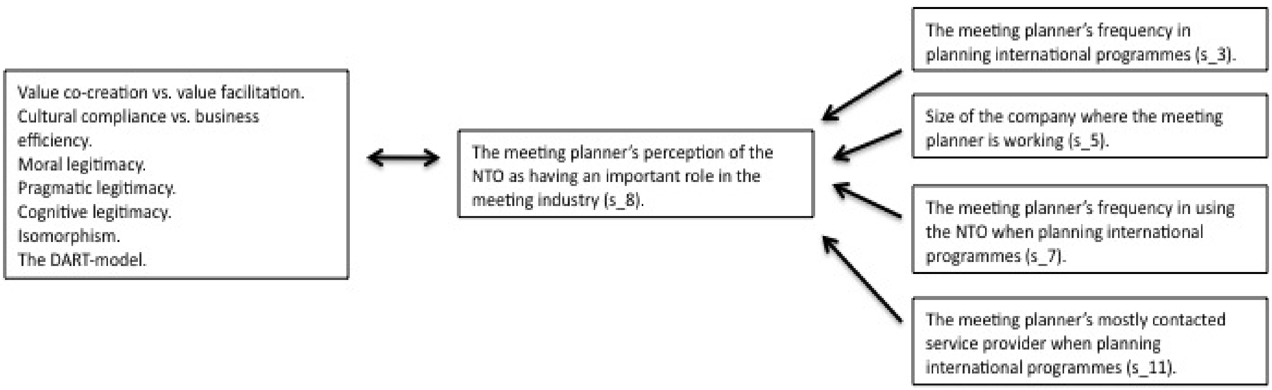
[87] S_3: How often do you plan international programmes?
[88] S_5: How many employees are working in your company?
[89] S_7: How often do you use the service of an NTO, when planning your international programmes?
[90] S_11: When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…
[91] S_10: Do you feel you have a clear understanding of the tasks of an NTO?

influence on how the sample of UK meeting planners understand the role of the NTO, seen from a legitimacy perspective.

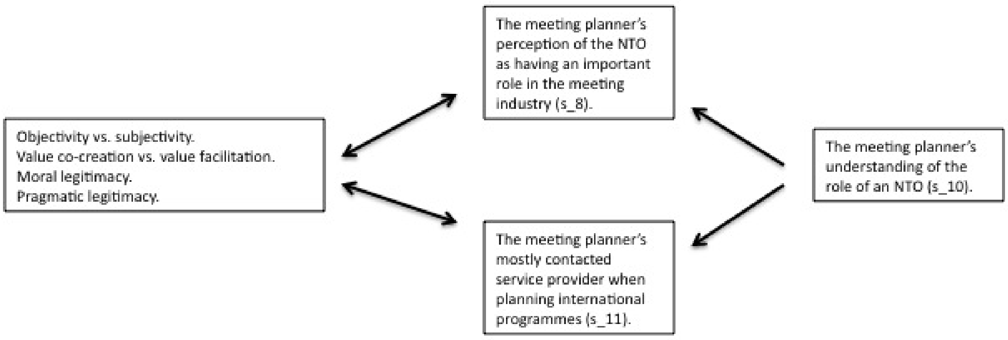
First off, the researchers will examine if the individual meeting planner's frequency in planning international programmes (s_3), as well the size of the meeting planner's intermediary agency (s_5) has an effect on how the meeting planners perceive NTOs as having an important role to play in today's meeting industry. This will provide the researchers with information on whether or not these background variables have implications on how NTOs should reach meeting planners, and if there are any pitfalls to be aware of, when it comes to size of the meeting planner's company or planning frequency.

Secondly, the researchers will cross-tabulate the variable of which organisation or tourism supplier the meeting planners mostly contact (s_11) and the variable regarding how often the meeting planner use the services of an NTO when planning international programmes (s_7) with variable (s_8). The intention will be to investigate if there are any correlations between how the individual meeting planner operates, and the meeting planner's comprehension of the NTO as an important part of the meeting industry. By looking into these two bivariate analyses, the aim is to examine if and how the way a meeting planner operates has an effect on the legitimacy appointed to the NTOs.

The figure below provides an outline of how the researchers intend to examine the influence of variables referring to background and operational factors on the level of importance the meeting planners appoint to NTOs.



In addition to examining the above-mentioned aspects, the researchers will also look into whether or not it is important for NTOs to undertake an objective and neutral position. To examine this aspect of RQ3, the researchers will cross-tabulate variable (s_10) with (s_8) to see if there is a correlation between these meeting planners' own sense of understanding of the tasks of NTOs and the level of importance appointed to NTOs. Furthermore, the researchers will also cross-tabulate variable (s_10) with (s_11) to examine if there is correlation between these meeting planners' own sense of understanding of the tasks of NTOs, and who they mostly contact when in need of assistance with an international programme. From a theoretical point of view, the examination of whether or not NTOs need to ensure a neutral role will be discussed using relevant theoretical concepts from chapter five. Below is an outline of how the researchers will approach this part of the analysis:



6.2 Meaning interpretation of explanatory interviews

As mentioned in chapter two, the researchers chose to perform three elaborative interviews with meeting planners, to obtain further elaboration on the findings from the quantitative data. The analysis of these interviews will be performed through the interpretation contexts, which Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) call self-understanding and theoretical understanding (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 238). This means that the qualitative interviews will be interpreted in a way, which puts forward the interviewee's statements from his or her own viewpoint, as seen from the researchers' perspective (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 237). However, direct quotes will also be used to exemplify the interviewee's opinions. After this, the interviews are interpreted through the theoretical framework (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 239) for the present thesis. Hence, the data is put into a theoretical context along with the quantitative results, which then creates an analysis of the three research questions, using the aforementioned key concepts to interpret the data. By using the key concepts derived from both the theory and empirical data, the researchers ensure the interactive process that characterises abduction.

Chapter 7: How does the meeting planner relate to the NTO?

7.1 Respondent profile

As mentioned in the analytical strategy, the researchers have chosen to include all valid responses for the analysis. The division between the respondents' current positions (s_1) is as follows: 23 respondents are meeting planners in intermediary companies, 17 are meeting planners working for the end client, and almost a fourth; 13 respondents, have other positions. Of these 13, there are probably respondents who have worked as meeting planners earlier. However, the researchers will not distinguish between these 13 and the rest during the analysis, as a differentiation between the respondents will lead to small groupings and also due to the argument earlier presented; that they can be analysed as one entity.

When looking at variable (s_2), the largest group of meeting planners from the sample (42 respondents) are experienced meeting planners, who have worked in the industry for more than six years. The last 11 respondents are divided almost equally between the answer possibilities of having worked in the meeting industry for less than three years (five respondents) and between 3 – 6 years (six respondents). The respondents plan international programmes quite often (s_3); meaning that roughly half the respondents (27) plan international programmes more than three times a year, and 23 respondents plan international programmes 1 – 3 times a year. The last respondents are divided almost equally between those who never plan international programmes (one respondent) or do it less than once a year (two respondents).

Variable (s_4)[92] has a spread, which shows that 47 respondents on average have 1 – 499 delegates participating in their international programmes; and thus plan smaller programmes. The last six respondents are equally divided between the international programmes of 500 – 999 and 1000+ respectively. The last background variable (s_5) shows that there is an almost equal spread between those meeting planners who work in smaller companies (28 respondents) and those working in larger companies of 100+ employees (24 respondents) and therefore only one respondent working in a company of 50 – 99 employees.

Roughly put: the sample of this survey spreads in an unforeseen manner in regard to the first background variable, has a majority of experienced meeting planners planning 1 – 3 or

[92] S_4: On average, how many delegates participate in your international programmes?

more than three meetings a year, and he or she comes from either a small or large company and plans international programmes with an average of 1 – 499 delegates.

7.2 RQ 1: *From the meeting planner's perspective, what role does the NTO have in today's meeting industry?*

To investigate what role the NTO has in today's meeting industry, seen through the eyes of the meetings planners who have participated in the survey and qualitative explanatory interviews, the researchers will embark on several significant issues extracted from both theory and the empirical data. The researchers wish to understand how these meeting planners perceive the NTO today, in relation to the NTO's specific services and additionally, from a more overall viewpoint; how the NTO is seen in an institutional light.

7.2.1 The UK meeting planners' use of the NTO

From the quantitative results, the researchers can see a division of when the meeting planners from this sample use the NTO, when planning an international programme (s_9). Only one respondent answers that he or she uses the NTO after finishing a programme (for concrete post-evaluation assistance), whereas the largest group of respondents (43,4%) answer that they use the NTO if needed in the planning process. Hence, it appears that a large group of the respondents do not see the necessity of using the NTO as a permanent assistant throughout the planning phase, nor as an organisation whose assistance they need for post evaluative processes (the measurement of ROI). 22,6% also answer that they never use the NTO, when planning an international programme. These meeting planners' connection to the NTO in relation to measuring ROI will be examined in section 7.2.3.

Looking back at the theoretical discussions with focus on the business logic perspective (cf. section 5.5.4), interesting issues are discovered in relation to this variable. In order to have a successful international programme the meeting planner needs to ensure a successful value-creation process. However, as pointed out, the supplier, here looking at the NTO, can attempt to influence this process. Hence, focus is on the meeting planner's value creation process, and if and how the NTO can influence the process.

The grouping of variable (s_9) shows a tendency of these meeting planners not having a very big need for the NTO's assistance, when planning an international programme since 20,8% use it for brainstorming and 11,3% use it throughout the entire process.

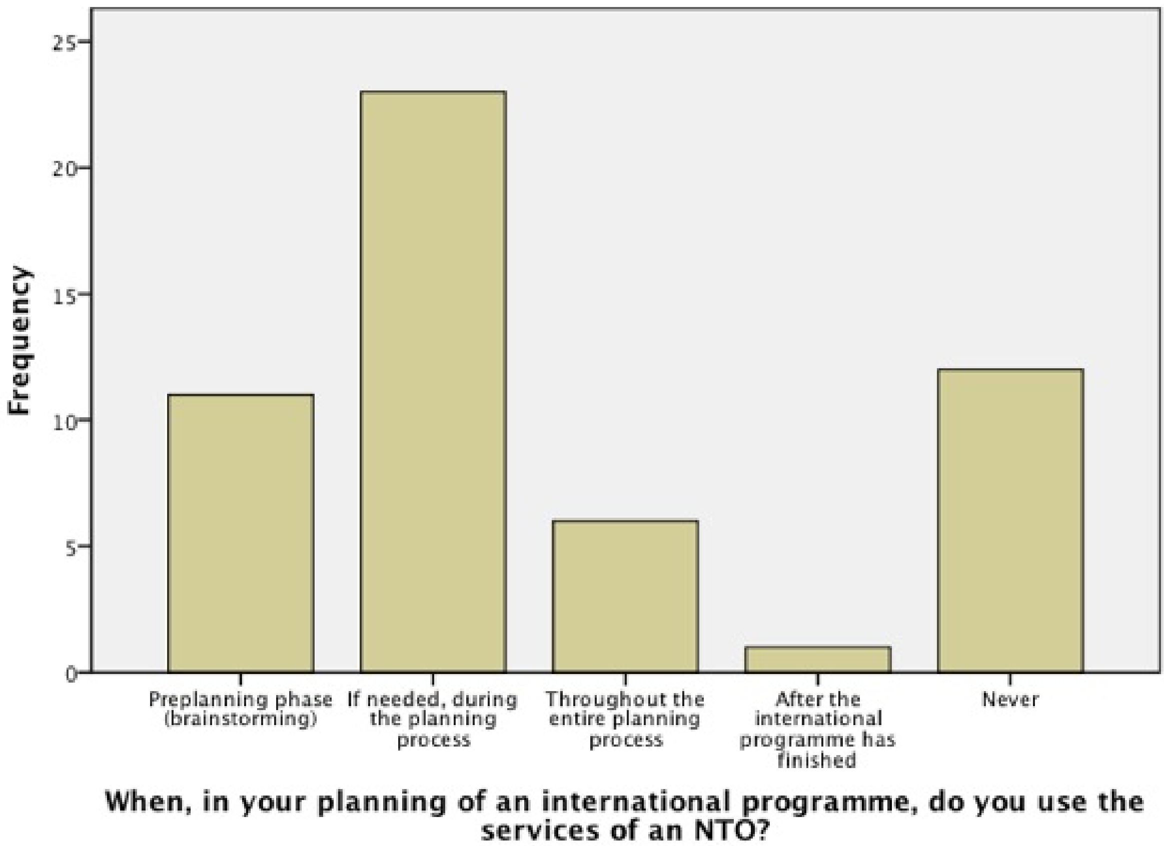


Figure 3 – variable s_9.

The meeting planners have, as described in chapter three, and therefore included as an important aspect in the survey, a whole pallet of potential tourism suppliers or organisations to turn to, when planning an international programme. These can all function as value facilitators for the meeting planners (in varying regards, of course) however, overlaps occur due to the isomorphic tendencies, and having first turned to one tourism supplier or organisation, the meeting planner can unconsciously forget what another one can assist with, or simply be content with his or her current service provider and therefore not need the services provided by others, as supported by all the interviewees in the explanatory interviews, as will be elaborated. It can however, also be interpreted as relating to the meeting planner's perception of the legitimacy of the different tourism suppliers and organisations. It can be an unconscious choice of who should assist with the planning, but if one of the tourism suppliers or organisations is better than the others at reaching pragmatic legitimacy (cf. section 5.4.3), in other words - complying with the meeting planner's wishes, then the meeting planner might turn in that direction. The researchers namely note that all three meeting planners interviewed, express that they can obtain relevant assistance from DMCs, hotels/venues, and already established partnerships respectively, and thus almost consequently turn in that direction (CMS, appendix 17, p. 197; NR, appendix 18, p. 203 – 204; NF, appendix 19, p. 211 & 214). This is a discussion that will be elaborated throughout the analysis of all research questions. An additional point is that many of the services offered by an NTO are ones the meeting planners themselves could organise via the Internet, to some extent.

7.2.1.1 Value co-creation or facilitation?

As noted about non-interactive and active relationships (cf. sections 6.5.4.1 & 6.5.4.2), other suppliers might have a better possibility of maintaining an interactive relationship with meeting planners, due to a possibly continuous offering of services throughout the planning, whereas the NTOs' services for a planning phase appear as more value facilitating services, which do not induce a longer interactive relation. Here for instance thinking of giving information about the country or knowledge about a regional destination, or that the NTO is the intermediary passing the meeting planner on to someone else to receive the ongoing service. Tourism suppliers, such as a local DMC or hotel, can be part of more stages of the planning than an NTO or CVB, giving advice about a region or the country itself. Moreover, due the NTO's previously mentioned many identities and tasks (cf. section 3.4), it can be difficult for the meeting planner to discern the services and tasks, as will be elaborated in the following.

Successful co-creation of value can possibly be generated more easily, when having ongoing interactive processes with the tourism suppliers with only one role. If looking at the primary variable concerning whether or not the meeting planners use the same international hotel chains (s_12), it shows that a cumulative percentage of 83% actually does so 'regularly' and 'once in a while'. This could indicate that it is easier for the sample meeting planner to turn to the same supplier, and also that the meeting planner might actually seek a supplier, who can assist throughout the many stages of the planning phase (due to the many things that could be handled in one place) and be a co-creator of value, but that it is just not the NTO the meeting planner perceives as having this role, or that they prefer co-creation processes with the hotel chains (which is also discerned partially in variable (s_11)[93]). The interviewees do not seem to share this assumption, but it could be an interesting notion to examine in a new context.

[93] S_11: When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…

The use of the same hotel chain can, however, point to this preference being a habit or due to good internal connections, which would be interesting to clarify in further studies - for instance, through the theorists Chris Huxham & Siv Vangen (2005) and Heffernan (2004), who promote trust as a precondition for good collaborations, which could thus be a reason for the high percentage using the same hotel chain 'regularly' and 'once in a while'. As trust is normally emphasised as something that develops with time and through a continuous contact, it appears that it could be through this contact with hotels, in regard to planning of programmes, that the meeting planners have built up a sort of relationship. Of course, one has to be careful to draw this conclusion, thus its further analysis, for instance when reaching the analysis of variable (s_14); the sample's experience of what they can get assistance with from the NTO, but also when embarking on RQ2 focusing on how these meeting planners expect the NTO to act towards them. Nonetheless, the assumption about personal relations and contacts is, to a great extent, supported by the two meeting planners CMS and NR. They both point out that personal relations and contacts are decisive to where they put their business (CMS, appendix 17, p. 195 & 200; NR, appendix, 18, p. 204) Hence, although CMS primarily contacts hotels and venues directly (CMS, appendix 17, p. 196), she would also use other tourism suppliers or organisations if she had a contact person:

> ”It depends on who has reached out to me and what contact details I have. Often if I have met somebody or I have a business card from somebody…(…) So from something like VisitDenmark or the other ones _____the other countries. But I will go straight to that person… So, but if I don't [Red. have a relevant business card], I will probably go to whatever I can find on the Internet so the Congress Bureau or something like that." (CMS, appendix 17, p. 194).

However, generally she does go directly to hotels or venues through the companies' database, which again shows that relations are important. The same goes for NF, who also, due to the large size of her company, uses already established partnerships, but would consider using an NTO if a relation was established (NF, appendix 19, p. 210). Having a database built up means having relations that are trusted for the solution of tasks. As a consequence of CMS primarily working with venue finding, she will clearly not need the continuous assistance as other meeting planners organising an international programme from A to Z.

From variable (s_9) and the subsequent interviews, the NTO seems to have more appreciation as a value facilitator; giving good advice if needed, or bringing about suggestions that can kick-start the meeting planners' planning process. Hence, through this role of facilitating value creation in some processes, the NTO does support these meeting planners' use of the services offered, but without becoming an actual co-creator of value. However, as the researchers will elaborate on in section 7.3, it can from this examination of the sample's current use of the NTO lead to an immersion of what the NTO should focus on, in relation to the meeting planners, and which of its many services, as well as also identities, are relevant for the meeting planners, as derived from the meeting planners' expectations. As one of the meeting planners states in the questionnaire's last question[94]: *"It [red. NTO] should be able to point us in the direction we need to look for anything that we may need to enable us to stage a sucsefull event in their country (...)."* (Appendix 22). This statement, as well as the analysis above, could point towards an expectation of the NTO to function more as an initial contact, when planning an international programme and maybe not function so much as a supplier throughout the planning process. Another respondent in the survey emphasises this: *"The NTO is quite often the first point of contact that a meeting planner has with a destination on a professional level. This contact is extremely important as is all the communication that helps to create an image and emotional connection to a destination, (...)"* (Appendix 22). This is also thought of in relation to the following discussion about ROI. Hereby not stating that the NTO is only used in the initial phase mentioned, because we also see a large percentage of 43,3% using the NTO if needed, as mentioned earlier. This also indicates that the NTO in some regards has an influence on these meeting planners' ongoing value creation process.

CMS and NR however, support the indication that meeting planners mainly use NTOs in the initial phases of the planning of an international programme for information gathering. As noted above, CMS is one of the meeting planners primarily working with venue finding, which creates a natural link to using the NTO in initial phases. NR also points out (to the question of when she would use the NTO) that: *"I think in the same way that I would use the DMC...it is to make the initial contact, find out about the destination, about hotels, any recommendations, to find out contacts, to be put in touch with."* (NR, appendix 18 p. 204). NF says that she would use the NTO in the same way, if she were to use it (NF, appendix 19, p. 211). Thus, generally speaking, the researchers detect some interaction between the NTO and this group of meeting planners during the planning process. The interaction is not

[94] S_15: In addition to the questions above, please let us know if you have any other comments about the role of an NTO that you would like to share?

enough to discern any co-creation of value taking place, but rather a non-interactive relation, where the NTO is a value facilitator, where it is more or less up to the individual meeting planner to create value-in-use. However, regarding the NTO as an unnecessary step that does not add value does not generally appear to be the case, when taking the present findings from the survey into consideration.

One thing is to know, when in the planning process these meeting planners use the NTO and in that regard look into value facilitation or co-creation, but moreover, in section 7.2.5 the researchers will look at these issues by focusing on which services, meaning resources or products, are experienced to be offered by the NTOs. These discussions will further try to identify if these meeting planners today have an actual need of co-creation of value in their relation to the NTO, and in relation to specific services. The discussion above that leads to examining the NTO's role will also be resumed, when looking into the meeting planner's preferred organisation or supplier to contact, when planning an international programme in RQ2 and RQ3.

7.2.1.2 Correlation between experience, size and use of the NTO?

When examining the correlation between variable (s_9)[95] and (s_3)[96], the researchers found that of the six meeting planners who use the NTO throughout the entire planning process, five plan 1 – 3 international programmes a year, which could point towards more use of the NTO, the less programmes the meeting planner arranges, however with somewhat low figures. The result of the meeting planners who use the NTO in the preplanning phase, however, points in a different direction.

Here it is noted that seven of the 11 respondents who use the NTO in this phase, actually plan international programmes more than three times a year. This could point mean a continuous need for value facilitation in the initial phases, even though the meeting planner could be more experienced due to the larger number of programmes planned, or that the meeting planner uses the NTO for the same tasks in relation to different international programmes. These observations can suggest that the meeting planner continuously sees the NTO as a legitimate service provider and therefore keeps using the NTO despite experience as a meeting planner. The interviews with NR and CMS confirm this observation from the survey. They have both been working in the industry for 9 and 15 years respectively, and

[95] S_9: When, in your planning of an international programme, do you use the services of an NTO?
[96] S_3: How often do you plan international programmes?

plan several international programmes yearly (NR, appendix 18, p. 203; CMS, appendix 17, p. 193 - 194), but would still use the NTO to seek information. Even though they neither of them use this organisation as the primary source, it shows that experienced meeting planners can still have the need to use the NTO. For NF it seems more distant to use the NTO in her daily work.

This is an interesting finding in relation to these meeting planners' understanding of the NTO's tasks, which will be described in section 7.2.6. Due to the two quantitative results above pointing in different directions, unfortunately not with great substance in the figures, it could be of interest to perform more exhaustive studies of these connections. This is of importance for NTOs' sales management's further work; should they keep directing their services to the experienced, existing clients, with whom they already have established contact, or should they seek new clients? As AHS mentioned (AHS, appendix 9, p. 168 - 169), it is important to keep the personal contact with meeting planners in order to know what their needs are, since they cannot all be grouped together. However, as she mentions (AHS, appendix 9, p. 165 - 166), the meeting planners can be difficult to locate in the different companies. In regard to this discussion, based on a cross-tabulation of variable (s_9) and (s_3) it is important to highlight that the cross-tabulation has resulted in a 0,406 P-value. Since the researchers have decided to work with $P < 0,05$, this cross-tabulation is considered non-significant.

To see if variable (s_9) is influenced by how many employees are employed in the meeting planner's company (s_5), these two variables have been cross-tabulated. Surprisingly, there is an almost fifty-fifty division between those companies with 1 - 49 employees, and those with 100+ in when they use the NTO. Thus, it does not appear as if the size of the company has anything to do with when in the planning process they contact the NTO. Both the sample meeting planners working in smaller and larger companies use it in the preplanning phase and for brainstorming. This indicates that value facilitation is still needed even though the meeting planner can be employed in a larger company used to organising international programmes cf. the discussion above. Similar to the cross-tabulation of variables (s_9) and (s_3) the P-value of this cross-tabulation is also non-significant, with a P-value on 0,993.

7.2.3 The meeting planners' connection to the NTO in relation to ROI

As mentioned in section 7.2.1, the researchers will in this section attend to post-evaluative processes (measurement of ROI). In variable (s_9), only one respondent answers that he or she uses the NTO after finishing an international programme. This is an interesting result to the researchers, due to how influential ROI seems to be these days. An example of an NTO focusing on ROI, through their 'Meetovation' initiative (cf. section 1.1.2) is VDK. ROmI (Return on Meeting Investment) is the overall purpose of the initiative; hence wanting to provide meeting planners with an initiative that can assist in optimising their ROmI; optimise their creation of value-in-use. However, the initiative is not a concrete post-evaluative tool as is meant with the last answer category in (s_9)[97], but a "package" that can help the meeting planner realise how ROmI can be created (thus the variable (s_14_6) 'educational courses and materials' is included in the questionnaire). 'Meetovation' hence shows an example of the current focus on ROI in the meeting industry.

The result from (s_9) does not necessarily show that these meeting planners do not work with ROI, but maybe that the NTOs do not appear to be the organisations used in this matter. In this context, it is interesting to look at variable (s_14_10)[98]. Here, 58,5% of the respondents do not have an opinion whether or not they experience they can get assistance with measuring the ROI of their events[99]. This figure can be so high, because these meeting planners have not experienced enough that they cannot get assistance with ROI to answer 'disagree' and that they have not yet experienced enough times that they can get assistance to answer 'agree', and therefore locate themselves in this in-between category. This, as well as the response grouping in variable (s_9), can indicate that these meeting planners have an unclear picture of whether the NTO can offer this service of ROI, or that they are not well informed about the possibility of this service from some NTOs.

Therefore, it can be interpreted that it is a service that the NTO is not explicit enough about being part of their service offerings (if it is), and that these meeting planners thus have a negatively loaded experience of the NTO's ability to assist in creating ROI[100]. The exploratory interview with CMS could confirm that the NTO is not explicit enough about its service offerings, since she has a difficult time distinguishing it from those of the CVB: *"That is probably an area where I am a bit grey actually. I am not entirely sure. Probably the difference…if there is a difference…and I do see them as really doing the same things so…yeah, I don't know if I am wrong in that assumption?"* (CMS, appendix 17, p. 93). Thus, she has an

[97] S_9: When, in your planning of an international programme do you use the NTO? Answer category four: After the international programme has finished.
[98] S_14_10: When contacting an NTO, my experience is that I can get assistance with measuring the ROI of my event(s) in the NTO's country.
[99] Instead of stating 'event' in the questionnaire it should have stated international programme.
[100] A possibility can of course also be that no NTO offers the service of measuring ROI.

unclear picture of whether the NTO could offer this service or not, and in case it does, she does not seem to be very well informed, if at all. The same goes for NF, who does not see the NTO as providing this service today, and also expresses that ROI is, from her point of view, rather done on individual venue level (NF, appendix 19, p. 212). If an NTO wishes to develop and include ROI as a service offering, or if it is already incorporated as one, then this sample's stance, as well as explanatory interviews, indicate that additional resources will be needed to create extra awareness about the option of using the NTO in this regard. This should also encourage the meeting planner to use the NTO for this service, if the NTO wants to be a supplier of it, so the meeting planner does not seek other tourism suppliers or organisations for assistance.

One can look at the tendencies above from a value creation perspective, since getting assistance with a certain service can affect the meeting planner's value-in-use process. Those NTOs who offer ROI evaluation as a service appear to not be distinct enough about their ability to facilitating the meeting planners' value-in-use process. Assisting them in measuring the effect of their programmes is a value facilitating task, which can incite co-creation of value, which the meeting planners from the sample do not experience that they can get assistance with, thus the NTOs should possibly be more effective in their interaction with the meeting planners. This, of course, depends on each NTO's procedure of reaching the meeting planner, but it could consist of an optimisation of a sales manager's resources for contact with the meeting planner; presenting the concrete measures and offers in relation to evaluative solutions; thus focusing on how the NTO can enable a positive value creation by for instance utilising communicative interaction (cf. section 5.5.4). If further explorations of the researchers' subject show that the reason for meeting planners not using the NTO for ROI measurements is due to low interest/need, then it is up to the NTOs to adjust their services. This viewpoint relates to the discussions of whether or not the NTO should function as a supplier, which will be a continuous theme throughout the chapter.

In addition to the discussion above, the meeting planners' use of the NTO after the programme has finished, can also relate to the basic discussion of what constitutes value for the meeting planners. The researchers are in the present thesis trying to investigate this entity of value in the relationship to the NTO. However, taking the result from (s_9) into consideration, an incongruence of how value is perceived by the meeting planner, and how the NTOs perceive and measure it might be present. With only one respondent answering that he or she uses the NTO after the programme, it can also indicate that the meeting planners do not feel that the NTOs understand what value is to them, and consequently how it should be measured. Naturally, this influences the NTO's possibilities to enter the meeting planners' evaluative processes and be a co-creator of their value, and the potential divergent perceptions of value can cause less unfortunate measurement processes. Thus, it seems of crucial importance to have a match of expectations of what value constitutes to the meeting planner, especially if the NTO wishes to be legitimate in a pragmatic aspect. From the explanatory interviews however, it does not appear to be such a complex reasoning, but simply the fact that they turn to the tourism supplier or organisation they feel can give them the most personal assistance, and the one that can lead them to financial profit and a satisfied end client. The NTO is thus not emphasised as an entity that should enter evaluative processes to create value in the relation, but more that it can be done through the facilitating role mentioned earlier. NF underlines that what is of importance to her, is that she can receive quick and free information. Hence, if she experienced that the NTO did this, she would consider using it for a service purpose (NF, appendix 19, p. 214). This again displays the importance for the NTO to be clear about its service offerings, if this is a part of its identity that it wishes to maintain.

This issue is interesting, when trying to investigate legitimacy issues, which also focus on relations and matches between, in this case an organisation's, compliance with stakeholders' self-interest or the institutional environment's expectations, roughly put (cf. section 5.4.1). As will be brought up in the analysis of RQ3, it is important to look into how the NTO can increase its potential to be perceived as a legitimate entity, and if this entails any changes or choices of the NTOs' primary identity towards meeting planners. In relation to the understanding of the meeting planner's value and needs, the researchers turn focus towards the pragmatic legitimacy. This type of legitimacy takes point of departure in certain stakeholders' needs and wants, and the organisation's attempt to comply with these. This discussion will be elaborated on in relation to RQ2 and below the researchers will bring up cognitive legitimacy.

7.2.4 The NTO as an institutionalised organisation?

When looking over the respondents' answers relating to what they experience they can get assistance with, when contacting the NTO (s_14_1 – s_14_10) a somewhat unforeseen result appears. If one looks over all the services potentially offered, a surprisingly big part of the sample has 'no opinion' in relation to many of them. Some of the meeting planners 'disagree' or ‘disagree strongly’, but the percentages of the ones who have ‘no opinion’ stand out[101]. This can point to the meeting planners from the sample not having considered these services as an interesting option and thus do not care about them, or that they do not know how to relate to them. If they were disagreeing that they experience they can get assistance with the services, the options of ‘disagree’ and ‘disagree strongly’ would have constituted higher percentages.

With this significant majority of respondents having ‘no opinion’ in mind, then it is unexpected to see that 62,3% actually proclaim to have a clear understanding of the NTO’s tasks (s_10), and that a cumulative percentage of 62,3% believe the NTO’s role in the meeting industry is ‘very important’ or ‘important’ (s_8). This can indicate that the understanding and importance of the NTO in the industry is not necessarily linked to its concrete services (specifically those services inducing co-creation of value), but that it is more an opinion linked to the viewpoint of the NTO being an institutionalised organisation that the meeting planners from the sample just perceive to exist, regardless of whether or not its offerings are ones they can relate to or perceive they can get assistance with. The NTO has, as an organisation existed for years, thus it can, in the eyes of these meeting planners, have manifested itself as an organisation with a designation of taken-for-granted legitimacy (cognitive legitimacy cf. 5.4.3), but not necessarily related to its services.

The cognitive legitimacy is, according to Suchman (1995), the ultimate type of legitimacy because it is so unspoken and taken-for-granted (Suchman, 1995, p. 583). It is the type of legitimacy that an organisation is appointed, when no alternatives are found (cf. 5.4.3). However, if the examination above, about these meeting planners’ perception of the NTO as a rooted organisation with cognitive legitimacy, despite the tendency of not relating to many of its specific services is accurate, then the way Suchman (1995) defines cognitive legitimacy might need alteration in this context. The NTO does appear, to some extent, to create understanding of its overall tasks, but when it comes to the experience of its service offerings, and the use of the NTO, then it appears to have a somewhat supporting role, and not being the one who eliminates competitors. This is as well seen when examining variable (s_11)[102]. Only 13,2% of the sample appoints the NTO as the tourism supplier or organisation they most often contact for the planning of an international programme, which

[101] For instance 58,5% reply ‘no opinion’ in relation to ROI and interaction on online forums respectively and 52,8% has ‘no opinion’ in relation to assistance with social events and assistance with educational courses and materials respectively.

[102] S_11: When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…

is not consistent with being the organisation, which eliminates competitors (as it, according to Suchman (1995), takes to possess cognitive legitimacy). If the NTO was identified as the ultimate organisation for a planning phase, then this figure should have been more significant. Since it is not, the NTO does not stand out as reaching its legitimacy solely through a supplier role. The discussion of variable (s_11) will be continued in following sections. The argument for the researchers juxtaposing the NTO and the other tourism suppliers and organisations, and thereby from this sample ruling out the NTO as the superior, lies in the earlier explanations of the amalgamation taking place between them and that they can perform resembling tasks.

This analysis could thus indicate that the majority of the sample still appoints legitimacy to the NTOs as organisations, due to their deep roots, but not because of their compliance with the meeting planners' experiences. Perhaps they do not appoint the NTO's identity via the specific services they can provide, but the question is also, if this is the kind of legitimacy that the NTOs wish for? Having cognitive legitimacy in consequence of ones deep roots is of course an achievement, but if the NTOs wish to continue functioning in a supplier role for meeting planners (which seems to be the objective among NTOs) then the managements should keep the achievement of the pragmatic legitimacy in mind. In this context the question of the NTO's role arises yet again; what should it focus on? And is it possible to retain several different roles that are all fulfilled entirely? The researchers will for obvious reasons not be able to conclude what functions best for all NTOs worldwide, but can from the analysis of the present sample's perceptions and expectations provide pointers towards possible initiatives, as will be done in section 7.4.1.

7.2.5 Do the UK meeting planners mainly relate to value facilitating services?

The services that an NTO can offer meeting planners have been listed according to research of different NTOs' services on their webpage[103], with a particular focus on VDK's service offerings. The two services, which stand out as being perceived as the ones the sample mainly experience they can get assistance with, are the traditional ones of acquiring general information about the country (s_14_1), and knowledge about a regional destination (s_14_2). These two services are classic services that NTOs have, in order to live up to their

[103] VDK - www.visitdenmark.dk-c, VisitSweden – www.meetings.visitsweden.com-a, The German Convention Bureau – www.gcb.de-a, The Australian National Tourism Organisation – www.businessevents.australia.com, Switzerland National Tourism Organisation – www.myswitzerland.com/en/meetings.html.

roles as representatives of their country. Fam. trips (s_14_5) and RFPs (s_14_3) are also often fixtures among NTOs' services, and are in this sample also experienced as such. Thus, a tendency of experiencing that the NTO can assist with fact-oriented services stands out.

However, looking at variable (s_14_3), 37,7% has 'no opinion' of experiencing whether or not they can get assistance with RFPs. This stands out as rather atypical, since this is a service that NTOs often present on their webpage,[104] and thus it is interesting that a larger group of these meeting planners do not have an opinion about it. This result can be difficult to interpret correctly, but it could be an indication of this third of the sample not needing the resource of the NTO as an intermediary collecting proposals for them, or that they choose other tourism suppliers or organisations to assist with this part of their planning process, as variable (s_11) could point towards,[105] and which the explanatory interviews also support. As examined in section 7.2.1, many of these meeting planners use the NTO for 'brainstorming' and 'when needed', but looking at this group that has 'no opinion' about collection of proposals from other suppliers, it does not seem to be a service needed in those two dominant phases. As a large enough group does not appear to need value facilitation in this regard, perhaps NTOs should take this into consideration and review alterations.

With this in mind, the researchers, to some extent, noticed a grouping of the services perceived to be offered by the NTO. The four services mentioned above; information about the country and regional destinations, as well as fam. trips and RFPs can be grouped as the more traditional facilitating services; all having a larger number of respondents 'agreeing' or 'agreeing strongly', whereas services such as educational courses, ROI, assistance with social events, and online forums - all being services inciting co-creation of value - score lower percentages of 'agree' or 'agree strongly'. However, if drawing a broad conclusion, the sample experiences it can get assistance from the NTOs in relation to most of the services. An interesting aspect in this analysis of these meeting planners' perception of the services offered, is that not many of them seem to either 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly' in relation to any of the services, but rather state 'no opinion' (more of the respondents answer 'no opinion' in relation to the non-traditional interactive services, cf. section 7.2.4). Thus, large groupings can appear to not relate to particularly the interactive services at this point, and therefore it is interesting to see what tendencies show, when discussing their expectations to

[104] VDK – www.visitdenmark.dk-d, VisitSweden – www.meetings.visitsweden.com-b, The German Convention Bureau – www.gcb.de-b.

[105] Although variable s_11 does not show at which stages the represented tourism suppliers or organisations are used, the NTO still stands out as being used the least along with the PCO.

the services in RQ2. Do they not experience these services being offered at this point, but would actually like to have them offered in the future? Or do they have an expectation to get assistance with these services at all, or do they wish to use other tourism suppliers or organisations instead?

In this section, following the tendencies considered in sections 7.2.1 & 7.2.1.1 in relation to value facilitation, they appear to be repeating, when looking into the experience of getting assistance with specific services. The meeting planners not relating to the interactive services seem to stand out and thus value facilitation appears to be at the crux of the relation between the meeting planner and the NTO, if one should use the term of Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) below. The explanatory interviews lean against the tendencies displayed in variable (s_11), regarding who the meeting planners mostly contact when planning an international programme (due the respondents primarily using the DMC, and going directly to the hotel or venue), but if they would use the NTO, they also emphasise the services that are fact-oriented (the obtainment of information). They all refer to the service from the NTO as getting recommendations, and emphasise the importance of the objectivity of the NTO, which will be elaborated on in section 7.4.6.

That being so, the movements pointed out towards co-creation of value in the supplier–customer relationship in section 5.5.3, do not appear to be the current trend in this context of the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner (derived from this sample and subsequent interviews). The quote stated in section 5.5.6: *"The use of interaction as a basis for co-creation is at the crux of our emerging reality."* (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, p. 5) thus seems correct in thinking of co-creation as taking place in interactive relations, but that is just not the case in this relation and service exchange.

The compliance with these meeting planners' requirements and needs, which here appears to not be in complete congruence in regard to concrete services (due to the large groups of 'no opinion'), can be a consequence of not considering pragmatic legitimacy issues in a more detailed manner (not knowing these meeting planners' needs). Even though these meeting planners agree that they experience they can get assistance with some of the offers, particularly the fact-oriented ones, it does not mean that it is the role of the NTOs to be "full-blooded" suppliers. On the contrary, it can be the case that these meeting planners expect the NTOs to provide them with the more interactive services, but that they just do not experience them being offered today, and therefore the NTOs need to work on gaining pragmatic legitimacy, in order to not only have taken-for-granted legitimacy. This will, as mentioned earlier, be continued in the analysis of RQ2 and RQ3.

7.2.6 The UK meeting planners' understanding of the NTO's tasks

When looking into the sample's understanding of the NTO's tasks (s_10) cross-tabulated with the variable of how long they have worked in the meeting industry (s_2), a peculiar result appears. Namely that of the meeting planners who have worked in the meeting industry for more than six years (42 respondents), constituting almost 80% of the respondents, a third of them (14 respondents) still do not have a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks. Looking at the two other respondent groups; those who have worked in the meeting industry for less than three years, and those who have worked in industry between 3 – 6 years, the number of respondents is low. However, from their replies one can see that they are divided approximately 50% - 50% in each group of 'understanding' or 'not understanding' the NTO's tasks clearly, thus also suggesting uncertainty of what the NTO's tasks are.

Hence, even though a total of 62,3% proclaims to have a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks, as mentioned in section 7.2.4, it is interesting that the grouping of those who do not have a clear understanding is proportionally larger within the group who has been in the meeting industry for more than six years. This result suggests a continuous lack of transparency of what the NTO's role actually is in the meeting industry. This is supported by the meeting planner CMS, who, as mentioned earlier, has difficulties discerning between the NTO and CVB, which shows that she does not have a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks, or how these tasks differentiate from the ones of an CVB (CMS, appendix 17, p. 198). NR replies that she believes to understand the NTO's tasks (NR, appendix 18, p. 206), but still does not make a distinction between the NTO and CVB if she was to use a different source than the DMC. NF also believes that she could have a clearer picture of the NTOs' tasks, and that she is probably not aware of these due to her lack of use of the NTO (NF, appendix 19, p. 213). This should be somewhat worrying, because even though the total of respondents who understand the tasks of the NTO is relatively high, the natural development should be that understanding comes with experience. It is however, important to notice that this cross-tabulation shows a non-significant P-value of 0,208.

If including background variable (s_3)[106] in this analysis, we see the same pattern; that out of those who plan international programmes more than three times a year, meaning that they must have some sort of experience as well; more than 50% do not have a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks. These results could thus argue that the NTOs still do not manage to distinctly clarify their exact tasks, and thus also argue that the more experienced meeting planners designate a lower legitimacy to the NTOs. In continuation of this, NF points out that transparency of the potential costs attached to the services of the NTO are missing. This is particularly interesting, since most services provided by the NTOs *are* free of charge, and by communicating this message more clearly, the NTOs would give the meeting planners a better overview of how they actually work, which could also benefit the NTO itself; to sell the organisation more on this note of free service. This discussion on the correlation between the meeting planners' understanding of the NTO, and the meeting planners frequency in planning international programmes is supported by a significant P-value of 0,003.

Even though the cognitive legitimacy was emphasised in section 7.2.4, it seems necessary to go deeper into who does not understand the NTO's tasks, in order to not lose these meeting planners as clients, and additionally not to lose them to the other tourism suppliers and organisations, who can stand in and perform the same tasks due to the isomorphic tendencies mentioned. Hence, if these experienced meeting planners have difficulties with relating to the NTO's services, and many of them proclaim to not have a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks after years in the industry, the NTO should be aware of the risk of being outplayed as a tourism supplier, and also as an organisation which appears to have a certain level of cognitive legitimacy.

However, what stands out as somewhat inconsistent is that the correlations in section 7.2.1.2 pointed to a continuous use of the NTO despite experience, but here, in relation to understanding of the NTO's tasks, the meeting planners with experience do not seem to understand them clearly. Thus, they use the NTO, but do not understand the tasks completely? This suggest two main issues: That these meeting planners only use the NTOs for the same task and therefore do not have an understanding of the everything else, or that the NTOs simply are failing in marketing their service offerings, which has also been scrutinised above. The understanding of the NTO's tasks will be examined again in the analysis of RQ3; in bivariate analyses with the importance of the NTO (s_8), and who the meeting planners mostly contact when planning an international programme (s_11).

[106] S_3: How often do you plan international programmes?

However, the primary variable (s_8) will dominate RQ3 in order to dive into legitimacy issues.

7.2.7 Summary

That the NTO to these meeting planners operates as a value facilitating organisation, which can assist in initial phases and when needed in the planning of international programmes, stands out very clearly. The fact-oriented services are pre-dominant, as opposed to those inducing co-creation of value, such as assistance with measuring ROI; hence the NTOs do not have much influence on the meeting planners' value creation processes. The sample overall continuously uses the NTO in its planning, despite experience, but when it comes to understanding the NTO's tasks it stands out as nontransparent to many of them. This should be considered by NTOs, because incomprehensibility seems to be a consistent factor in various regards; presumably influenced by the isomorphic movements. Nevertheless, the NTO seems to be established as an institutionalised organisation. The NTO's role as a supplier, providing practical and geographical information dominates, thus the NTO appears to have a combined role as supplier and country ambassador in these meeting planners' frame of reference.

7.3 RQ 2: *What role should the NTO have in the meeting industry according to the meeting planner?*

In addition to the previous examination of the sample's perception of the role of the NTO, this section will be utilised to analyse what these meeting planners expect of an NTO. Similar to the analytical approach to the examination of RQ1, the researchers will also in this section derive relevant results from the empirical data gathered through the quantitative survey and the explanatory interviews, as well as include relevant theoretical perspectives; thus creating a discussion from the concepts in section 5.6.

7.3.1 The meeting planners' expectations to service offerings

When asked about their expectations to what the NTO should be able to provide in form of services, these meeting planners seem to agree more on their expectations to the NTO in regard to some offerings than others. More specifically, little doubt is shared about the sample's expectations to the NTO as a legitimate source of general information about the country it represents, as well regions or destinations within the country (s_13_1 and s_13_2 respectively). Both variables have 35 of the meeting planners agreeing strongly. However, looking at the results of the other questions regarding these meeting planners' expectations to the services of an NTO, the results are not significantly different from that of the two above-mentioned variables. Actually, the meeting planners seem to be either 'agreeing strongly', 'agreeing' or having 'no opinion' about their expectations to all of the different service offerings of an NTO. What is noticeable however, is that the more fact-oriented services of an NTO, such as general information, assistance with fam. trips and RFPs have a greater rate of 'agreeing' or 'agreeing strongly' than those service offerings referring to services not directly concerning information about a country and its tourism suppliers. This result is consistent with the one seen in section 7.2.5; that the majority of these meeting planners already experience that they can get assistance with these particular services.

7.3.1.1 Mind the gaps

Although none of the variables regarding the expected services of an NTO scored a significantly high percentage in the categories of 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly', it seems as though these meeting planners' expectations differ slightly depending on the content of a specific service offering. Services referring to information about the country, its regions, and destinations, as well as fam. trips, facilitation of contact to commercial contacts and assistance with request for proposal, all scored a relatively high level of 'agreeing' and 'agreeing strongly'. Other services, which include assistance with ROI, presentation for clients, educational courses and materials, free access to research publications, social events for meeting planners, and creation of online forums, also scored fairly high in 'agreeing' and 'agreeing strongly'. However, what divides the last-mentioned group of variables from the first is a higher rate of meeting planners replying with 'disagreeing strongly', 'disagreeing', or 'no opinion'. It is in this regard important to highlight that none of these variables have a significant part of these meeting planners leaning towards these responses, which is why it will not be meaningful to discuss the existence of a great difference between the expectations of certain services. However there seems to be some smaller differences between the expectations to the different services put forward in the questionnaire. It is thus relevant to further discuss why these meeting planners seem more clear and united in their expectations towards some services than others.

7.3.1.2 Cultural compliance vs. efficiency

One way to examine how these meeting planners' expectations to the services of an NTO correlate with the actual service offerings, is through the theoretical perspective on the potentially conflicting relation between business efficiency and cultural compliance (cf. 5.2.2). Because of its position as a governmental organisation, the NTO has certain formal structures to follow to ensure that it operates in a legitimate manner. As a governmental organisation, the NTO generally has certain obligations to guarantee its moral legitimacy, by tending to the societal norms of stakeholders, such as the government, industry organisations, and the general population, which do not have a direct self-interest in the work of the NTO, but who will still keep the NTO accountable for its actions. The well-known viral marketing video, produced by VDK, which tells the story of a Danish woman looking for the father of her child, is a good example of how the attention to moral legitimacy is critical for the internal support of an organisation such as an NTO. Although the marketing campaign was an international success in terms of exposure[107], it resulted in a negative impact on the moral legitimacy of VDK (cf. section 5.4.3). In addition to the moral legitimacy, the NTO also has to consider the specific needs of its target audience in order to ensure pragmatic

[107] www.mediawatch.dk.

legitimacy, as mentioned in RQ1, as well as consider its cognitive legitimacy by being aware of its implicit, institutionalised status (sections cf. 5.4.3 & 7.2.4).

Looking at the pragmatic legitimacy in regard to this context of the study, these meeting planners seem to be measuring the role of the NTO on its ability to provide information, assistance with fam. trips, and RFPs (s_13_1 – s_13_3 and s_13_5). The meeting planners interviewed also emphasise these services as the tasks they all perceive the NTO can assist with - but also those they expect it to be able to assist with. These services can thus be viewed as the main needs of these meeting planners, and it therefore seems clear that the NTO has to undertake these services in order to ensure its pragmatic legitimacy as a service provider, whereas it seems that other kinds of services can be seen as being outside the scope of the required services of an NTO. We saw in section 7.2.4 that the NTO seems to be appointed cognitive legitimacy, which is not necessarily linked to its services, however, it seems that fact-oriented services could have some smaller impact on the cognitive legitimacy. When looking at these meeting planners' expectations, it seems obvious that pragmatic legitimacy can also be obtained by providing the mentioned services.

Although the expectations to the services of an NTO mostly refer to the NTO's ability to supply the meeting planner with information, assistance with fam. trips, and RFPs; the NTO also has to produce innovative offerings in order to optimise its business efficiency in the increasingly more competitive meeting industry, as noted in chapter one. According to the theory, such innovative service offerings can potentially clash with the beliefs and scripts of the meeting planners' expectations of the NTO (cf. section 5.2.2). However, what is interesting to see in the results of the survey, is that this does not seem to be the case. Although one can make the argument for a differentiation between core services and services of less relevance for the meeting planner, none of the variables regarding the meeting planners' expectations of an NTO had a significant amount of meeting planners replying 'disagree' or 'disagree strongly'. More precisely, the groupings 'disagree' and 'disagree strongly' only represent 3,9% of all responses regarding the meeting planners' expectations to the services of an NTO. In contrast to those results, 'agree' and 'agree strongly' represent 74,6% of the total responses regarding this subject. In between these categories we find the 'no opinion' responses, which make up 21,4% of the total responses.[108]

[108] See appendix 21.

Looking at the 74,6% ‘agreeing’ or ‘agreeing strongly’ in the above-mentioned index, it seems reasonable to argue that the meeting planners in this sample are somewhat open to the innovative offerings presented to them by an NTO. However, it is important to notice that the responses from the meeting planners regarding who they mostly contact when planning an international programme (s_11) indicate that there is a differentiation to be found between what is expected of the NTO and how the meeting planners use the NTO. This result is further confirmed through the explanatory interviews. The interviewees from the explanatory interviews have the same expectations to the services of an NTO, but mainly use other tourism suppliers. In regard to the connection between cultural compliance and business efficiency, the index concerning the meeting planners’ expectations suggests that the NTO could decide to create innovative service offerings, without risking a clash between its cultural compliance and business efficiency. This argument is supported by the initiatives of NTOs, such as VDK, who has already successfully implemented innovative services in its offerings to meeting planners such as the MIND project (Visitdenmark.com-g). Looking at the testimonials VDK has received from participating meeting planners, it seems clear that this project represents a successful implementation of an innovative service (Visitdenmark.com-h). With this project, VDK has managed to extend its offerings to the meeting planners to include educational courses on how to optimise the meeting planner’s planning process of their programmes, as well how to measure the ROmI of their programmes.

However, each NTO has to consider these meeting planners’ potential lack of relation to those services, as suggested in section 7.2.5, which means that the NTO not only needs to make an effort in regard to creating new services, but also in terms of making the meeting planners aware of such service offerings. This seems crucial to succeed with implementing new and innovative service offerings, especially taking the responses from the explanatory interviews into consideration. This is because of the interviewees contrasting somewhat to those in the sample; them not expressing a need for these innovative services and appearing rather conventional in their requirements. When NR and NF were asked if they would be open to innovative services, they did not appear interested. However, CMS notes, that she is open to learning new things (CMS, appendix 17, p. 198), which could include being open towards these innovative service offerings.

7.3.1.3 Value co-creation or facilitation?

According to the theoretical perspectives on value creation, as discussed in the theoretical part of this study, it appears that there is a rising trend for suppliers to move from being non-interactive value facilitators towards becoming more of an interactive value co-creator (cf. 5.5.4.2). By becoming a value co-creator, the supplier is able to adjust its services to match individual needs, as well as solve potential problems in cooperation with the customer, as highlighted in the DART model (cf. 5.5.6). Relating to the latter beneficial outcome of co-creation of value, the NTO will, presumably, be able to solve occurring problems in their relationship with the meeting planners, by engaging in a dialogue with them. Furthermore, such a dialogue will also prove itself useful in situations where the NTO needs to adhere to problems in the surrounding environment; as it has been exemplified in section 5.5.6[109]. In addition to using dialogue as a problem-solving tool, NTOs can also use dialogue to positively affect their relationship with meting planners as indicated by NR: *"That's [red. DMC] my first point of call, but tourist organisations that make contact with me, for example Monaco Tourist Organisation…because they contacted me and built a relationship, then I would go to them. Otherwise I tend to go to DMCs."* (NR, appendix 18, p. 204). This supports the notion presented in section 7.2.1.1; that relations and interaction are valuable and appear to make a significant difference for instance in the meeting planner's choice of source. Although interaction is emphasised as crucial for and potentially resulting in a joint value creation process (co-creation of value) (Grönroos, 2011, p. 243; Grönroos, 2008, p. 307; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 5), the interaction in this particular case seems more as a resource in a value facilitating process: That interaction should take place between the supplier and customer, but without inciting co-creation of value.[110]

What is observable in regard to the sample of meeting planners and their expectations to the services of an NTO, is that the results from the survey do not correlate completely with the theoretical perspective on the current changes in value creation, as already mentioned. Although, the differentiation between the expectations to the different services is not significant, it is in this context interesting that the meeting planners in the survey seem to have stronger expectations to the NTO as an information provider than anything else (s_13_1 & s_13_2), which is similar to what we saw regarding the perception of the NTO in section 7.2.5. This supports the argument that the expectations to the services of an NTO are more

[109] That VDK had to deal with a potentially conflicting image of Denmark as en open-minded country.
[110] This aspect will be elaborated in chapter eight.

coherent with that of a non-interactive value facilitator than that of an interactive value co-creator, as mentioned in sections 7.2.1 & 7.2.5. The reason is that the meeting planners seem to have a higher expectation to the NTO as being able to provide them with value facilitating services than as a provider of services that incite co-creation, such as, but not limited to, educational courses and assistance with ROI (s_13_4 and s_13_6 – s_13_11).

One could therefore ask if the NTO should seek to allocate all its resources towards ensuring a certain quality standard as a non-interactive value facilitator, rather than utilising its resources in an effort to undertake an interactive position as a value co-creator. However, as also previously mentioned, this sample of meeting planners does seem to have a somewhat open mind towards the NTO indulging in innovative service offerings, which points in the direction of another approach.

Instead of an NTO allocating all its resources to ensure a certain quality standard, the NTO could decide on a differentiated approach; meaning that a quality standard through value facilitation would be the aim for some services, whereas the aim for other services would be a focus on co-creation of value processes, with a personalised experience as the desired outcome, as according to theory. More specifically, one could suggest that services regarding general information about the country, fam. trips, and RFPs would benefit from a value facilitating approach, since these services represent factual content, which the meeting planner will use in his or her further planning of a programme. What is however interesting to observe in regard to the above-mentioned traditional services, is that CMS in general does not expect the NTOs to be able to assist with fam. trips. CMS emphasised this point by expressing her surprise at having been offered this service by VDK, once (CMS, appendix 17, p. 195) On the other hand, innovative service offerings, such as the previously mentioned MIND project, are much more likely to benefit from different co-creation of value processes. The reason for this is that these services refer to a continuous learning- and value creation process between the meeting planner and the NTO. Nonetheless, in order to make such suggestions for NTOs, the researchers' findings would need to be elaborated on in further studies, also to examine whether pragmatic legitimacy could actually be optimised by entering these aspects or not. As Dowling & Pfeffer (1975) state; it is difficult to change what constitutes legitimacy (cf. section 5.4.4), but if these service offerings proved to be significant, it could be plausible for the NTO to approach this alteration and make innovative service offerings a bigger part of the identity.

7.3.2 How does the NTO ensure its own ROI?

Even though an NTO decided to allocate resources to establish co-creation of value processes, the question still remains if such a transformation would lead to greater expectations, and thereby also a greater utilisation of the services of an NTO, or if the meeting planners would continue to mostly use other players, as seen in the results of variable (s_11)[111]. One question that arises from this discussion refers to what kind of ROI a participation in co-creation processes with the meeting planners could result in. Looking at the results from the survey, it seems clear that the NTO does have the potential to participate, on some level, in co-creation processes with the meeting planners. Despite this assumption, the question still remains, if the resources needed to incite meeting planners to participate in such processes will be able to produce an acceptable ROI for the NTO, compared to what the NTO could gain from allocating its resources differently. Unfortunately, the empirical data for this study does not produce any clear answers to this question, but it does give an indication of what is to be expected. Taking into consideration the NTO's pragmatic legitimacy, as discussed earlier in this chapter, one could suggest that the NTO should focus mainly on its role as a non-interactive value facilitator because of the meeting planners' clear perception of and expectation to the NTO as a legitimate value facilitator in terms of general information, and assistance with fam. trips and RFPs. However, one could at the same time suggest that the NTO would benefit from experimenting with co-creation of value through new and innovative services. If the NTO created innovative services in a co-creation process with the meeting planners, this could potentially have an effect on the NTO's pragmatic legitimacy. To complete such a transformation, however would not happen over night, but instead be a longitudinal process with no reassurance of an acceptable ROI for the NTO. Thus it seems clear that in regard to the overall differentiation between value facilitation and value co-creation, the NTO is presented with a secure and somewhat "easy" option, which entails a role as a non-interactive value facilitator, against an option entailing the implementation of new co-creation processes with a far greater risk for a negative result with regard to the ROI of the resources allocated.

Although the latter option bears a great risk for the NTO, it also presents a potential for the NTO to have a much more significant influence on the meeting planners value creation process, thus optimising the value of its relationship with the meeting planners. As mentioned, this approach does not seem to have a clear, quick or guarantied successful

[111] S_11: When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…

impact on the ROI for the NTO, which is why this approach cannot be recommended for NTOs seeking a continuous correlation between its resources and their ROI. However, this approach can be recommended for an NTO with a willingness to allocate part of its resources to stand out from its peers, with a potential risk of failing in gaining an acceptable ROI in the long run.

7.3.3 The general tendency

The general results of the 11 variables relating to the expectations of the meeting planners[112] indicate a tendency for these meeting planners to expect the NTO to be able to provide all the services presented in the survey. With most of the meeting planners 'agreeing' or 'agreeing strongly' in all questions, it would be fairly easy to come to the conclusion that the meeting planners have high expectations to the NTO as a value facilitator and perhaps even a value co-creator. However, an interesting observation, when taking a closer look at the results, is that a relatively large percentage of the meeting planners in most of the questions replied with 'no opinion' or 'agree' instead of 'agreeing strongly' (s_13_3 – s_13_11). As mentioned in the previous section, this can be viewed as an indication of these meeting planners expecting the NTO to provide certain services more than others. Furthermore, when asked about whom the meeting planners mostly contact (s_11), only 13,2% of the respondents replied that they mostly contact the NTO, as mentioned earlier in the analysis. This is not necessarily to be understood as the meeting planners not expecting the NTO to be able to provide the services put forward in the survey, but it could be viewed as an indication of the meeting planners' uncertainty as to what they can expect of the NTO in regard to some of the service offerings.

Despite expecting the NTO to be able to provide them with the services presented in the study, there seems to be a strong tendency among the meeting planners to not use the NTO as a main value facilitator or co-creator in their value creation process when planning international programmes (s_11).

[112] S_13: An NTO should be able to…

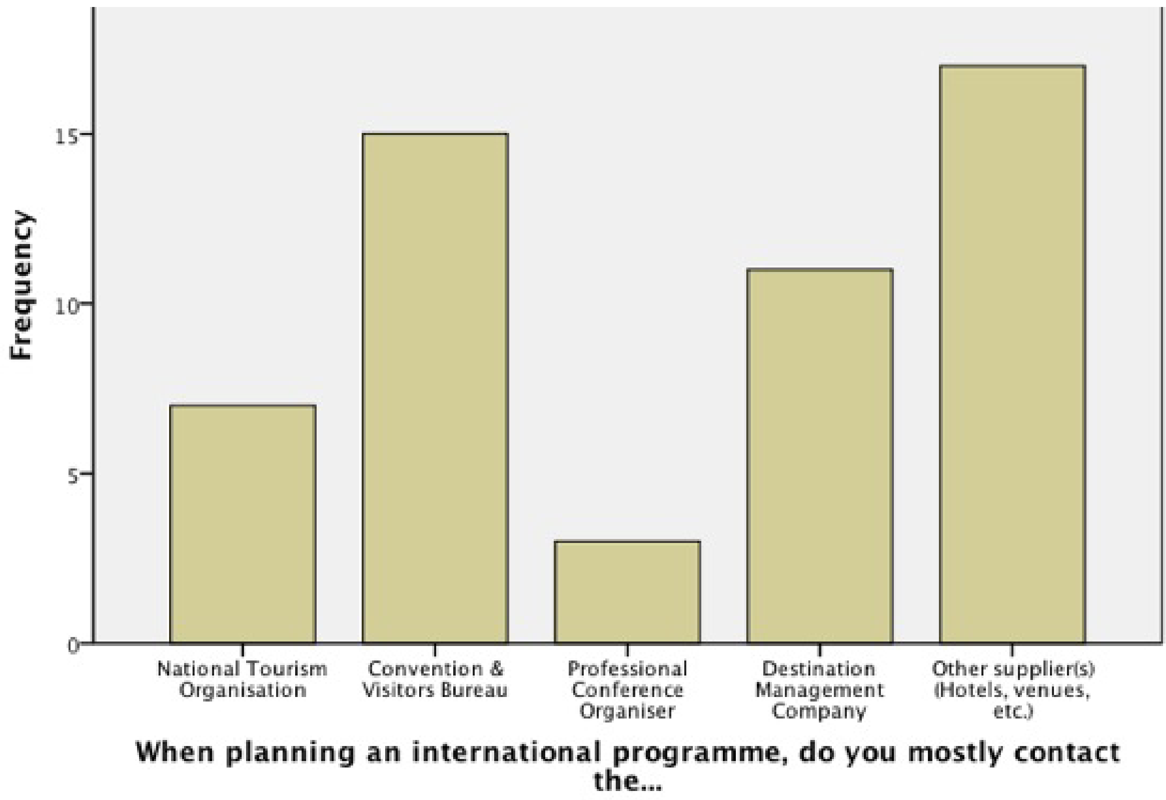


Figure 4 – variable s_11.

However, the cumulative percentage of meeting planners, who proclaim to use the services of an NTO to some extend in their planning process is 77,4% (s_7[113]). This indicates that the in some cases NTO must bear some level of legitimacy as a value facilitator for these meeting planners' value creation processes. The question is therefore not *if* the meeting planners use the NTO, but rather that they presumably use other players, such as a CVB, to a greater extend, which can indicate that although the NTO does appear to have certain levels of pragmatic and cognitive legitimacy, it does not enjoy the same level of pragmatic legitimacy as other service providers in the meeting industry.

This could relate to the fact that different players within the meeting industry are offering the same services; the isomorphistic movements earlier presented (cf. 5.3.1). As highlighted in the theoretical discussion on isomorphism, the overlapping tasks of different organisations within the meeting industry could be linked with the NTO's intentions to ensure its legitimacy by conforming to a successful approach. However, the results of this survey indicate that the overlap of different services does not have a positive outcome on the legitimate role of the NTO, and by having to compete with other value facilitators, the NTO

[113] S_7: How often do you use the services of an NTO when planning your international programmes?

not only has to facilitate various services, it also has to validate its legitimacy in comparison to its competitors. The NTO has to acknowledge its position as one out of several players in what can be described as a network of value enablers, while also paying attention to the dyadic relationship between itself and the meeting planner. NR does not distinguish between the CVB and NTO, and the fact that she would not distinguish between those two organisations, complies with the isomorphic direction mentioned in the exploratory phase of this study, and that this homogenisation can actually influence the meeting planner's choice of source in the planning of an international programme.

For the NTO this should, without a doubt, be taken into serious consideration to continuously justify its focus on the business tourism segment through the role as a service supplier, and even more generally as an organisation. As emphasised by Henderson (2004) in section 3.4, NTOs even need to justify their existence, due to the continuous lack of acceptance of tourism as an industry. Thus, a perspective, which stands out as crucial to investigate further, is the scrutiny of internal structures of each country's meeting industry; specifically to achieve congruence and transparency of which organisation or tourism supplier represents what area and how.[114] In the present thesis it is interesting that the results from the survey show twice as many meeting planners using the CVB as apposed to the NTO, and that two interviewees (CMS and NR) do not appear to distinguish between these two organisations. This calls for further investigations to identify what this differentiation is based on.

Thus it seems imperative for the NTO to not just to meet the expectations of the meeting planners, but also to more actively engage in the meeting planners' creation of value-in-use, in order to manage its legitimacy in the meeting planners' value creation process. An example of how an NTO could optimise its role as a value facilitator or co-creator of value, and thereby also potentially affect its legitimacy, could be through the implementation of sales managers, who actively follow up with meeting planners to see if they need any assistance, as mentioned in regard to measuring ROI (cf. 7.2). By doing so, the NTO has an opportunity to not just personalise its service offerings to fit the needs of the individual meeting planner, but also to continually be updated on the requirements of the meeting planners it interacts with; hence changing its role more to that of an interactive value co-creator, with continuously changing personalised service offerings.

[114] This aspect will be attended further in chapter eight.

7.3.4 Summary

In section 7.2 we saw that the NTO is very much perceived as having a value facilitating role in regard to the planning of international programmes, and that the combined role as supplier and country ambassador seems dominant. This role is repetitive, when it comes to these meeting planners' expectation of what role the NTO *should* have. The NTO appears to gain its pragmatic legitimacy by offering fact-oriented services, and should therefore intend to maintain these to not become illegitimate; bearing in mind that other organisations and tourism suppliers are used more often by these meeting planners and have similar service offerings, which should initiate alternative thinking. The non-interactive relationship is accentuated in the service exchange between the meeting planner and the NTO, but the need for relations and dialogue prior to the actual service exchange is nevertheless found. As opposed to the current perception of the NTO, the sample gives the impression of being open towards innovative services. However, the NTOs need to take their own ROI into consideration before investing too many resources in these initiatives.

7.4 RQ 3: *How can the NTO increase its potential to be perceived as a legitimate entity in the meeting industry?*

This last and third part of the analysis will, similarly to the two preceding sections, take point of departure in the study's empirical data, and the concepts put forward in chapter five. Moreover, this section will include and refer back to the earlier examinations from RQ1 and RQ2. These findings will be incorporated in analysing how the NTO, from the meeting planners in the sample's and exploratory interviewees' perspective, can increase its potential to be perceived as a legitimate entity in the meeting industry. Additionally the primary variable in focus in the present section will be (s_8); focusing on the NTO's importance, cross-tabulated with other relevant variables; background variables as well as primary variables.

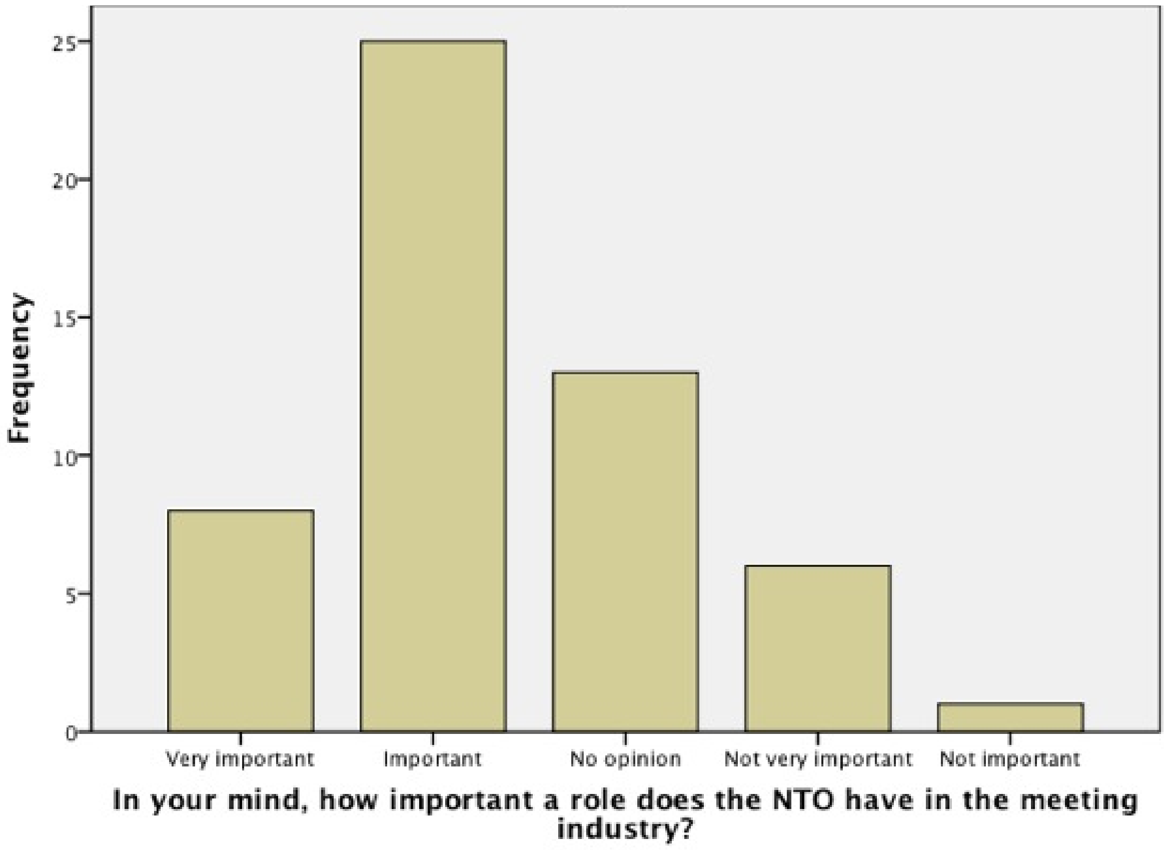


Figure 5 – variable s_8.

As pointed out in section 5.4.2, a group of theorists hold an instrumental view (for instance Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990; Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975), and they believe that organisations can influence and manage legitimating processes and thereby direct how they are perceived. Hence, they view legitimacy as an operational resource (Suchman, 1995, p. 576 - 577). In

RQ3 the researchers will intend to explore these possibilities on the basis of the above-mentioned approaches. From the examinations of RQ1 and RQ2 it could namely appear that NTOs need to undertake initiatives to maintain its cognitive legitimacy and not look inwards; viewing it as something inherent, but look into strategies to obtain pragmatic legitimacy and maintain cognitive legitimacy without conflicting with the moral obligations mentioned. This approach to influencing legitimacy correlates with the theoretical proposition presented by Payne et al. (2008) in section 5.5.3, with focus on more specific initiatives. Suppliers need to focus on the client's requirements for them to create value, and not just on the production of a predetermined product. Concerning to legitimacy issues, organisations also need to be aware of their surroundings and attempt to influence how they are perceived in regard to their activities/role, which can give rise to being seen as legitimate. Suchman (1995) points out that normally, organisations will not intent to reach all three types of legitimacy (cf. section 5.4.3), but that interrelations exist (Suchman, 1995, p. 584).

Taking the previous chapters into consideration, and for the NTO to reach an optimal position, the researchers see a necessity for NTOs to ensure balance between all three types, as well as ensuring balance between being efficient and complying to what is expected of the organisation (cf. sections 5.2.2 & 7.3.1.2). The intention is not to discuss how the NTO can outplay or be superior to other tourism suppliers and organisations, but to provide propositions (still seen through the eyes of the meeting planners) to what the NTO's role and tasks should focus on, in order to create more balance in the meeting industry; based on the analyses of these meeting planners' perceptions and expectations.

As mentioned in chapter three, the financing used by NTOs for the national focus for this large business segment varies, and the main focus is still on leisure tourism for many of them (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 117). Nonetheless, many NTOs have a focus on business tourism through different service offerings, but the recourses seem to vary. One thing is to establish that NTOs should invest more in this segment; which MS also emphasises (MS, appendix 4, p. 153), but what its focus and representation of tasks should be, compared to other tourism suppliers and organisations, needs to be considered; however, in this thesis it will be without immersion into CVBs' concrete working areas (which is the organisation that an NTO mainly resembles, as pointed out earlier). In chapter eight, the researchers will discuss an angle, which can be used in future research to examine the tasks and roles of the various tourism suppliers and organisations.

7.4.1 Substantive management of legitimacy

An approach to repairing, maintaining, or gaining legitimacy can be viewed through the application of substantive management (cf. 5.4.2). Instead of portraying itself as a service provider/supplier (being a value facilitator or co-creator), the NTO could decide to move in a completely different direction. Should the NTO choose to let other organisations, such as the CVB, be in charge of the services currently provided by the NTO, it would allow the NTO to seek a legitimate role through functions other than that of a service provider. As an example, the NTO could decide to change its function to become more of a national marketing organisation, with the main goal of marketing the country and its internal stakeholders. By doing so, the NTO would not have to compete with other organisations to ensure a legitimate role as a service provider, and thus perhaps optimising its cognitive legitimacy as a marketing organisation, instead of attempting to relate its legitimacy to many different services. Alternatively, it could undertake a supportive role to the business efficiency of such organisations as a CVB by becoming the "'advertising agency"', instead of a competitive service provider. This is as highlighted by MS in the exploratory interview; that the NTO should overall distinguish itself from the other tourism supplier and organisations by primarily taking on tasks such as building brand messages and assisting the destinations within the country (MS, appendix 4, p. 153). Although not explicitly mentioned, this argument is indirectly supported in the explanatory interviews. Looking at the empirical data of these interviews, it becomes clear that the respondents have great difficulties distinguishing between CVBs and NTOs, as mentioned earlier. In fact, the interviewees' frequently referred to CVBs, when asked about the services of an NTO.

Despite it seemingly being an easy solution for the NTO - ensuring its legitimacy by changing its role so it does not overlap with other entities in the industry, one still needs to bring certain things into consideration for such a transformation to be successful. As mentioned earlier, a significant amount of the meeting planners expect the NTO to be able to provide them with information and assist them with fam. trips. Should the NTO decide to remove resources from its service offerings to become more of a general marketing organisation, this could have a negative effect on the pragmatic legitimacy of the NTO, as perceived by the meeting planners. It could be argued that the NTO would be able to respond to these concerns by taking the appropriate measurements in regard to the substantive management of its position. However, each NTO has to consider if it has the required resources to adhere to a successful transformation of the meeting planners' expectations of its role. If not, it could mean a clash between the aforementioned cultural compliance and business efficiency. Of course the NTO could also decide to incorporate a role, as a marketing organisation, in addition to providing the meeting planner with various services, such as it is the case with VDK (cf. chapter four). This approach seems to be an easy way to cover all bases and potentially ensure all three types of legitimacy. However, it does have its implications. Firstly, the NTO has to ensure that it has the required resources available, to successfully ensure its legitimacy as both a service provider and a marketing organisation. Secondly, it entails a potential risk for the meeting planners to be left with an even more blurry understanding of the role of the NTO, thus making it difficult for the meeting planner to have a clear understanding of the function and role of the NTO. This would have a further negative impact on the expectation of the NTO, since the meeting planners likely would not know what to expect, which ultimately could damage the legitimacy of the NTO's role in the meeting industry.

That most of the variables regarding the meeting planners' expectations to the services of an NTO project a certain level of uncertainty in what to expect from an NTO, could indicate that the NTOs in general need to make more use of the substantive management of their role in the meeting industry, regardless of what function they decide to undertake. They need to find a way in which they can continuously make themselves relevant in meeting industry.

7.4.2 Is planning frequency influential to importance?

We saw in the examination of RQ1 (7.2.4) that quite a large part of the meeting planners from the sample state to believe that the NTO is 'important' or 'very important' (a cumulative percentage of 62,3%) and that it, in combination with the experience of many of the respondents not relating to the NTO's service offerings, (cf. the examination of variable s_14), could appear that the NTO has a certain amount of cognitive legitimacy not relating to its concrete service offerings, but rather to its position as a tourism representative for its country. However, similarly to what was pointed out in chapter five (cf. section 5.4.3), one needs to bring about relevance and understanding for the surroundings in order to obtain a state of cognitive legitimacy. The meeting planner's own sense of understanding of the role of the NTO seems somewhat fair, but the relevance seems to be what the NTO should put into focus. By considering its relevance, it would moreover ease the obtainment of pragmatic legitimacy, because relevance needs to be attended with the eyes of those who use or intend to use the NTO, namely considering their self-interest.

If we look at the frequency in the planning of international programmes (s_3), and its correlation with the meeting planners' assessment of the NTO's importance (s_8), an almost equal division between those planning 1 – 3 programmes a year and those planning more that three programmes a year is shown. Of the 15,1%, which perceive the NTO to be 'very important', the division is equal between the two groupings mentioned. The same goes for the 47,2% that perceives the NTO as being 'important'.

However, an interesting grouping is the one who perceives the NTO as being 'not very important'; since the large majority of the ones who have chosen this answer category plan more than three meeting a year. (83,3% of them equal to five respondents). Again, a part of the group of the experienced meeting planners from the sample provides unexpected answers. As emphasised in section 7.2.1.2, the experienced meeting planners appear to use the NTO in preplanning and brainstorming phases, but in the bivariate analysis of (s_10)[115] and (s_2)[116] (cf. section 7.2.6) it was shown that they have difficulties understanding the tasks of an NTO. In the bivariate analysis of (s_8) and (s_3), we now see that 16 respondents with frequent planning (more than three times a year) perceive it as being 'important' or 'very important', but that 11 respondents still reply 'no opinion', 'not very important', or 'not important'. This question relates to the NTO's position amongst other players and its presence in the meeting industry, and thus these results are necessary to take into consideration in relation to the cognitive legitimacy. The NTOs cannot stake on this legitimacy just because NTOs seem to have an overall institutionalised appointment, but need to make use of the managerial approach if they want to maintain this position and also be reactive to the researchers' findings in regard to pragmatic legitimacy issues. Suchman (1995) states this in a direct manner: *"Thus, managers must guard against becoming so enamored with their own legitimating myths that they lose sight of external developments that might bring those myths into question."* (Suchman, 1995, p. 595). Legitimacy issues will of course not be discussed as such within organisations, but are, so to speak, implicit when planning strategic initiatives such as selection of services, branding strategies, and marketing initiatives and thereby deciding on what role and image the NTO wishes to portray.

[115] S_10: Do you feel that you have a clear understanding of the tasks of an NTO?
[116] S_2: How long have you worked in the meetings industry?

The group of experienced meeting planners who did not see the NTO as 'very important', 'important', or has 'no opinion' might be those who only use the NTO for one specific task and thus do not perceive it as significant, and do not understand its other tasks. It can also consist of those who mostly use the other tourism suppliers and organisations, and hence disregard the NTO. As mentioned earlier, taking their experience into consideration, it is a bit unexpected that this group of respondents replies as it does. The interviewees seem to be representatives of this group. On the question regarding the NTO's importance, none of them express that it has large significance. It namely appears to be due to their use of other tourism suppliers, because if they use the NTO, they use it for initial contacts, and when needed to obtain different kinds of information. CMS appoints a certain level of importance to the NTO, but she seems to link this to the services that she can obtain from the NTO, displaying pragmatic legitimacy:

> "(…) no, I think it is…to have something that can provide a broad spectrum of information about somewhere that will be neutral is great and also if there are particular language difficulties or if you are having problems making yourself understood as to what you want to do then that can be…you know…really helpful as well (…)" (CMS, appendix 17, p. 199).

Even though Suchman (1995) emphasises legitimacy maintenance as one of the "easier" management tasks, continually making oneself relevant in a competitive environment can be a difficult assignment and also difficult towards persons with experience in the industry, because they can have a prejudiced opinion about how things are done best. The NTOs could, according to institutional theory, intend to maintain their taken-for-grantedness by acting in a continuously natural way and not minding or criticising competitors; thus, in a passive manner show that they still possess legitimacy, because they function as usual. A more active and substantive way of securing cognitive legitimacy, and then rather obtaining it than maintaining it, could be to seek an altered identity/role, as discussed in section 7.4.1. If we see that a larger amount of meeting planners with years of experience, and with a high frequency of programmes, still do not understand the tasks of an NTO and that some of them do not see the NTO as being important, then alteration could be what is needed to obtain a greater level of pragmatic legitimacy.

7.4.3 Is company size influential to importance?

If looking into bivariate analysis of (s_8) and (s_5)[117], we see that there is an almost equal division between meeting planners representing small and large companies, as was presented in section 7.1, and that the division of their feelings of the NTO's importance in the meeting industry are also almost equally divided. However, out of the 25 respondents answering that they view the NTO as being 'important', the 16 respondents are meeting planners working in smaller companies; compared to the rest who are employed in the largest type of company represented in the questionnaire. Furthermore, only two respondents representing a smaller company, view the NTO as being 'not very important', compared to four respondents from the largest company. Even though the last figures mentioned have little difference, these results suggest an influence of the size of the company on the meeting planner's perception of the NTO's importance in the industry.

Larger companies can have less need for external assistance in their planning process due to the internal resources in the company, and this can influence how the single meeting planner employed views the NTO's importance. On the other hand, the smaller companies can be in need of gathering information outside their company and use the resources available for planning an international programme, thus giving the single meeting planner employed in this smaller company a feeling that the NTO has a larger importance in the meeting industry. It is important to notice that the P-value for this cross-tabulation is 0,749, which indicates a very clear non-significant relation between the variables. The responses from the three interviewees go against the result of this P-value, they all work in large, global companies, with market offices worldwide, which gives them the possibility to use internal resources. CMS emphasises that she uses the Internet[118] and that she can draw on her colleagues: *"I generally do the initial search myself. If it is an area that I am very uncertain of, I will potentially ask one of my colleagues that might be based in that area."* (CMS, appendix 17, p. 194). For NF it is the same situation; she can draw on her colleagues and the extensive network the company has (NF, appendix 19, p. 211 & 214). As such, they have this possibility, that meeting planners in smaller companies, do not. A note is however, that both CMS and NR point out that their use of tourism suppliers and organisations depends on the size of their events (CMS, appendix 17, p. 197 & NR, appendix 18, p. 205).

[117] S_5: How many employees are working in your company?
[118] CMS, appendix 17, p. 194.

However, we saw in section 7.2.1.2 that the size of the company did not actually influence the use of the NTO, and that both small and large companies appeared as needing value facilitation; taking their use of the NTO into consideration. Here, in relation to the designation of importance, it indicated that the meeting planners from smaller companies might see a greater asset in the NTO, and that their actual use of the NTO is linked to how important they perceive the NTO to be. The NTOs should take these tendencies into consideration, contemplate how they can make themselves more relevant to the more experienced meeting planners, as well as those coming from the larger companies, but of course, as goes for all regulations, with a continuous reminder of its own ROI, as elaborated in section 7.3.2.

7.4.4 Possible modifications

Since value facilitation seems to be dominating this sample's perception and expectation to the NTO, it could suggest that the initiatives inducing co-creation are perhaps not the way to win over the meeting planners. A more extensive examination of meeting planners' requirements from NTOs could be performed by the single NTOs to create an understanding of the requirements of the meeting planners using a particular NTO. By intending to manage issues that can increase ones legitimacy, instead of being a passive player, and feeling that following others' requirements in order to be legitimate is a constraint (cf. section 5.4.2), the NTO can, presumably, obtain a greater level of acceptance by being flexible and knowing its clients. This will potentially lead to the creation of relevance that seems to be missing, to come a step closer to possess cognitive as well as pragmatic legitimacy.

Referring back to the DART-model (cf. section 5.5.6) Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004) emphasise the advantage of personalisation towards the single customer, which could be a preferred approach to make sure that relevance is created for every meeting planner, though not necessarily via co-creation of value due to the earlier findings. The NTO could thus put more focus on the single relation between themselves and the meeting planner to continue being a supplier of service offerings without necessarily asking the meeting planner to give way to interaction. We saw in the examination of RQ2 that a fair part of the sample appears to appoint pragmatic legitimacy through the informational service offerings and thus this focal point seems relevant to hold on to; at least at this point. The NTOs could consider making use of the DART-model's different entry points, for instance through entering into a better dialogue with the individual meeting planner and making it more transparent as to how and with what the NTO works, as mentioned earlier. However, if substantive alteration to obtain pragmatic legitimacy via an altered role, as earlier suggested, (primarily in section 7.4.1) is out of reach for some NTOs, then more superficial and symbolic adjustments (cf. section 5.4.2) can be performed to maintain the current portion of pragmatic and cognitive legitimacy that this sample seems to appoint to the NTO (although the more substantive alterations are to the stakeholders' preference cf. Ashforth & Gibbs (1990) in section 5.4.3). It seems important to be reactive to the extent possible, not to end up with the necessity of performing strategies for repairing legitimacy. Of course isolated cases can arise and be repaired, but it is more difficult to repair overall dissatisfactions, which might require more than the suggested symbolic management (cf. section 5.4.4).

These modifications of course depend on many points such as each NTO's budgets, their current service offerings and role, as well as all the other stakeholders (both externally as well as internally) that the NTO has to take into consideration, as emphasised among other places in section 5.4.2 by Kostova & Zaheer (1999). However, looking at this sample it could be to the NTO's advantage to focus on "business-as -usual", as mentioned above, (cf. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990, p. 183), due to a nevertheless noticed use of the NTO (cf. section 7.3.3), until a possibility opens up to make more significant changes. Initiatives to keep "business-as-usual" could be given through continuous (relevant) newsletters and presence at trade shows. NF also emphasises that the NTOs should expose themselves better, for instance at exhibitions (NF, appendix 19, p. 213). As one of the respondents elaborates, the NTOs should keep in mind the amount of information sent out to meeting planners and also its relevance:

> "Too often NTO'S seem to think their primary responsibility is to churn out newsletters (…). It becomes overload and the information is written through obligation to maintain consistent timescales rather than because there is anything interesting to communicate. Consequently the content diminishes in value. I would much prefer infrequent but well planned and delivered presentations that challenge us to appraise and consider the destination." (Appendix 22)

Thus, maintaining an intact picture of ones business still requires consideration of content, as the respondent above emphasises. In the following section the researchers will use the same variable (s_8) relating to the NTO's importance, but putting it into a bivariate analyses with (s_11)[119] and (s_7)[120]. This is to detect correlation and especially to see if the frequency

[119] S_11: When planning an international programme, do you mostly contact the…
[120] S_7: How often do you use the service of an NTO when planning your international programmes?

in use of the NTO has an impact on how the sample perceives the NTO's importance, but also if those respondents who usually contact other tourism suppliers or organisations still appoint some importance to the NTO.

7.4.5 Is actual use of the NTO influential to importance?

The cross-tabulation of (s_8) with (s_11) provides the researchers with an interesting result. In variable (s_11) we see that only seven respondents (13,2%) have answered to mainly contact the NTO when planning an international programme, but putting this variable into the bivariate analysis, it is seen that actually a cumulative percentage of 49,1% perceives the NTO as being 'very important' or 'important' even though they mostly contact other tourism suppliers or organisations. It stands out as somewhat strange that this fair percentage views the NTO as having a significant role in the meeting industry, but that no more than 13,2% usually uses it in their planning process. This does not mean, that coherence should necessarily be present between these two matters, and it does not express that the sample does not use the NTO, which would however have been a result worth examining more in-depth.

The researchers also noticed earlier in section 7.2.4 that a reasonable percentage appeared to have problems with relating to the NTO's service offerings, but still viewed the NTO as 'important' and 'very important' and understood its tasks (with 62,3% respectively). Thus, the cognitive legitimacy, which appeared to be appointed to the NTO when looking at those correlations, seems to become reinforced, when taking the present cross-tabulation into consideration. This is supported by a significant P-value of 0,009, which indicates a strong correlation between variable (s_8) and (s_11). A large part of the sample thus seems to designate the taken-for-granted legitimacy to the NTO through its role as an established national organisation, and not through its concrete service offerings and role as a supplier, as earlier mentioned. However, the findings do not rule out the NTO as supplier in a planning process, due to the pragmatic legitimacy that seems to be appointed through the informative service offerings, and that a use of the NTO is still detected. We see that of those 14 respondents using the NTO regularly, all reply that the NTO is 'very important' or 'important' and that 11 out of 17 respondents using the NTO once in a while reply the same as above (cross-tabulation of (s_8) and (s_7)). Hence, it is a result to consider for the NTOs that they are actually used, but not used mostly. The positive outcome is that the majority of the ones using the NTO actually designate it some importance. Similarly to the cross-tabulation of variable (s_8) and (s_11), we, also in this case, see a strong significant correlation between the two variables with a P-value of 0,000.

When looking at the responses from the interviewees in the explanatory interviews, the researchers found more or less the same results as with the quantitative sample. However, the interviews produced an interesting nuance to this question, in that although none of the interviewees mostly contact NTOs when in need of assistance with an international programme, NR and CMS did, as mentioned, express a willingness to work with NTOs who would initiate and maintain contact with them. Thus, it seems that there is potential for NTOs to improve its score in future surveys regarding whom the meeting planners mostly contact, when in need of assistance, by engaging in a continuous dialogue with the meeting planners. This dialogue seems to be a crucial point of departure for the meeting planners to later engage in the further service exchange with an organisation or tourism supplier. This notion will, as mentioned, be included in chapter eight.

7.4.5.1 Decoupling efficiency from formal structures?

It appears that the NTO, as an organisation, has managed to decouple the business efficiency from the formal structures, which is emphasised by both the institutional theorists Meyer & Rowan (1977) and by Oliver (1999) (cf. section 5.2.2) to be a method by which illegitimacy can be avoided. If legitimacy is overall not appointed through the service offerings, which can be compared to the technical activities that according to theory often vary and are inconsistent, by these meeting planners, but the NTOs still appear to have some level of legitimacy, then it could be due to the NTOs' abilities to separate the two mentioned obligations to which organisations need to comply, or at least what is expected according to theory. It is of course problematic to draw an overall conclusion as to how each and every single NTO has been managing these two issues, but it could seem, through the eyes of these meeting planners, that a large amount of them appoint cognitive legitimacy to NTOs as a consequence of the actions of separation just mentioned. If the different service offerings and activities, such as the inadequate campaign for VDK mentioned earlier, are handled and actively tried to be decoupled from the NTO's status as an institutionalised entity (as Oliver (1999) emphasises a more active approach than institutionalists is favourable), then the NTOs can consequently be appointed the cognitive legitimacy as they overall seem to have. Nonetheless, this is not an easy task especially when including the important aspect of the pluralism of institutional environments (cf. section 5.3.1) and the inconsistent requirements that NTOs have to live up to[121]. As was emphasised in section 7.3.1.2, the NTOs can seemingly utilise innovative service offerings to optimise their business efficiency without clashing with expectations, but it could be an idea to perform this in a decoupling from the conformity to formal structures.

The institutional theorists Meyer & Rowan (1977) emphasise that *"(...) institutional isomorphism promotes the success and survival of organizations."* (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 349), but the results of variable (s_11) need to be managed and that does not appear to be solved via isomorphism, because they at this point rather seem to constitute a problem for the NTOs in order to stand out and be perceived as the superior, compared to the other tourism suppliers and organisations, as earlier exemplified through the explanatory interviews. Hence, it could be an idea for the NTOs to currently focus on a dual role as a national representative including informative supplier functions, and later maybe alter the organisation more substantively towards either direction, as pointed out earlier. Further studies with a larger sample and different angles would be valuable to draw more exhaustive conclusions and thereby have a more thorough discussion of what role the NTOs should undertake.

7.4.6 Subjectivity vs. objectivity in relation to the NTO as a supplier

In this section the researchers wish to focus on a bivariate analysis of the variable relating to the NTO's importance (s_8) and the sample's understanding of the NTO's tasks (s_10), as well as a cross-tabulation of variable (s_10) with variable (s_11) relating to who the meeting planners mostly contact in the planning of an international programme in order to create a discussion of the necessity of an objective vs. subjective tourism supplier or organisation. The first bivariate analysis provides results that on the one hand point towards some of these meeting planners still appointing importance to the NTO in the meeting industry even though they do not feel they have a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks (15,1% of all respondents), but on the other hand a cumulative percentage of 24,3%, which feel they have a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks answer 'no opinion', 'not very important', or 'not important' in regard to its importance. The before-mentioned 15,1% might be those meeting planners who appoint an amount of legitimacy to the NTO disregarding if they relate to the

[121] The researchers find this to be an important aspect to discuss in further studies of the NTO's role in the meeting industry.

specific tasks or not. Hereby not stating an equal sign between being appointed as important and being legitimate, because the designation of legitimacy can for instance depend on more specific egoistic notions or a stakeholder can feel that the NTO is important, but does not necessarily see it as an organisation complying with moral obligations. Even though they most likely use a different tourism supplier or organisation, they can still see some relevance of the NTO being in the meeting industry. The other grouping overall seems to understand what the NTO does, but that it does not necessarily evoke a feeling of importance to them, which again points to that some of the meeting planners from the sample need to be provided with more relevant offerings that can raise the feeling of importance and hopefully relate it to the tasks provided. Although this bivariate analysis does not indicate a strong P-value the value is nonetheless significant with a value of 0,022. The result of this bivariate analysis is furthermore supported by the analysis of (s_10) and (s_11) below. This bivariate analysis also indicates a significant correlation with a P-value of 0,050.

Taking the last bivariate analysis up for discussion (s_10 and s_11) the researchers wish to put focus to whether or not a clear understanding of the NTO's tasks makes the meeting planners from the sample use the NTO mostly, and what the use of the other tourism suppliers and organisations can show. In earlier findings in this chapter we saw from variable (s_11) that only seven respondents (13,2%) mostly use the NTO in the planning of an international programme, and in this cross-tabulation, to the NTOs' "luck", six out of those seven respondents have a clear understanding of what the NTO's role is. However, the unfortunate result for the NTOs is that even though 62,3% has a clear understanding of their tasks, only the 13,2% uses them the most. Moreover, the 39,4% of those with clear understanding use the CVB; more than double of the number using the NTO and as well, more respondents use DMCs or direct suppliers/venues.

If the researchers add up the respondents mostly using the PCO, DMC, and other suppliers (venues, hotels, etc.) respectively, we see that they cumulatively constitute a large amount (58,6%). This grouping includes those tourism suppliers that work with a more subjective mindset, because they will obviously always recommend themselves for an international programme, due to them being a private company, or the DMC or PCO will most often suggest suppliers from whom they earn on commissions. Hence, meeting planners turning towards these suppliers will probably most often get a biased recommendation that originates in the suppliers' self-interest.

Due to the result emphasised above it seems that the meeting planners from this sample do not prioritise that their source is working objectively and impartially, but that they turn towards the source giving the best service or price or, as mentioned in RQ1 that they can have developed a relation to these tourism suppliers and therefore mostly use them.[122] It is an interesting tendency since NTOs and CVBs try to work in an objective manner (being public organisations) and Davidson & Cope (2003), emphasised in section 3.4, point out that NTOs are, by many agencies and intermediaries, appreciated for the impartial advice they can provide (Davidson & Cope, 2003, p. 118). However, one of the respondents from the sample enhances in the questionnaire's last question[123] that: *"It would be great to get a really neutral noncommercial opinion of venues, suppliers etc. So you can choose more wisely."* (Appendix 22), which then goes against the sample's tendency. Also, variable (s_13_11)[124], which had the intention to assess if the sample's meeting planners expect the NTO to be able to assist with facilitating contact in an objective manner shows that actually a cumulative percentage of 75,4% 'agree' or 'agree strongly' with this viewpoint[125], which does not correlate with the showings from variable (s_11). All the interviewees express the need and importance of having a neutral organisation to turn to, which however goes somewhat against their own preferences of using the DMC and hotels or venues directly, but as mentioned earlier, CMS and NRs' use of tourism suppliers and organisations depend on the size of their international programme. To the question whether or not it is important to have a neutral organisation CMS answers: "*Yeah, certainly for us because we are also neutral in terms of the venues that we will find for our clients. We have to be neutral to find the best solution for the clients so…you know if I wanted somewhere that wasn't neutral I would go to the Sales Manager of the particular hotel chain."* (CMS, appendix 17, p. 197). NR as well emphasises the transparency that a neutral organisation can provide (NR, appendix 18, p. 205). These perceptions could hence be interesting to have elaborated on in further research to scrutinise if neutrality of NTOs is of actual importance or not. The use of these tourism suppliers emphasises the notion put forward in section 7.2.1.1; that the meeting planners

[122] This observation is of course a speculation, which could be examined more thoroughly.
[123] S_15: In addition to the questions above, please let us know if you have any other comments about the role of an NTO that you would like to share?
[124] An NTO should be able to… Facilitate contact with all relevant commercial contacts.
[125] It is necessary to point out that it is not certain that the meeting planners have interpreted the question as intended due to the exclusion of the words 'objective'/'subjective'. The word 'relevant' has been used to indicate that the NTO is expected to facilitate contact information in an objective manner.

from the present sample could appear to be using these tourism suppliers for the co-creation of value, but that the NTO is preferred as a value facilitator.

Going back to the legitimacy discussions and considering the pragmatic legitimacy that the NTOs, according to the present thesis should focus more on obtaining, then this aspect of subjectivity vs. objectivity as well arises. Suchman (1995) emphasises that organisations should remember to keep a humanistic aspect besides only focusing on an exchange perspective, and that it can provide overall positive evaluations of the organisation (Suchman, 1995, p. 578). Constituents often relate to an organisation, as if they were humans, and it is therefore easier to designate legitimacy to trustworthy and honest organisations (Suchman, 1995, p. 578). In relation to the subjectivity of the organisations that the meeting planners from the sample mostly contact, then these aspects can be somewhat difficult to sustain taking the organisation's self-interest into consideration. According to the theoretical perspective just outlined, it would have been more consistent if the meeting planners mostly contacted the official organisations, which would give more objective advise and thereby presumably be more trustworthy. Of course the interest is for all suppliers to please the customer, but if self-interest is influential in a financial manner, then the trustworthiness can be threatened. It is a difficult task for an NTO to take action according to the discussion above, because it most often operates within certain established frames that require it to be an objective player. Thus, as mentioned above, further examinations of meeting planners' need for objective vs. subjective assistance would be highly relevant.

7.4.7 Summary

The lack of the NTO making itself relevant to these meeting planners is here emphasised and thus suggestions to actively and substantively manage its legitimacy are proposed. The researchers suggest the NTOs to seek legitimacy via other functions than being a supplier of services. This could for instance be through changing the identity to being a marketing organisation, or integrate this part next to the current service offerings, not to stake the current pragmatic legitimacy, which seems to be appointed via the fact-oriented services. This moreover due to the isomorphic movements that do not appear to work for the benefit of the NTO as a service provider; rather the opposite, when looking at whom these meeting planners turn to in a planning phase. Nonetheless, each NTO needs to find its own stance and can lean towards continuous symbolic management if substantive alterations are not possible. A need to make oneself relevant to those meeting planners with experience and working in larger companies stands out, along with the fact that objective advise does not dominate these meeting planners' viewpoints.

Chapter 8: Critique of methods and implications for future research

In this study focus has been set on investigating the relationship between meeting planners and NTOs. More specifically, the intention has been to examine the NTO's role in the meeting industry, as seen from the perspective of UK meeting planners working in intermediary companies. This has been done on both a more generic level, taking the NTO's overall role into account, but also in relation to more specific service offerings. In addition to gathering quantitative and qualitative empirical data from the meeting planners, the researchers have included theoretical concepts from value creation, legitimacy, and institutional issues in their analysis to further elaborate on the meeting planners' perspective on the NTO. This approach has made it possible for the researchers to produce findings, which can be of help to create a clearer picture of how a UK meeting planner perceives the NTO and what is expected of the NTO; however, without drawing generalisable conclusions due to the amount of respondents. By overall choosing to look at value creation, legitimacy, and institutional issues, with regard to the study's empirical data, the researchers have been able to put their findings into theoretical contexts, which in addition to providing a clearer understanding of the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner, has also given an indication of the role of today's NTO. Through the above-mentioned process the researchers have also been able to bring forward suggestions to future studies about the relations between the NTO and the meeting planners. These suggestions will be further discussed later in this chapter.

8.1 Critique of methods

A significant issue to be mentioned is, as pointed out above, the size of the sample that hindered the researchers from drawing generalisable conclusions. Although the survey went out to approximately 11,000 UK meeting planners, only 53 meeting planners completed the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 0,5%. This could indicate that the survey was too long, and thus discouraged many of the meeting planners from taking time to answer the questionnaire. Another, much simpler reason, could be that the meeting planners did not find the topic of the survey interesting or of relevance to their daily work. This is supported by the fact that although only 53 meeting planners completed the survey, 109 meeting planners entered the link to the survey. However, it is the researchers' estimate that a shorter survey would have had significant, negative implications on the empirical data supporting the analysis of this study, which is why a shorter version of the survey is not recommended for further studies. Instead, the researchers would suggest to optimise the prizes related to participating in the survey. In the current study, the researchers gave out four cookbooks from the Danish restaurant Noma[126] to four random participants in the survey. Although the researchers do not have any documentation to support that an optimisation of prizes would result in a larger sample size, it seems feasible to assume that this could be the case.

Looking at the construction of the different variables for the survey, it is clear that they have produced empirical data, which the researchers have been able to use in their examinations. Although the variables have shown to be useful in the analysis of this study, one can argue that, should other researchers with more time and resources wish to conduct the same study, with another and preferably larger sample of meeting planners, it would benefit the analysis to adjust some of the variables. For instance, instead of having closed questions regarding what the meeting planners experience and expect when contacting an NTO, a different approach could be to have open-ended questions, which have the potential to provide the researchers with a much more nuanced understanding of how the meeting planners perceive the NTO and what is expected.

Moreover, it is uncertain if the number of meeting planners, who decided to answer 'no opinion' in some cases, might have been the result of unclear questions. One example of what can be viewed as an unclear question, which the researchers themselves realised during the analysis of the findings, concerned the variable regarding the NTO's assistance with ROI (s_14_10). Looking at this question, it could refer to assistance with the actual measurement of ROI, but it could also mean that the NTO gives the meeting planners ideas on how to optimise the ROI of their programmes, such as seen in the VDK MIND project (cf. visitdenmark.com-h). Despite this, the researchers have found it valid to use this variable in the analysis. The reason being the inclusion of another variable (s_14_6), which the meeting planner could have used to indicate, that the NTO assists with ideas on how to optimise the ROI of meetings.

During the preliminary phases of this study, the researchers discussed whether or not to move forward with a case study or a study, which would examine the more generic relationship between meeting planners and NTOs, since the researchers found significant differences to exist among the NTOs, which the researchers studied during the preliminary phases of this study. The researchers feel that their decision to move forward with the general approach has provided them with valuable knowledge on these meeting planners'

[126] Courtesy of VDK.

general perspective on the NTO. Furthermore, the researchers found it more relevant to investigate the general perspective on the NTO, because this approach provided an indication of what the meeting planners generally look for in an NTO, rather than specific issues regarding only one NTO. Still, the researchers find that the results from this study could benefit from being applied to specific case studies. By doing so, it would be possible to further discuss specific suggestions on whether or not the specific NTO should focus on repairing, maintaining, or gaining legitimacy, and how the NTO should manage itself in regards to being a part of the meeting planners' creation of value-in-use.

8.2 Implications for future research

8.2.1 Hypothesis for examining meeting planners' relation to the NTO

Because of the researchers' inability to find substantive existing, research regarding the meeting planners' perspective on their relations with NTOs, this study has been of overall exploratory character. More specifically, the researchers have utilised selected, theoretical perspectives, as well as empirical data to examine three research questions referring to the relationship between the meeting planner and the NTO. One of the main focus points has been to examine if the NTO should focus on value co-creation, or value facilitation in its interaction with the meeting planner. In the current study a clear distinction has been made between these two different approaches to influence the meeting planners' creation of value-in-use, as it is by the theorists (for instance Grönroos, 2008, 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b included section 5.5). However, through the course of the analytical discussions, the researchers have discovered that a distinction between either value facilitation and value co-creation for an NTO to optimise its impact on the meeting planners' value creation process is not necessarily definitive. Instead, the researchers suggest that NTOs might be more effective in their approach to the meeting planners if they apply elements from the co-creation focus; it could be those from the DART-model; to a goods logic-based value facilitation process, as briefly mentioned.

Namely, that they make use of an outside-in perspective, involving in the meeting planner's value-in-use, but without being co-creators in a continuous interaction. Instead of being interactive co-creators, or non-interactive facilitators, the researchers suggest an interactive value facilitation role, without becoming an actual co-creator of value, but making use of the mentioned DART-model's building blocks. As described below, the meeting planners interviewed focus on these elements, but would prefer the NTO as a value facilitator as the sample.

According to the interviewees in the explanatory interviews, it is essential that the tourism supplier or organisation interested in interacting with the meeting planner reaches out to the meeting planner, and maintains a continuous dialogue. By doing so, the NTO would potentially optimise its chances for the meeting planner to contact the NTO, when in need of assistance with an international programme. NR highlights this point when asked why she rather uses an DMC than an NTO: *"Just because they [red. DMCs] are constantly in touch. They are always coming in to meet up. I don't really have much exposure to tourist organisations."* (NR, appendix 18, p. 204).

Furthermore, the interviewees unanimously indicate that transparency of the service offerings of any service provider is a key factor in the decision-making process of whom to contact for assistance. In addition to perceiving transparency as a clear communication of services, NF highlights the relevance of transparency in costs related to any of the services. According to her, one of the reasons to why she is hesitant to use the services of an NTO, is namely because it is not clear to her, if the services are linked to any costs, as mentioned in chapter seven. Since most services of an NTO are free of charge, it would make sense for NTOs to ensure this message is communicated clearly to the meeting planners they wish to engage with. Transparency can furthermore, as mentioned by CMS and NR in section 7.4.6, be accentuated through the unbiased assistance.

In addition to dialogue and transparency seemingly being the main factors in the meeting planners' decision-making process of whom to contact when in need of assistance, yet another factor also seems to be of importance. When asked about the criteria for whom the meeting planner would contact, NF emphasises the importance of easy and quick access to required assistance (cf. section 7.2.3). Although not explicitly mentioned by the other interviewees, they do seem to share this opinion.

Looking at what appears to be key factors influencing these meeting planners' decision-making process regarding who to contact, when in need of assistance with planning of an international programme, but also when being in the planning phase, as seen from the sample, there seems to be a correlation between these factors and the previously mentioned DART-model (cf. section 5.5.4). Although risk assessment is not a key factor, the interviewees do seem to implicitly touch upon this issue as well. This can be interpreted from the fact that the interviewees also focus on receiving information that eliminate the risk of dissatisfied clients. CMS points to the importance of risk assessment by stating: *"So honest information is what we want…you know…is it really only 10 minutes from the airport or is it more like half an hour…you know…is it actually the best view in Stockholm or is there somewhere else that is better."* (CMS, appendix 17, p. 197).

Whereas the decision-making process regarding who to contact, when in need of assistance with an international programme seems to be very much inviting to be a value facilitation process including the DART-model's building blocks, so does it throughout all aspects of the service exchange between the meeting planner and NTO. Thereby, establishing this relationship between the meeting planner and NTO to as well be influenced by the service logic (Grönroos, 2008, p. 307 – 308). The meeting planners namely seem to prefer the NTO to be a value facilitator, not engaging in continuous interaction, but still needing interactive elements. This is an argument that is supported in the findings of the survey and explanatory interviews, which show a strong emphasis on value facilitating services, such as providing the resource of general information, as seen in RQ1 and RQ2. Additionally, the explanatory interviews indicated a need for an informal relationship.

Because of the fact that this study only included three qualitative explanatory interviews, and because of a small sample size, the researchers suggest that further research could be conducted with this proposition in mind. With a point of departure in the findings of this study, the researchers suggest that future research regarding the explored relationship, could benefit from examining the following hypothesis:

> *An NTO would benefit from including elements from co-creation of value to value facilitation in the meeting planner's decision-making process of whom to contact, when in need of assistance, as well as in the actual service exchange.*

To give an overview of how the researchers perceive elements of co-creation being included in the value facilitation process, one can view the figure below:

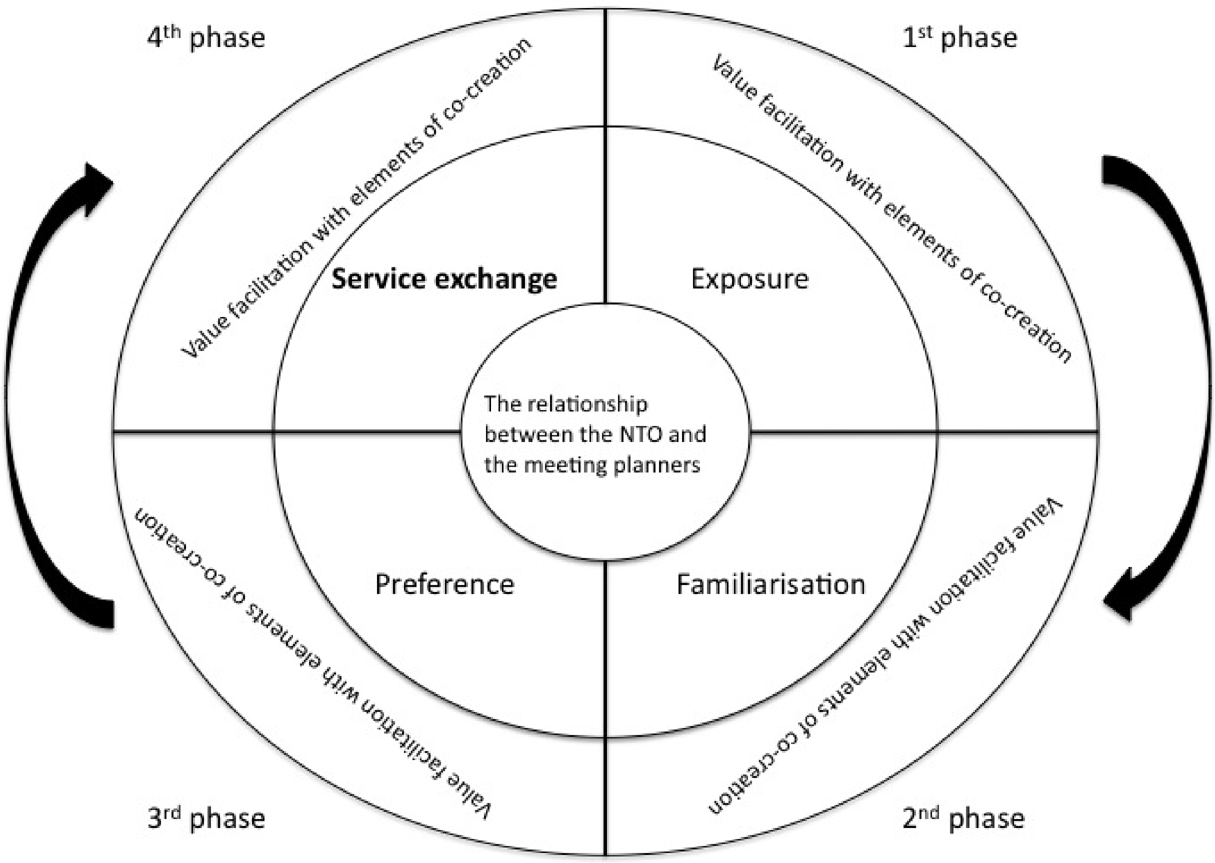


Figure 6 – Value creation in the relationship between NTO and meeting planners.

8.2.2 The relationship between NTOs and the association market

Whereas this study has been focused on the meeting planners involved in planning international programmes, another interesting relationship to investigate would be the relationship between NTOs and the association decision makers. The reason being that the process of planning and organising international programmes for international associations often differ from the approach of corporate programmes in size and public financial support. This perspective is supported by AHS, who explains that the association market differs from corporate programmes. More specifically, the planning of association programmes is often much more politically influenced, which means that the NTOs and CVBs have to take on another approach than when dealing with corporate programmes (AHS, appendix 9, p. 166 - 167). To examine the associations' perspective on the role of the NTO, the researchers suggest that the framework of this study can be utilised, since the intention also here will be to examine the relationship between the NTO and one of its target groups.

However, what could be added to the framework could be an identification process of how different individuals, involved in the decision-making process, are able to influence the final decision of where to have the next international programme of an international association. By adding this aspect, it would be possible to examine if different approaches to different people in the decision-making process, is necessary or if one common approach to all persons involved in the decision making process of an association would be sufficient.

8.2.3 An international perspective

Another relevant approach to investigate the role of the NTO in the meeting industry could be to broaden the gathering of empirical data to include meeting planners from a wide range of countries. By doing so, the study would get an international dimension, which one could argue would be beneficial, when investigating a national organisation that focuses on international marketing towards target groups in leisure- and business tourism. Furthermore, this approach would make it possible to identify potential differences in the institutional environments of different nationalities, and thus also be able to bring forward suggestions for the NTO on how to approach meeting planners from different countries, as previously mentioned when discussing the perspective of different environments cf. Kostova & Zaheer (1999) in chapter five. One way to take this into consideration could be to include background variables in the survey, with reference to the meeting planner's cultural background or nationality, thereby making it possible for the researcher to differentiate between meeting planners from different cultures. By looking at the NTO's approach to meeting planners from around the world from a cultural perspective, a researcher would be able to examine if the NTO should put an effort into regional marketing, as is the case with VDK. who has nine locally based offices around the world (cf. section 4.1) or rather use its resources on a unified international marketing approach.

8.2.4 Internal alliances

In the current study the researchers have examined the relationship between the NTO and the meeting planner as an isolated dyadic relationship, but in a generic manner as mentioned earlier. However, through the examination of this relationship, the researchers have also briefly discussed the isomorphic tendencies existing between the services of the NTO and other tourism suppliers and organisations in the meeting industry, such as the CVBs, and what impact this has on the role of the NTO, both seen from a value creation and legitimacy perspective. Because the researchers in this study have found an overlap between services offered by NTOs and other players in the meeting industry, a suggestion for further research regarding the role of the NTO could be an exploratory study of a country's internal networks seen from an alliance perspective. Moreover, to get more into depth with the concept of isomorphism and what triggers it, as well as its effect. The researchers shortly discussed the forces potentially leading to an isomorphic state (cf. section 5.3), and in relation to the Danish meeting industry the normative forces (for instance the filtering of personnel between WoCo and VDK) could be empirically relevant to examine for further understanding of the isomorphic tendencies and the NTO's role. By introducing other theoretical perspectives on alliances, such as the ones of Ranjay Gulati (1998) and T.K. Das & Bing-Sheng Teng (2002), it will be feasible to investigate how and if the NTO would benefit from entering into alliances. Moreover, one could include the Danish theorists as Henrik Halkier & Annette Therkelsen (2008) and their theoretical perspectives on umbrella branding to examine how alliances in a country's internal meeting industry could be utilised to create a unified destination branding message. This approach to further studies regarding the role of the NTO would give a chance to discuss how future structures of such alliances should and could be built, and how the NTO should position itself in order to optimise its role; whether it be as an intermediary, ambassador, or network convener.

In regard to gathering empirical data for a study on internal alliances in a country's meeting industry, it is recommended, by the researchers of this study, to utilise the same overall approach as the one in the current study. By conducting exploratory interviews with key players within a country's meeting industry valuable information could then be utilised for constructing a quantitative survey. A survey, which could be sent out to all internal players, would give a much more extensive idea of the problems and possibilities of building, maintaining, or repairing alliances. Similar to the current study, qualitative interviews can then be utilised to elaborate on the findings of the quantitative survey.

8.3 Summary

As seen in the previous sections of this chapter, there are both methodical improvements to be made to the existing framework, as well as alternative directions and theoretical approaches to take in regards to future studies of the role of the NTO in the meeting industry. The researchers feel that they have brought forward some of the more relevant alternative approaches for future studies in the previous sections, by looking at other target groups, an international perspective, and internal alliances, since findings from such future studies would work in synergy with the findings of the current study, thus creating added value to the researchers' existing knowledge base. However, it is important to stress that although a decision has been made to single out three different alternative approaches to future studies in this chapter, there is a wide range of different other approaches, which could be taken. As mentioned in the problem area of this study, the meeting industry is a very complex industry. Because of the NTO's function as a national representative, the NTO has to be attentive to the requirements of a wide range of both internal and external players. This aspect alone opens up to numerous different suggestions on future studies regarding the relations between the NTO and different clusters of players, such as hotels or venues.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

As mentioned in chapter one, the researchers were unable to locate research regarding how meeting planners relate to NTOs. The researchers therefore found it of interest and relevance to investigate these relations in order to bring forward new knowledge on how meeting planners relate to NTOs, and if NTOs in continuation of this should bring about alterations. As previously mentioned the researchers decided to focus on UK meeting planners.

In order to examine their relations to NTOs, the researchers decided to gather their own empirical data consisting of the practice of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The reason for including both types of empirical data collection was based on the researchers' aim not only to generalise their findings, but also to have elaborations on the UK meeting planners' perspectives. Unfortunately the survey resulted in only 53 respondents, which is why the researchers have not been able to provide generalisable conclusions in regards to the findings of this study. However, as discussed in chapter seven, disregarding the number of responses, many relevant findings have been revealed, contributing to exploratory discussions and giving rise to future, more exhaustive studies.

As elaborated in chapter one and used as a consistent division throughout chapter seven, the researchers have focused on three research questions, all relating to the overall research question:

How does the meeting planner relate to the NTO?

The relations between these two players have been considered in a more generic light, focusing on the role of NTOs in general from the meeting planners' perspective, but also, been going into details about the meeting planners' more specific relation to the NTOs' service offerings. The research questions have assisted the researchers in examining these two overall aspects, and thereby what kind of value creation is taking place between UK meeting planners and NTOs, and through what role the NTO is appointed legitimacy.

The results from the thesis indicate that these UK meeting planners have a clear perception of and expectation to NTOs as being able to assist with general information about a country. They thus view the NTO as a supplier, but through the services that they enhance, the NTO is moreover portrayed as a country ambassador; appointing the NTO a dualistic role. The NTO appears to be designated its pragmatic legitimacy through this role, however, the researchers find it interesting that the UK meeting planners from both the sample and explanatory interviews seem to have limited knowledge about what an NTO can actually assist them with, in addition to provide general information and fact-oriented services. They seem to primarily make use of the NTO in the initial phases of their planning of an international programme, and also sporadically, but overall turn to other tourism suppliers, when in need of service assistance. In a theoretical context, it seems that these UK meeting planners perceive and expect the NTO to be an entity which functions as a simple value facilitator of general information and not as either a more extensive value facilitator nor a co-creator of value. Hence the respondents in this study indicate that these UK meeting planners do not currently require any significant assistance with their value creation process from the NTOs.

Instead these UK meeting planners seem to mostly rely on the assistance of other service providers, such as hotels and DMCs in their planning process of an international programme. This is very interesting since all three of the interviewees simultaneously highlight the importance of having the NTO as a neutral service provider in the meeting industry.

In relation to the above, another interesting observation is that the UK meeting planners participating in the explanatory interviews seem unable to identify the key service offerings of an NTO, as well to differentiate between the role of CVBs and NTOs. This is despite the fact that all three have been working in the meeting industry for several years. Furthermore, the experienced meeting planners from the sample, also appear to have difficulties understanding the tasks of an NTO and appointing it importance. One could therefore argue that the NTO is facing a significant problem in regard to how it makes itself relevant and how it communicates its role. Even though its pragmatic legitimacy seems to be designated through the mentioned services, the findings indicate that there is room for improvement when it comes to these meetings planners' awareness of an NTO's role and services, this particularly in regard to the experienced meeting planners.

If the UK meeting planners cannot distinguish between the above-mentioned organisations, have difficulties to relate to certain service offerings, or are not aware of the services offered by an NTO, then of course an NTO will not be able to ensure its usage in the UK meeting planners' planning process. It is therefore of importance that the NTO not only focuses on the quality in its scope of services, but also creates awareness about what the NTO represents and can assist with in regard to the UK meeting planners. CM emphasises that: *"(…) national institutions are becoming a little bit less important than some years ago, due to the fact that more regional and city structures have been established."* (CM, appendix 6, p. 156). CM's quote stands out to be confirmed in the present thesis, but the results additionally discern that the homogenisation of the tourism suppliers and organisations' roles are making it difficult for the meeting planner to relate to the NTO.

Looking at the overall results of this study, one could suggest that the NTO basically has three doors to choose from, in order to bring about changes according to the discussions of the empirical data in combination with the theoretical concepts. Behind door number one is the opportunity to continue business-as-usual; meaning a seemingly low influence on the UK meeting planners' value creation process, and a low level of pragmatic legitimacy. Whereas door number one demands no alterations of the NTO's current role, apart from potential symbolic management, door number two suggests more resources to be allocated to relationship marketing in order to create personal relations between the NTO and the individual UK meeting planner. This approach, especially came across in the qualitative interviews as an important factor in the decision making process of who to turn to when in need of assistance, but also throughout the actual service exchange, as was described in chapter eight. By allocating more resources to relationship marketing one could therefore argue that the NTO could be appointed a higher level of pragmatic legitimacy, as well have a greater influence on the UK meeting planners' value creation process. Looking behind door number three is the suggestion to change the role of the NTO through substantive management, as discussed in section 7.4.1. Depending on which role the NTO pursues it could risk damaging its pragmatic legitimacy as well its influence on the UK meeting planners' value creation process. On the other hand, radical alterations could also result in an improvement of the cognitive legitimacy appointed to the NTO by the meeting planners, which could exceed the combined value of its current pragmatic legitimacy and influence on the UK meeting planners' value creation process.

In short, the UK meeting planners seem to appoint some pragmatic legitimacy to the NTO as an influential part of their value creation process. However, it seems that great opportunities exist for NTOs to optimise their relations to this segment. Although the researchers acknowledge that the suggestions to optimise this relationship, as brought forward in this study, do not cover all aspects of the relation, it is the researchers' hope that the present study will give inspiration to NTOs on how optimisations could take place, based on how the meeting planner seems to relate to the NTO.

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