

# Preface

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Interorganizational relationships – e.g. alliances, joint ventures, outsourcing and offshoring initiatives – feature prominently in contemporary business society. Such relationships are generally attractive, but complex, because members from different organizations with different backgrounds and experiences need jointly to discover and create value. To complicate matters further, they have to make sure that their organization appropriates part of this value and they have to safeguard against opportunistic behaviour by partners and undesired knowledge spillovers. In this manuscript, I explore how contracts and trust relate to the creation, appropriation and discovery of value in interorganizational relationships. More particularly, I capitalize on the observation that contracts and negotiation and contracting processes are frequently hardest when you need them most (Chapter 3), that they assume a non-trivial relationship with trust (Chapter 4) and that they can be conducive to giving, making, demanding and breaking sense (Chapter 5). Moreover, I develop the notion that contracting and other acts of formalization eventuate in tensions with which people have to cope (Chapter 6) and I discuss the implications of standardizing contracting practices (Chapter 7). Finally, I contend that contracts and the processes from which they emerge should not be studied in isolation, as they interact with various other governance mechanisms (Chapter 8). In further developing and exploring these insights, I attempted to accommodate and cherish existing research on contracting and trust in interorganizational relationships, while simultaneously attending to and developing alternative notions and viewpoints. I believe this manuscript gives testimony to the way such endeavours can enrich our thinking on the governance of interorganizational relationships. I wish to thank Margret, Sam and Casper, my parents, family, friends and colleagues in the Netherlands and many other places around the world for their tremendous support during the journey that has eventuated in this manuscript. They are the ones that made my voyage a precious intellectual experience.

*Paul Vlaar, Amsterdam, October 2007*