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Deepening Insights Into Social Entrepreneurship by Leveraging Service-Dominant Logic

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ABSTRACT


Social entrepreneurs operate in highly complex social and institutional environments where dual economic and social missions create paradoxes, conflicts, and challenges. To achieve their goals, social entrepreneurs are frequently dependent on the resources and engagement of numerous other actors as diverse as funders, policymakers, accelerators, investors, volunteers, universities, supply chain partners, NGOs, and of course, customers and beneficiaries. To understand these complexities, a holistic and systemic perspective is required. In response, this study leverages the service-dominant (S-D) logic of marketing to offer a path to deepening insights in social entrepreneurship research. Specifically, the paper draws on four key concepts related to S-D logic that offer interesting avenues for future research: (1) service ecosystems, (2) value co-creation, (3) institutions and institutional arrangements, and (4) actor engagement. To enrich the conceptual arguments, illustrations are provided using the Melbourne-based social entrepreneurial collective, Moving Feast. The collective emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic and involved numerous social enterprise organisations, support organisations, funders, and community organisations. The paper concludes with a set of future research avenues.

KEYWORDS

Social entrepreneurship; service-dominant logic; value co-creation; institutional work; actor engagement; emergent properties

Social entrepreneurship (SE) combines market-based mechanisms with charity-based objectives to provide market solutions to social problems (Battilana and Dorado 2010; Nyssens and Defourny 2016, 16). However, social entrepreneurs do not operate in a vacuum. They are anchored in complex social and institutional structures comprising competing values systems and goals (Johannisson, Ramírez-Pasillas, and Karlsson

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2002). Navigating these complexities is challenging. The dual economic and social missions of SE can generate tensions among stakeholders (Smith, Gonin, and Besharov 2013) and create legitimacy problems that affect access to external resources (Miller et al. 2012). The hybrid nature of many SE organisations (incorporating aspects of for-profit and non-profit organisations) means that social entrepreneurs are frequently dependent upon diverse (public and private) actors to achieve their missions. These diverse actor groups can include investors, enterprise accelerators and incubators, grantors and funders, government departments and ministries, non-profit or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), universities, policymakers, suppliers and distributors, and of course, customers (Fehrer, Baker, and Brodie 2020).

However, while the strategic importance of collaborative approaches for SE success is reflected in some research (Kwong, Tasavori, and Wun-Mei Cheung 2017), relatively little attention has been paid to exploring the key dynamics and mechanisms of value co-creation in complex multi-actor SE contexts (Grönroos and Voima 2013; Re and Magnani 2022). Instead, research has predominantly focused on the role of 'heroic' social entrepreneurs as the creators of social and economic value (Spear 2019), or the idiosyncrasies of SE business models and linear value chains (Lund-Thomsen and Nadvi 2010; Micheleni and Fiorentino 2012; Verstraete and Jouison-Laffitte 2011). It is only more recently that scholars, governments, and policymakers have begun to adopt a more systemic perspective that recognises broader social and institutional complexities facing social entrepreneurs (Barraket and Loosemore 2018; Gupta et al. 2021; Huang 2020; Kullak et al. 2022; Sigala 2019). Extending these contributions further requires recognition of the complex dynamics of multi-actor contexts, and the interdependence of broader institutional arrangements that guide value creation processes and the 'bursting' influence of entrepreneurial activity that disrupts institutional arrangements (Schumpeter 1947, 153). Hence, fresh insights can be delivered by shifting focus from dyads and linearity (e.g. Jefferies, Bishop, and Hibbert 2021; Yang et al. 2022; Zhang et al. 2021).

In response, this paper aims to *generate a future research agenda that will deepen insights into social entrepreneurship by adopting a holistic and systemic perspective*. To do so, this study takes a 'theory adaptation' approach (Jaakkola 2020, 23), which involves leveraging an 'alternative frame of reference to propose a novel perspective on an extant conceptualisation'. This approach has previously been used to expand areas like stakeholder marketing (e.g. Hillebrand, Driessen, and Koll 2015) and actor engagement (e.g. Brodie et al. 2019), and is gaining traction in SE and value co-creation research (e.g. Rösler et al. 2021). As an 'alternative frame of reference', we integrate the service dominant (S-D) logic of marketing (Vargo and Lusch 2004a, 2008, 2016) to propose a dynamic, systemic perspective of SE. S-D logic explains how value co-creation manifests from resource integration involving multiple generic actors embedded within complex adaptive service ecosystems governed by endogenously generated institutional arrangements (Vargo and Lusch 2004a, 2008, 2016). More specifically, we achieve conceptual integration by leveraging four key concepts central to S-D logic – value co-creation, service ecosystems, institutional arrangements, and actor engagement.

To enrich the conceptual integration of S-D logic in the paper, practical illustrations are drawn from the case of social entrepreneurial collective, *Moving Feast*, based in Melbourne, Australia. The collective was initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic by the hospitality social enterprise, STREAT, founded by social entrepreneur, Rebecca Scott (Coggan 2021). Moving Feast aimed to provide nutritious food to vulnerable communities across Melbourne and support continuity of employment in social enterprises. During Melbourne's COVID-19 lockdowns, Moving Feast grew more than 60,000 food plants, packed more than 30,000 produce boxes, and cooked more than 150,000 meals (Waters 2021). The collective eventually involved numerous other social enterprise organisations, seven support organisations (including commercial partners), 25 funders, and 30 community organisations (Moving Feast 2021), hence, offers a valuable illustration of value co-creation involving diverse actors. Further background information about the illustrative case is available in the accompanying web appendix.

This study extends the scope and perspective of SE research. This shift is timely as the focus of SE research transitions to emphasise collective SE – ‘collaboration amongst similar as well as diverse actors for the purpose of applying business principles to solving social problems’ (Montgomery, Dacin, and Dacin 2012, 376). By synthesising key concepts drawn from S-D logic with SE, this study arrives at a set of four overarching avenues for future research. The first avenue comprises the types and roles of actors and resources involved in value co-creation processes in (social entrepreneurial) service ecosystems, including the influence of social embeddedness on resource integration and the roles and functions of different types of (tangible and intangible) resources. Second is the role of institutional arrangements in guiding value co-creation processes, but equally, how these arrangements might be deliberately redesigned or shaped by different embedded actors through institutional work or design principles. The third avenue involves the role of emergence in SE systems, including how improved social outcomes might be conceptualised as emergent properties, and the roles and intentions of actors at different levels of aggregation in creating, stabilising, and institutionalising favourable ephemeral emergent outcomes. Finally, fourth, how social enterprises might be reconceptualised as engagement platforms for value co-creation processes, including the types of engagement dispositions and behaviours of various generic actors, and how positive engagement by broader stakeholder groups might be organised and managed. In sum, the proposed four research avenues extend current understandings of social value (co-)creation and provide a platform for future theoretical and empirical work in the SE domain.

Social entrepreneurship

SE is an entrepreneurial activity with social purpose at its core, where organisations and individuals ‘combine the passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation, and determination’ (Dees 1998, 1). While there are numerous SE definitions, common across all is the creation of social value as the core purpose, rather than the creation of personal and/or shareholder wealth. Whilst SE can be practiced by any organisation from any sector of the economy, the most frequent organisational type is a ‘social enterprise’. Social enterprises are dual-mission

organisations that aim to achieve both social purpose and financial sustainability (Doherty, Haugh, and Lyon 2014) by engaging in economic and trading activities, with an earned income strategy (Peredo and Mclean 2006). Any surplus revenue is typically reinvested back into the organisation to support its social purpose (Dees 1998, 1), while in some cases, volunteers serve key functions (Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern 2006).

The pursuit of social value creation through entrepreneurial activity does not necessarily involve the creation of a new venture (Bacq and Janssen 2011), such as when a non-profit organisation transitions to a hybrid form to include social entrepreneurial activity to bolster other revenue derived from philanthropic sources (Elkington and Hartigan 2008). Other social enterprises might be purely for-profit, often called 'social businesses', and trade in products that directly or indirectly positively impact a social or environmental problem. Nevertheless, among the many types of organisations and initiatives that engage in SE, social enterprise remains predominant.

Traditionally, SE research centred on the study of individual social entrepreneurs and idiosyncrasies of social enterprise business models and value chains (e.g. Doherty and Kittipanya-Ngam 2019; Kullak, Baker, and Woratschek 2021; Scuotto, Cicellin, and Consiglio 2023; Zahra et al. 2009). Additionally, early studies of social value creation focused predominantly on the value-creation efforts of individual social entrepreneurs (e.g. Ormiston and Seymour 2011; Peredo and Mclean 2006; Santos 2012). This approach reflected mainstream literature that views value creation as the domain of business, within a dyad that includes the customer. But this perspective neglects broader organisational, relational, and contextual factors that contribute to social value co-creation (Quélin, Kivleniece, and Lazzarini 2017).

In response, SE scholarship has recently shifted its focus to emphasise the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement and collaboration (Lorenzo-Afable, Lips-Wiersma, and Singh 2023). This literature emphasises institutional support (Montgomery, Dacin, and Dacin 2012; Teasdale et al. 2023) and active engagement with various actors, including beneficiaries, government entities, for-profit organisations, and local communities (e.g. Altinay, Sigala, and Waligo 2016; Kullak, Baker, and Woratschek 2021; Weber et al. 2017) to co-create value (e.g. Babu et al. 2020; Ostertag, Hahn, and Ince 2021) and opportunities (e.g. De Silva et al. 2020) across different levels of aggregation (micro, meso, and macro) (e.g. Yin and Jamali 2021). These studies recognise social value creation as a co-creative process. Indeed, single social enterprises frequently lack the resources required to achieve their purpose single-handedly. Moreover, social entrepreneurs frequently must collaborate in contexts riddled with multiple institutional logics (e.g. Gillet et al. 2015), leading to potential inter-logic tensions (e.g. Kosmynin 2022). In sum, social value creation unfolds dynamically, heavily dependent upon interactions and interdependencies between multiple actors, embedded within sometimes conflicting institutional arrangements (Cherrier, Goswami, and Ray 2018; Lorenzo-Afable, Lips-Wiersma, and Singh 2023).

However, gaps remain. There is a lack of research exploring engagement by multiple stakeholders in value co-creation and macro-level analyses (Montgomery, Dacin, and Dacin 2012; Teasdale et al. 2023). Existing literature also predominantly adopts a customer/beneficiary perspective of value co-creation, overlooking the potential

contributions of other actors in the ecosystem (e.g. Jefferies, Bishop, and Hibbert 2021; Lan et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2021). Further, value co-creation is perceived differently across studies, leading to a lack of agreement on its definition and dynamics (e.g. Babu et al. 2020; Galvagno and Dalli 2014; Grönroos 2008; Jefferies, Bishop, and Hibbert 2021; Ostertag, Hahn, and Ince 2021; Sud, Vansandt, and Baugous 2009; Yang et al. 2022). This issue inhibits effective theory development and understanding of how social entrepreneurial efforts co-create value in complex conditions (Austin and Seitanidi 2012; Grönroos and Voima 2013; Lorenzo-Afable, Lips-Wiersma, and Singh 2023).

Overall, while making valuable contributions, most SE literature reflects a lack of consensus in what constitutes co-created value and adopts a restricted view of resource-integrating actors (Teasdale et al. 2023). To develop a more comprehensive understanding of social value creation, we argue that future research should adopt a systemic perspective by drawing on S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004a, 2016).

Service-dominant logic

S-D logic (Lusch and Vargo 2014; Vargo and Lusch 2016) provides an inclusive, holistic, and dynamic conceptualisation of social and institutional phenomena within markets. It has recently gained the attention of SE researchers, such as when exploring participatory governance in social enterprises (e.g. Savall Morera, Solórzano-García, and Guzmán 2023), transformative value creation (e.g. Barrios, Camacho, and Estrada-Mejia 2023), and SE in tourism and hospitality (e.g. Altinay, Sigala, and Waligo 2016; Lin et al. 2019). Building on these contributions, we assert that S-D logic offers a valuable path forward for deepening insights in SE, driven by its overarching narrative – that all value is co-created by resource-integrating actors engaged in service-for-service exchange, who are themselves embedded in self-adjusting service ecosystems governed by endogenously generated institutional arrangements (Vargo and Lusch 2016). Next, we systematically unpack these concepts and provide some illustrative examples by drawing on the case of Moving Feast.

Our conceptual arguments are graphically represented in Figure 1, which depicts a multi-level perspective of upward and downward causation in the social entrepreneurial context. This Figure shows that while institutional arrangements guide value co-creation processes, micro-level activities endogenously generate meso-level emergent properties including markets and industries, which in turn go on to generate macro-level properties, including social and environmental outcomes. Hence, novel resource integration practices, instigated by networks of actors at micro-level, can go on to (re)shape meso- and macro-level properties.

Value co-creation and actor engagement within service ecosystems

S-D logic is underpinned by the concept that all value is co-created by actors engaged in service-for-service exchange. Service is defined ‘as the application of specialised competencies (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself’ (Vargo and Lusch 2004b, 2). S-D logic

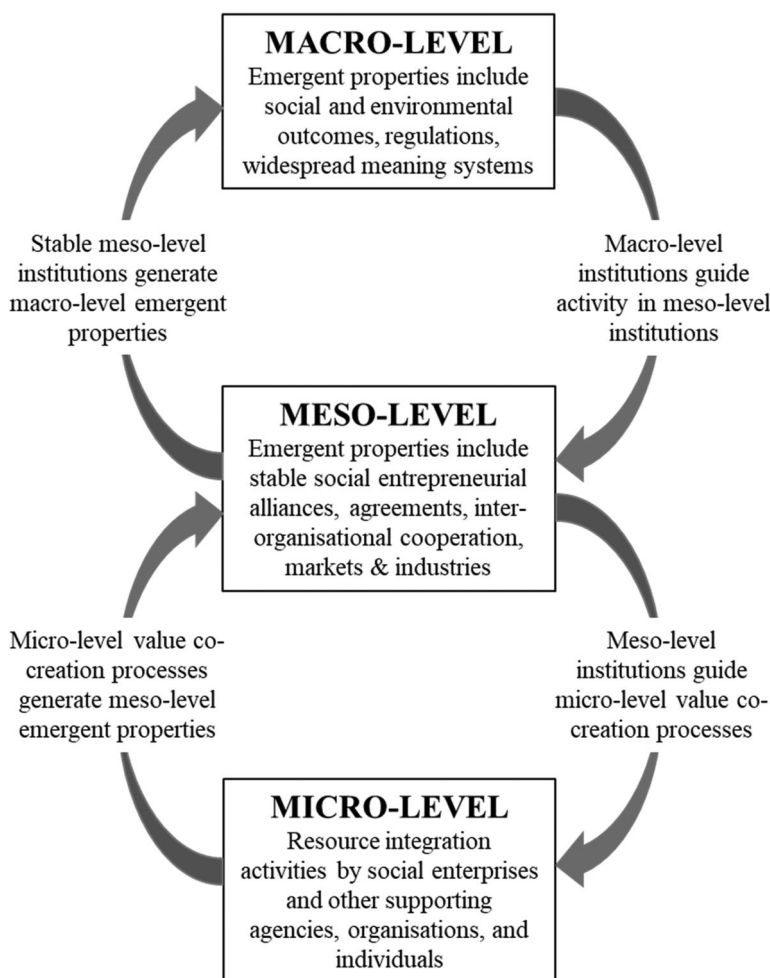


Figure 1. Upward and downward causation in the social entrepreneurial context.

asserts that even tangible goods act as mechanisms or instruments for the delivery of service; hence, value-in-use in context is what is desired (Vargo and Lusch 2008). This implies organisations must *interact with* customers and other stakeholders to realise value collaboratively (Ballantyne and Varey 2006). Put differently, rather than value propositions being benefits provided to customers by an organisation, value propositions are instead ‘promises of value creation that build upon configurations of resources and practices’ (Skålén et al. 2015, 144). Furthermore, value co-creation occurs through time, through the exchange of service by any number of actors. One actor might offer service indirectly through a good, while someone else applies their knowledge and skills (service) later when using that good. In sum, by recognising the breadth of actors involved in value co-creation processes and service as the basis of exchange, the potential (tangible and intangible) resources available for developing and realising value creation are increased enormously (Kullak, Baker, and Woratschek 2021; Michel, Brown, and Gallan 2008).

While value co-creation has proved to be a powerful concept to explain the roles of diverse actors in the process of co-creating value, it remains abstract in nature. To make value co-creation more tangible and measurable, the concept of actor engagement emerged as a mid-range theory to S-D logic's metatheoretical narrative (Brodie et al. 2019; Storbacka et al. 2016). Engagement refers to the positive cognitive, affective, and behavioural disposition of an actor towards a brand or network (Brodie et al. 2019). Highly engaged actors invest their own resources, including knowledge, skills, time, and labour (Jaakkola and Alexander 2014). This engagement can be observed through behaviours such as loyalty, repurchasing, generating online content (e.g. reviews, recommendations), and assisting with product development (Brodie et al. 2011; Pansari and Kumar 2017). In the context of SE, engagement is critical for attracting, maintaining, and leveraging the resources of numerous actors, including volunteers, funders, policymakers, and customers (Conduit, Karpen, and Tierney 2019).

Actors engaged in value co-creation processes are embedded within service ecosystems. Lusch and Vargo (2014, 161) define service ecosystems as 'relatively self-contained, self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange'. The smallest service ecosystem involves two humans interacting with one another; the largest 'comprises the global economy' (Maglio and Spohrer 2008, 18). Hence, service ecosystems are nested and layered within and across one another. In the SE context, a micro-level service ecosystem might be a social enterprise, or interactions between an enterprise and its customers. Meso-level service ecosystems might be industries and markets, and macro-level service ecosystems might be communities and nations.

A major strength of the service ecosystem perspective has been to move beyond dyads or linearity as research foci. Instead, service ecosystems enable conceptualising and capturing the systemic nature of value co-creation processes, for example, in areas as diverse as health (Frow et al. 2019), public policy (Trischler and Charles 2019), innovation (Di Pietro et al. 2018), digital platforms (Alaimo, Kallinikos, and Valderrama 2020), and circular economy (Fehrer, Kemper, and Baker 2024). To further explain the concepts of value co-creation, actor engagement and service ecosystems, let us turn to our first illustration.

In the case of STREAT, multiple actors and organisations were enrolled to form the collective *Moving Feast*, which aimed to achieve social impact during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collective's success was primarily facilitated by intangible resources, such as knowledge, skills, and the ongoing relationships among the actors. For example, one of the collective's collaborators – the Collingwood Children's Farm – worked with an Aboriginal corporation's land management team to develop a trial native food garden (Moving Feast 2023), benefiting both organisations through leveraging the knowledge, skills, and relationships of each other. The value created for both would have not been possible without the other. *Moving Feast* delivered essential services of survival and nutrition through 30,000 produce boxes and 150,000 meals – service provision through tangible outputs (Waters 2021). In so doing, the collective also provided additional services such as enjoyable flavours, social gatherings around food, and opportunities for expressing affection through meals. For members of the collective, personal, and social value was derived from their involvement, including a

sense of achievement and the pleasure of making a positive impact on a pressing social problem. Not all actors in *Moving Feast* applied their efforts simultaneously but contributed their expertise, competences, and resources at different times. For example, public and private resources that were bundled – directly or indirectly – to enable the collective to achieve its goals included delivery drivers, public roading networks, compost and gardening system providers, policymakers, funders, and more.

Widespread actor engagement was reflected in the broad collection of organisations affiliated to the *Moving Feast* collective, and their subsequent engagement behaviours reflected high intensity of engagement, e.g. their willingness to contribute valuable resources to achieve the collective's goals. These resources, skills and competences were leveraged to increase resource density and availability, including from support organisations like Minter Ellison and Social Traders, and funders like the Westpac bank and Coopers Investments (Goodwin and Scott 2023). The beneficiaries of *Moving Feast* also demonstrated high levels of engagement by actively investing their effort, knowledge, and skills into the collective's activities. Through Open Days and co-design workshops, residents and organisations collaborated to develop plans for a facility that enabled farmers and small producers to sell and create value-added products (Moving Feast 2022).

In sum, while the collective operated as an orchestrator of value co-creation processes, without the service of others, the manifest value created would have not been possible. Investments by affiliated actors demonstrated high engagement intensity across multiple levels – cognitively stimulated and aroused on an individual level, deep relational bonds and positive interactions on a dyadic level, and featuring many connections and symmetrical goals and objectives on a network level (Wang et al. 2023).

'Zooming out' to adopt a multi-level view

To better reflect complex social and institutional contexts, more recent elaborations of S-D logic have seen the integration of institutional and systems perspectives. This integration enables 'zooming out' to achieve an even more dynamic and holistic perspective of value co-creation processes (e.g. Chandler and Vargo 2011; Lusch and Vargo 2014; Vargo and Lusch 2016) and non-linear, multi-actor analyses across different 'levels' – e.g. micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. These perspectives respond to calls in SE research for consideration of cross-level effects within and between levels driven by the actions of multiple stakeholders (De Bruin, Shaw, and Lewis 2017; Saebi, Foss, and Linder 2019) and how institutions shape and influence social entrepreneurial initiatives (Lortie et al. 2023).

Within the S-D logic literature adopting a systems perspective (Barile and Polese 2010), the concept of emergence has become prominent of late. Emergence is the process 'whereby the global behaviour of a system results from the actions and interactions of agents' (Sawyer 2005, 2). As value manifests from a co-creation process involving interactive relationships through time, linear or dyadic conceptualisations are not adequate (Vargo et al. 2023). Evolving value-creating processes can result in novel resource integration patterns and configurations that can subsequently generate new emergent properties (Vargo et al. 2023). An emergent property is a capability or

property of a system that is greater than the sum of its parts, meaning the property cannot be reduced to its constituent parts (Elder-Vass 2010). Emergent properties include entities, rules, norms and institutions, structures, markets, ideas, belief systems, and so on (Pena and Breidbach 2021).

Of especial significance to SE, processes of emergence generate and shape service ecosystem formation through the shared intentions of embedded actors (Baker and Nenonen 2020; Taillard et al. 2016). Through time, individual intentions and values contribute to conversations and negotiations with others, which in turn contribute to emergent ephemeral roles and preferences that then contribute to the establishment of stable norms, rules and practices (Sawyer 2005). In so doing, service ecosystems can go through phase transitions from periods of stability to periods of disruption, to a new state of stability (Polese et al. 2021).

In SE research, Babu et al. (2020) explore the evolution and formulation of multi-stakeholder strategic alliances for social innovation. The authors find that social innovation-led value co-creation follows an evolutionary trajectory, progressing from the stages of emergence and engagement creating a spiralling and iterative relationship. In essence, while the creation of value becomes the predominant driver for the service ecosystem and strategic alliance itself, the pursuit of value acts as a pivotal motivator in shaping and sustaining these collaborative initiatives for social innovation.

Moving Feast drew on the Victorian Government's Recycling Victoria Innovation Fund to create valuable circular economy retail products by repurposing offcuts, excess produce, and waste items from their social enterprises (Sustainability Victoria 2023). In so doing, improved environmental outcomes, and changing assumptions around waste and business responsibility emerged as new belief systems within the involved organisations, funders, local area authorities and regulators, and the broader community generally.

Turning from systems, the institutional perspective is also central to the S-D logic narrative. Institutions are the formal and informal rules, schemas, practices, assumptions, and behaviours that are taken-for-granted and guide people's daily lives (Scott 2001). They provide the mechanisms that both enable and constrain the coordination of value co-creation activities, and guide the interpretation of value by embedded actors (Wieland, Koskela-Huotari, and Vargo 2016). Institutions and institutional arrangements (overlapping and interconnected sets of institutions, often called institutional logics) provide the context for resource integration within service ecosystems (Storbacka et al. 2016).

Integrating the concepts of institutional arrangements and service ecosystems into managerial thinking broadens possibilities considerably. For example, Vink et al. (2021) propose that service ecosystems can be intentionally shaped through, not only changing practices and activities, but also, deliberately modifying elements within the governing institutional arrangements. Actors typically reproduce incumbent institutional arrangements through their day-to-day routinised activities (Greenwood et al. 2008). However, through reflexivity (the ability to question incumbent arrangements) (Suddaby, Viale, and Gendron 2016) actors become aware of institutional multiplicity and conflicts, and can begin to influence or change the physical enactments and artefacts that are the manifestations of institutional arrangements. To do this, actors can

engage in institutional work – those deliberate actions they undertake to make, break, or maintain institutions (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006, 219) view ‘institutional work as intelligent, situated institutional action’ taken by individual actors or collectives to change institutional structures. Through time, changes continuously unfold as actors engage in institutional work, incumbent institutional arrangements are innovated, and new types or ways of doing things become institutionalised (Koskela-Huotari et al. 2016).

While there is no one definitive list or typology of institutional work (Hwang and Colyvas 2011) the construct nevertheless provides an overarching conceptual framework to understand the types of actions that can be undertaken to reshape the status quo. Sigala (2016) argues that social entrepreneurs should cultivate the ability to influence and shape not only their own but also other actors’ unique sense-making processes and cognitive frameworks. By doing so, they can encourage the adoption of social behaviours and practices, which can ultimately become institutionalised as common and accepted market practices.

An institutional perspective has become popular in the developing market-shaping literature (Baker, Storbacka, and Brodie 2019; Flaig, Kindström, and Ottosson 2021; Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019). Market-shaping holds promise for social entrepreneurs wanting to create markets that deliver improved social or environmental outcomes. Markets can be defined as ‘complex adaptive socio-technical-material systems, consisting of institutions, actors, practices, and discourses that organise particular economised exchanges’ (Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019, 252). Such a (eco)systemic definition enables a broad set of theoretical lenses to be utilised in studying the market-shaping phenomenon (Nenonen and Storbacka 2021). For example, in SE literature, Kullak et al. (2022) investigate the institutional work undertaken to shape a market for SE in Ghana. Initial market coordination mechanisms were established by foreign NGOs through their lobbying and advocating work. Later, widespread acceptance and adoption of SE became institutionalised by the bottom-up work undertaken by entrepreneurs themselves (e.g. framing and learning work), and top-down work of a local social entrepreneurial platform (e.g. creating and diffusing knowledge, embedding and routinising work).

Turning back to our illustrative example, *Moving Feast*, STREAT and Good Cycles established the ‘Purpose Precinct’, a one-stop shop at a major city market that showcases the work of social enterprises in Victoria and Australia, supported by the Social Enterprise Network of Victoria (SENVIC), and funded by the Victorian Government Social Enterprise Strategy 2021–25 and the Melbourne City Revitalisation Fund (Goodwin and Scott 2023). These instances of leveraging official mechanisms are a type of institutional work, called ‘political work’ (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006), and enabled the collective to substantially reshape guiding institutional arrangements.

Discussion and research agenda¹

Building on the above review, this study proposes a set of key future research avenues to enhance the theoretical insights generated in SE, by drawing on four key areas related to S-D logic: service ecosystems, institutions and institutional arrangements,

emergence and emergent properties, and actor engagement. In so doing, we hope to encourage fresh thinking related to the inherent challenges and paradoxical tensions of dual mission logics (e.g. Smith, Gonin, and Besharov 2013), the emerging focus on collective SE (e.g. Montgomery, Dacin, and Dacin 2012; Spear 2019), and the growing micro-foundations movement in organisational research. A summary of the key research foci, and some illustrative research questions are presented in Table 1.

Actors and resource integration in service ecosystems

Emerging SE ecosystem research, exploring components, actor roles, types, and support for SE development (Diaz Gonzalez and Dentchev 2021; Kabbaj et al. 2016; Manjon, Merino, and Cairns 2024; Roundy 2017), highlights the centrality of entrepreneurial ecosystems and collaboration in collective value creation. With the evolution and maturation of networks and actors within a SE ecosystem, there is an increasing need for coordinating resources. Intermediaries, taking on various roles such as enabler, mediator, and aggregator, have different impacts on the development of the SE ecosystem (De Bruin et al. 2023). However, the mechanisms involved in this value-creation process remain under-researched (Manjon, Merino, and Cairns 2024).

The emergent nature of value means involved actors are affected differently over time in terms of their roles, their perception of value, and their level of participation and engagement (Ekman, Raggio, and Thompson 2016). Role multiplicity and varying levels of engagement create complexities as they may shift over time due to various reasons such as social entrepreneurial project status, the nature of social needs, and partners' resource availability. Because of the variety of roles played by actors simultaneously and distinctively, actors may experience value co-creation processes and outcomes differently through relationships such as dyads, triads, and networks (Ekman, Raggio, and Thompson 2016). Therefore, an opportunity remains for future research to explore *deeply why and how actor roles and identities shift over time in different contexts, and how these shifts affect and inform value co-creation processes and outcomes.*

Further, actors engaging in a multi-actor rather than dyadic environment need a broader state of awareness and readiness to act as effective resource integrators and to deal with role multiplicity (Danatzis, Karpen, and Kleinaltenkamp 2022). Actor readiness from a SE perspective will be unique. For example, some literature argues that social entrepreneurs' perception of social venture creation is driven by specific emotional and cognitive attitudes (Germak and Robinson 2014), and motivations are associated with ideological goals and compassion (Stirzaker et al. 2021). However, what might be the nature of engagement dispositions in other actors beyond the entrepreneurs? Therefore, based on Danatzis, Karpen, and Kleinaltenkamp (2022) conceptualisation of 'actor ecosystem readiness', future research may explore *the relationship between cognitive, emotional, interactional, and motivational readiness of social entrepreneurs, social enterprise managers, policymakers and collaborators, and their level of participation in resource integration.*

As resources are embedded in broader social structures, access is often gained through social relationships with others (Laud et al. 2015; Portes and Sensenbrenner

Table 1. Summary of key focus areas and illustrative research questions.

Key focus areas	Broader research questions	Specific illustrative research questions
Actors and resource integration in service ecosystems	What is the role of multiple 'generic' actors engaging in resource integration as opposed to dyads of firms/customers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why and how do actor roles and identities shift over time in different contexts? b. How do these shifts affect value co-creation processes and outcomes?
	How are resources integrated in the social entrepreneurial value co-creation context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is the relationship between cognitive, emotional, interactional, and motivational readiness of social entrepreneurs, social enterprise managers, policymakers and collaborators, and their level of participation in resource integration? b. What is the nature of social embeddedness and its effects on resource integration processes in SE? c. How does embeddedness affect resource integration activities and availability across multiple actor groups? d. How can resource flows be generated, sustained, and distributed in service ecosystems? e. How might structural, relational, and cultural embeddedness of actors in service ecosystems constrict, negate, or minimise value co-creation in SE? f. What resources (i.e. operant and/or operand) are integrated? g. What are the roles and functions of different types of resources? h. What and how does service-for-service exchange unfold in SE? i. What is the role of complementarity and mutual benefit across and between diverse actors? j. What extent can social entrepreneurial organisations leverage broader constellations of actors to reduce resource interdependencies and/or increase resource density? k. What are the roles of power and influence in equitable value co-creation processes and resource integration activities (exchange and distribution) in social entrepreneurial service ecosystems?
Role of institutional arrangements and institutional work	What is the role of institutional arrangements in social entrepreneurship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are the interdependencies between institutional arrangements and SE activity? b. What is the degree of isomorphism between social enterprises/entrepreneurs, and how might isomorphic pressures be resisted? c. What is the nature of conflicting institutional arrangements and their impact on value co-creation processes?
	What institutional arrangements can be influenced and how?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do actors in social entrepreneurial ecosystems (e.g. entrepreneurs, managers, funders, policymakers, etc.) experience and respond to institutional complexities? b. What, how and why is institutional work undertaken to influence institutional arrangements? c. What is the role of reflexivity and awareness of institutional arrangements when undertaking institutional work? d. What actors within broader service ecosystems undertake work and to what end? e. What is the nature of actor collaboration in carrying out institutional work, and what is the timing of impactful institutional work?

(continued)

Table 1. Continued.

Key focus areas	Broader research questions	Specific illustrative research questions
Emergence and emergent properties		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> f. What is the focus of institutional work and what 'level(s)' does it target or emerge from? g. How do different types of institutional work impact different actors? h. How do interpretive flexibility, coordinated arrangements, and dynamic relationships effectively manage tensions, acting as boundary objects in institutional work thereby facilitating resource integration and value co-creation processes?
	What are the interdependencies between micro-level practices and macro-level properties in nested social entrepreneurial service ecosystems?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What are the paths and approaches to favourable emergent properties? b. What are the relationships and actors that achieve favourable emergent properties? c. What and how do interdependencies between actors operating at different levels influence their mixed (and sometimes competing) goals and values? d. What positive and/or negative feedback loops stabilise or drive transformation of social entrepreneurial service ecosystems?
	What is the role of emergence and emergent properties in social entrepreneurship value co-creation processes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do generic actors (e.g. social enterprises, policymakers, funders) identify and exploit opportunities for commercial and/or social value (co)creation in actor-to-actor networks? b. What is the balance or mix between discovered or exploited approaches when generating desirable emergent properties? c. How might these approaches be bridged by adopting a market-shaping approach, where social, environmental, and market outcomes are conceptualised as emergent properties?
Actor engagement and engagement platforms	How do emergent properties, shared norms, and governance models emerge from, and collectively shape and influence, collaboration dynamics within actor-to-actor contexts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is the nature and role of alliances and collectives when conceptualised as emergent properties, and what constitutive processes are involved in alliance creation? b. How do individual intentions and values manifest as shared norms and meanings, and how might these be codified or expressed? c. What (formal and informal) governance models (and other similar guiding institutional arrangements) are evident in an actor-to-actor context? d. How is actor-to-actor learning, knowledge, and capabilities – as emergent properties – developed, shaped, and crafted through service-for-service exchange in value co-creation processes?
	What is the role of actor engagement in the social entrepreneurial context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dispositions are evident in social entrepreneurs/ social entrepreneurial organisations and how do these dispositions affect resource integration motivations and activities? b. How can engagement by online, offline, and phygital social entrepreneurial platforms be effectively organised, facilitated, managed, and optimised? c. How do managerial practice and passion, and organisational culture, of a focal social enterprise support organising for actor engagement?
	How can social enterprises organise actor engagement in a value co-creation context?	

1993). The extent to which an entrepreneur is socially embedded, and their congruence with governing institutional arrangements, will affect their ability to access resources (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Social embeddedness is defined as ‘the nature, depth, and extent of an individual’s ties into the environment’ (Jack and Anderson 2002, 468). In SE research, embeddedness has been studied widely (Hlady-Rispal and Servantie 2018; Smith and Stevens 2010), including how institutional embeddedness shapes and is shaped by social entrepreneurs, enterprises, and social innovation processes (e.g. Chatzichristos and Nagopoulos 2020; Kummitha 2017; Nowak and Raffaelli 2022), its influence on opportunities, constraints, and resources (Grohs, Schneiders, and Heinze 2017; Kokko 2018; Manjon, Merino, and Cairns 2024; McKeever, Anderson, and Jack 2014), and how it impacts the emergence of social entrepreneurial organisations (Seelos et al. 2011) and scaling of social value (Smith and Stevens 2010). Thus, social embeddedness has a significant impact on the scope and type of resource integration processes that might unfold in a service ecosystem.

To acquire and accumulate needed resources (e.g. knowledge), social enterprise managers can engage in co-design through participatory processes such as community engagement (e.g. Echaubard et al. 2020) and social engagement (Lin et al. 2019). In these contexts, social entrepreneurs and managers may especially leverage relational social capital (i.e. relational embeddedness) and bridging social capital (i.e. outward-looking relationships) to connect with people with different social identities. In so doing, access can be gained to new information and resources, e.g. alternative socio-demographic or cultural knowledge (Poortinga 2012). Hence, an actor’s access, mobilisation, internalisation, transformation, and application of resources depend on their relational, structural, and cultural embeddedness in the service ecosystem (Laud et al. 2015). The broader implications of this assertion have been confirmed by mainstream entrepreneurship and management research based on social capital theory where they find that individual social capital affects resource acquisition to develop collaborations (Hitt et al. 2011; Wright and Hitt 2017), entrepreneurial ventures (Jack and Anderson 2002), and social enterprise models (Hatak, Lang, and Roessl 2016). Therefore, *what is the nature of social embeddedness and its effects on resource integration processes within service ecosystems in SE; how does embeddedness affect resource integration, value cocreation processes, and resource availability across multiple actor groups; and how can resource flows be generated, sustained, and distributed within service ecosystems?*

The modest amount of SE research that adopts the value co-creation concept tends towards studying positive aspects, e.g. enablers of value co-creation rather than inhibitors. Indeed, social embeddedness may act as a constraint or become a liability (Jack and Anderson 2002). For example, the unexpected exit of a network partner from the service ecosystem may create a paralysing effect due to actor (inter)dependence (Duysters and Lemmens 2003). Future studies might investigate *how structural, relational, and cultural embeddedness of actors in service ecosystems constrict, negate, or minimise value co-creation processes.*

SE research about value co-creation acknowledges the integration of both operant (intangible) and operand (tangible) resources, and the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration. Yet, there is a paucity of studies that deeply engage with analysing the

nature of resources, which goes beyond a dyadic perspective. Babu et al. (2020) find that operant resources (e.g. skills, knowledge, and competencies) are more shared among stakeholders than operand resources. However, further work is needed from a relational perspective, as resource integration is not limited to dyadic interactions. Instead, constellations of actors engage in resource integration for mutual benefit (Alexander, Jaakkola, and Hollebeek 2018). Thus, future research needs to examine *what resources (i.e. operant and operand) are integrated and, what are the roles and functions of these types of resources; what and how service-for-service exchange unfolds in SE; what is the role of complementarity and mutual benefit across and between diverse actors; and the nature and role of digital resources in social entrepreneurial activity?*

SE literature finds that collaboration between organisations is inspired by capitalising on social opportunities, gaining financial and operational efficiency (Babu et al. 2020; Barraket and Loosemore 2018), acquiring legitimacy, and accessing resources and capabilities to drive social missions (Kullak, Baker, and Woratschek 2021; Ostertag, Hahn, and Ince 2021). Although actors integrate resources for mutual benefit (Vargo and Lusch 2016), inequitable exchanges may lead to differences in power, authority, and capabilities (Joy, Poonamallee, and Scillitoe 2021). Organisational interdependence and unpredictable alliance partners may lead to situations where survival is threatened (Pfeffer 1987, 26–27). Mainstream research finds that organisations develop strategies like increasing scale of production, diversifying, and developing links to others to avoid such dependencies (Hillman, Withers, and Collins 2009). Given resources and social mission operate as normative bases of various organisational choices in SE (Joy, Poonamallee, and Scillitoe 2021), there are opportunities to explore strategies for reducing interdependencies. Thus, *to what extent can social entrepreneurial organisations leverage broader constellations of actors to reduce resource interdependencies; and what are the roles of power and influence in equitable exchange and distribution in social entrepreneurial service ecosystems?*

Role of institutional arrangements and institutional work

SE researchers have frequently drawn on ‘new’ institutional perspectives (Barraket and Loosemore 2018), e.g. institutional logics (Zhao and Lounsbury 2016). Discussions explore social venture behaviours, legitimacy and isomorphic processes (Montgomery, Dacin, and Dacin 2012; Nicholls 2010), embeddedness effects (Chatzichristos and Nagopoulos 2020), institutional complexity (Cherrier, Goswami, and Ray 2018), social mission hybridity (Battilana and Lee 2014), and the impact of market logics on hybrid enterprises (Kosmynin 2022). Moreover, social entrepreneurs as institutional entrepreneurs and ventures shaping institutions have been studied (Chatzichristos and Nagopoulos 2021). Indeed, emerging research suggests an interrelatedness between institutions and social entrepreneurial agency (e.g. Littlewood and Holt 2018; Stephan, Uhlaner, and Stride 2015), practices (e.g. Hota, Bhatt, and Qureshi 2023; Ko and Liu 2021), and initiatives (e.g. Bhatt, Qureshi, and Riaz 2019; Chandra 2017; Urbano, Toledano, and Soriano 2010). Social entrepreneurs rely on complex webs of stakeholders (e.g. government and venture capitalists) who belong to distinct institutional spheres with contrasting goals, norms, values, and schemas (Meyer and Rowan 1977;

Smith, Gonin, and Besharov 2013). Institutional complexities arise in these situations (Kodeih and Greenwood 2014; Scott 2008), and actors might respond based on identity, role or position (Greenwood et al. 2011).

Yet, there is a need for further attention to the actions and interactions of individuals and organisations when responding to complexities (Smets and Jarzabkowski 2013). In SE, isomorphic pressures may engender similarity in activities as entrepreneurs attempt to achieve institutional legitimacy (Nicholls 2006; Sud, Vansandt, and Baugous 2009). Yet, Nicholls (2006) argues social entrepreneurs focus on systemic change that disregards institutional norms and defy isomorphic pressures by reconfiguring incumbent value creation boundaries (e.g. public/private, and social/economic). Hence, future research might further explore *the interdependence of institutional arrangements and SE activity; the degree of isomorphism and how isomorphic pressures might be resisted; and how actors in social entrepreneurial service ecosystems (e.g. entrepreneurs, managers, funders, policymakers, etc.) experience and respond to institutional complexities.*

Social entrepreneurs and other actors (e.g. policymakers and funders) might enact institutional work in an effort to drive systemic change, reconcile incompatible logics (Pache and Santos 2013) and reconfigure institutional infrastructure (Hinings, Logue, and Zietsma 2017; Nicholls 2006). For SE research, the concepts of service ecosystem design (Fehrer, Kemper, and Baker 2024; Vink et al. 2021) and market-shaping (Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019) hold particular promise. Indeed, social entrepreneurial activity is shaped by, and shapes, an entrepreneurial ecosystem (Warnecke and Balzac-Arroyo 2023; Lyons and Roundy 2023). Foci of institutional work can be numerous, e.g. shaping formal rules, expectations, norms, assumptions, and discourses (Kullak et al. 2022). Therefore, future research should examine *how and why institutional work is undertaken to influence institutional arrangements; the role of reflexivity and awareness of institutional arrangements when undertaking institutional work; which actors within broader service ecosystems undertake work and to what ends; what is the focus of institutional work and what 'level(s)' does it target and/or emerge from; how different types of institutional work impact different actors; and how design principles can be integrated into collective action towards reshaping broader systemic realities, including markets for SE.*

As no service ecosystem ever exists in stasis, institutional work undertaken by actors (e.g. social entrepreneurs, organisations, policymakers) might never eliminate conflicting institutional arrangements (Koskela-Huotari and Vargo 2016). Nevertheless, boundary objects (e.g. shared and agreed norms, approaches, models or frameworks) that span domains can facilitate reconciliation (Sajtos, Kleinaltenkamp, and Harrison 2018). Boundary objects feature interpretative flexibility and can enable collaboration through establishing common ground. They 'allow different groups to work together without consensus' (Star 2010) by facilitating a flow of information and knowledge (Carlile 2004). This creates an opportunity to explore *how boundary objects manage tensions within dynamic relationships and enable institutional work through interpretative flexibility and coordinated arrangements.*

Role of emergence and emergent properties

Collaborative efforts of actors in a service ecosystem enable the emergence of ‘inter-organisational networks, structures of domination, and the production and reproduction of institutional rules and resources’ (Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy 2000, 38). Although nascent, SE research is beginning to allude to emergent properties that can manifest from SE activity (Wurth, Stam, and Spigel 2022), employment opportunities and pathways to employment (e.g. Barraket and Loosemore 2018), socio-ethical value for vulnerable and marginalised communities (e.g. Lubberink et al. 2019), and social inclusion (Lin et al. 2019). Discussions on scaling social innovation also consider emergence, e.g. by framing SE opportunity as an emergent property that emerges from interactions at different levels (e.g. Hu et al. 2020; Westley and Antadze 2010), while Goldstein, Hazy, and Silberstang (2008) argue that collective learning is a nonlinear, multi-level emergent property.

This multi-level view of emergence is worthy of even further exploration. Emergent properties manifest at different levels, such as a social community of practice that enables networking opportunities, which then ‘bubbles up’ and influences policy development (Ratten 2022). Importantly, such emergent properties might be driven from actors at different levels within the service ecosystem, e.g. through micro-level social entrepreneurial/enterprise activity, meso-level incubators or accelerators, or macro-level government ministries. Hence, future research can explore *the paths and approaches to favourable emergent properties, the relationships and actors that achieved them; the interdependence of actors operating at different levels and their mixed goals and values; and the positive and negative feedback loops that stabilise or further transform service ecosystems*. Such research necessarily presupposes the integration of a systemic perspective and may require longitudinal or historical approaches.

Mainstream entrepreneurship research debates opportunity identification: opportunity discovery (e.g. Davidsson and Honig 2003) vs. opportunity enactment (Gartner, Carter, and Hills 2003). However, SE contrasts with mainstream entrepreneurship in factors like mission(s) and performance measurement (Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern 2006). While some argue an objectively existing need must exist that is independent of the social entrepreneur (Hu et al. 2020), a market-shaping approach bridges push and pull approaches (Nenonen, Storbacka, and Windahl 2019). This is reflected in extant studies that show social entrepreneurs tend to move back and forth between the recognition and exploitation phases (Lehner and Kansikas 2012). However, little attention has been given to the strategic approaches of funders or policymakers in incentivising or rewarding social value (co)creation processes. Therefore, future research can investigate *how generic actors (e.g. social enterprises, policymakers, and funders) identify and exploit opportunities for commercial and/or social value (co-)creation in actor-to-actor networks; the balance or mix between discovered or exploited approaches; and how these might be bridged by adopting a market-shaping approach*.

Alliance creation and governance may take a non-linear path, giving rise to multiple structures and governance models (Babu et al. 2020). Yet, SE research predominantly limits its focus to structural properties of alliance formation (e.g. types of partnerships and governance), and actor/partner selection (e.g. Barraket and Loosemore 2018; Ostertag, Hahn, and Ince 2021). However, given non-profit organisations typically

employ informal coordination mechanisms and fewer formal controls than business or government entities (Seibel and Anheier 1990), there may be complex issues at hand. To strengthen the conceptual underpinnings of collective action formation in SE, future research can explore *alliances and collectives as emergent properties, including the process of alliance creation; how individual intentions and values manifest as shared norms and meanings and how these are codified or expressed; and what (formal and informal) governance models (and other similar guiding institutional arrangements) are evident in an actor-to-actor context*. To this end, future researchers can build on complexity theory and collaboration theory, as the latter may not adequately explain collaborative processes or governance structures in complex domains comprising multiple diverse actors (Westley and Vredenburg 1997). In addition, juxtaposing complexity theory with effectuation theory (Sarasvathy 2001) could enrich scholarly investigations, as the latter explains entrepreneurial action in uncertain contexts, i.e. entrepreneurs and organisations co-create opportunities and value with available means and networks, within the context of affordable losses and evolving goals (Vogel 2017).

By linking partners and stakeholders with often different motives, social enterprises create inter-group learning and produce value in the form of knowledge and resources (Bull and Ridley-Duff 2019). Mainstream management literature recognises learning as an outcome of alliance creation (Power and Waddell 2004) 1989), and organisational learning literature, especially, views alliances as opportunities for co-specialisation and enhancement of the capabilities of alliance members (Hamel 1991). Although SE research highlights the importance of a learning-oriented culture (e.g. Goyal and Sergi 2015; Maizza et al. 2019; Ostertag, Hahn, and Ince 2021), rarely does a study deeply explore learning and knowledge as an outcome of value co-creation – as emergent properties. Thus, opportunities remain for future studies to discern *how actor-to-actor learning, knowledge, and capabilities – as emergent properties – are developed, shaped, and crafted through service-for-service exchange*. This research focus could encompass numerous diverse actors within the broader service ecosystem including entrepreneurs, accelerators and incubators, policymakers and regulators, and other NGOs or supporting organisations.

Actor engagement and engagement platforms

Exploring individual-level drivers for value co-creation, Lan et al. (2017) found that self-efficacy, a sense of duty to society, anticipated rewards (e.g. expectations of positive opportunities and outcomes), and learning opportunities motivate product users to be active value co-creators in a sharing economy context. While some literature regards SE as a largely agential process (Miller et al. 2012), some argue that social entrepreneurs' perception of social venture creation is driven by specific emotional and cognitive attitudes (Germak and Robinson 2014), and motivations are associated with ideological goals and compassion (Stirzaker et al. 2021). Put differently, there is a direct relationship between individuals engaging in SE and high levels of empathy and moral judgement (Tiwari, Bhat, and Tikoria 2022). However, there is little exploration beyond the assertion of engagement in opportunity identification, and

exploitation as altruism (Stirzaker et al. 2021). Therefore, building on extant research (e.g. Stirzaker et al. 2021; Vuorio, Puumalainen, and Fellnhofer 2018), this study argues that social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurial organisations' disposition to engage could feature unique combinations of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. Future research can explore *what emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dispositions are evident in social entrepreneurs/social entrepreneurial organisations and their beneficiaries and customers, supporting actors and organisations, and policymakers and other official actor groups; and how these dispositions affect resource integration motivations and activities of the different actors.*

Fehrer, Baker, and Brodie (2020) argue that focal social enterprises act as platforms for engagement by multiple resource-integrating actors within a social entrepreneurial ecosystem. Engagement platforms are 'physical or virtual touchpoints designed to provide structural support for the exchange and integration of resources, and thereby co-creation of value, between actors in a service system' (Breibach, Brodie, and Hollebeek 2014, 596). Engagement theory is powerful for understanding the drivers and manifestations of engagement amongst diverse actors. Lobo and Zapata (2022) suggest social entrepreneurs adopt a 'platform thinking' approach, where they view themselves as facilitators of change rather than the sole problem solver. Lin et al. (2019) find that resource acquisition and accumulation are built on tripartite relationships where digital platform-based alliances act as mediators between service providers and customers. Thus, organising for engagement is a crucial element to be investigated. However, the broader actor-to-actor perspective will surface further insights again, as engagement platforms enable multiple actors to engage with one another efficiently and systematically by providing the guiding institutional arrangements (Blasco-Arcas et al. 2020). However, extant literature provides a limited understanding of the effective organisation of engagement through platforms (Jonas et al. 2018).

SE research finds stakeholder engagement is critical to enable co-design of solutions through discussions with beneficiaries and communities (Echaubard et al. 2020). However, research argues there are essential practices to sustain co-creation behaviours. These include deliberate, skilful, and continuous engagement with key and emerging actors in a target community (Ma et al. 2020), and creating a learning-based ecosystem through community-level engagement that facilitates identifying, exploring, and integrating the views of different stakeholders (Goyal and Sergi 2015). While mainstream engagement research provides an understanding of the way engagement develops in complex organisational contexts (Jonas et al. 2018), SE research is largely silent on this matter. Moreover, research that explores SE ecosystem growth strategies promotes initiatives such as advocacy campaigns, and providing training and advisory assistance to other social enterprises (Islam 2020). Here, social enterprises become coordinators of scarce resources (Chell 2007) and facilitate engagement among divergent actor groups (Breibach, Brodie, and Hollebeek 2014). Further research could *investigate the organisation, facilitation, management, and optimisation of engagement by online, offline, and phygital social entrepreneurial platforms.*

To this end, future SE research can build on the three modes of organising for engagement by Blasco-Arcas et al. (2020): orchestrating engagement (i.e. bidirectional

interactions between the organiser and the client), facilitating engagement (i.e. facilitation activities for engaged actors to meet and learn other actors), and stimulating engagement (i.e. active work as a matchmaker). It is also important to study the drivers of actor engagement organisation by a focal social enterprise. Barraket and Loosemore (2018), find that more than the organisational policies related to social mission, experienced and passionate managers in social enterprises drive cross-sector collaborations. Defined as the extent of cognitive resources spent in implementing a firm's strategy (Gardner et al. 1989), managerial passion may complement alliance resources to produce higher performance (Adomako, Quartey, and Narteh 2016). Particularly, mainstream entrepreneurship literature argues that in uncertain and resource-constrained contexts (Baron and Tang 2011), the entrepreneurial passion of a manager may become a powerful driver of entrepreneurial action (Adomako, Quartey, and Narteh 2016; Cardon et al. 2013; Chen, Yao, and Kotha 2009). Moreover, Goyal and Sergi (2015) and Ostertag, Hahn, and Ince (2021) find that learning-oriented culture is an essential factor for value co-creation to be successful. Hence, the same concept of organising for engagement can be extended across other actor groups embedded within social entrepreneurial ecosystems, such as university collaborators, or policymakers. Therefore, future research may explore *how managerial passion and organisational culture of a focal social enterprise, or other supporting or involved actor groups, enable organising for actor engagement*. Such investigations will make important managerial implications for fostering actor engagement across, within, and between actors in service ecosystems.

Conclusion

Ambiguity and uncertainty in wicked problems and a volatile operating environment resulting from policy interventions, technological development, and changing institutional contexts, provide a rapidly evolving backdrop to SE. Social entrepreneurs are heavily dependent on multiple diverse actors for success. These complexities call for a systemic view of SE. We followed a theory adaptation approach, by leveraging S-D logic to revise extant knowledge in SE. In so doing, this paper provides future research avenues that recognise complexities in SE and enriches current understanding of social value (co-)creation with a deeper theoretical elaboration manifesting from S-D logic's holistic view. Specifically, we offer future research directions along four conceptual vectors: service ecosystems, institutional arrangements, emergence, and actor engagement.

We have identified the importance of taking multi-level views of value co-creation processes and collaboration. We build on extant studies that adopt institutional perspectives (e.g. Storbacka et al. 2016; Vargo and Lusch 2016), to encourage an understanding of how actors reconcile institutional demands and conflicting logics. With only a few exceptions (e.g. Hervieux and Voltan 2019; Montgomery, Dacin, and Dacin 2012), little SE research has drawn on systems perspectives. In response, we suggest future studies explore how regulatory frameworks, social or environmental outcomes, alliances, widespread belief systems, and markets might be viewed as emergent properties and the role of upward and downward causality in multi-level service

ecosystems. Put differently, this perspective offers opportunities for understanding how social entrepreneurs and enterprises, typically in collaboration with others, (re)shape such outcomes. While collaboration has been a focus of SE research (e.g. Austin and Seitanidi 2012; Barraket and Loosemore 2018), scholars could explore how ecosystem actors support each other with interdependent and complementary resources, the nature of those resources, and the importance of leveraging constellations of supporting actors to increase resource density. The systemic and institutional views advocated in this study offer a nuanced understanding of (social) value creation, interdependence, interaction, collaboration, and dynamism.

Note

1. In proposing the research agenda, this study acknowledges that social entrepreneurship is not limited to social enterprises but to many other forms of organisations and initiatives. Yet, we refer to social enterprises along with social entrepreneurship since social enterprises are recognised as one of the major vehicles of carrying social entrepreneurial initiatives and social innovations in society and the extant literature considers social enterprises ‘as the expression of a new entrepreneurship’ (Defourny 2001, 13), a new form of social entrepreneurship and innovation going beyond the traditional non-profit sector and the social economy (Borzaga and Defourny 2001).

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