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Shifting Arrays of a Kaleidoscope: The Orchestration of Relational Value Cocreation in Service Systems

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Synopsis

Set within the empirical context of family caregiving, this research contributes to the knowledge of the interdependencies among multiple actors and value outcomes by employing a relational perspective. The findings reveal how interdependent actors orchestrate value cocreation in service systems. Specifically, the study identifies three multi-actor orchestration mechanisms—assembling, performing, and brokering—through which non-referent actors coordinate value cocreation on behalf of referent or dependent actors. In employing the metaphor of the kaleidoscope to emphasize system dynamism, our findings deepen understanding of how actor orchestration enhances and balances positive and negative well-being outcomes in service systems. In terms of impact, this study will help service practitioners facilitate orchestration and optimize value for all.

Introduction and Background

Globally, in line with demographic, economic, and sociocultural changes and the rise in aging populations, the number of family caregivers has grown significantly (Verbakel 2018), which necessitates increased support to maintain and sustain their physical, psychological, and emotional well-being. As many countries struggle with the economic and social challenges of providing aging or vulnerable individuals with access to resources in social care and public and private health-care systems (Colombo et al. 2011), family members often need to coordinate and balance between the absence and presence of resources, assembling alternative and complementary resources where possible.

Despite the ongoing interest and advancements in value cocreation (e.g., McColl-Kennedy et al. 2012; Vargo and Lusch 2016), there is much to learn about the interdependent nature of value cocreation and its impact on non-referent and referent beneficiaries, as their interdependencies are constituted in self-adjusting systems. Much value research tends to portray cocreation as dyadic, reciprocal, and often exchange-based (Ballantyne and Varey 2006; Fitzpatrick et al. 2015; Grönroos and Voima 2013) and little is known about the value outcomes for non-referent beneficiaries involved in complex value cocreation that may occur within or beyond market exchanges. These unaddressed issues support calls from the global service community for deeper scrutiny of how multiple actors coordinate value cocreation and how they impact value (Ostrom et al. 2015) and therefore motivate our research.

Issues and Questions Considered

Contemporary perspectives on value cocreation increasingly embrace the multifaceted and complex nature of value cocreation in service systems (Lusch and Vargo 2011; Meynhardt, Chandler, and Strathoff 2016). Increasingly, value cocreation is considered to extend beyond interactions among collaborating actors, and it is presented as a central coordinating mechanism in dynamic service ecosystems (e.g. Ferguson, Paulin, and Bergeron 2010). However, since service exchanges are described as reciprocal (Chandler and Vargo 2011), there appears to be a tacit assumption that referent beneficiaries are agentic, independent, and capable of actively engaging with other actors to access and integrate resources and cocreate value.

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Further investigation is therefore required to encompass the relationality among multiple market and/or social actors and acknowledge a greater degree of interdependence among actors in service systems.

In this study, we extend the concept of orchestration (Breibach, Antons, and Salge 2016) to customer-centric non-referent beneficiaries (i.e., family caregivers) in human-centered, multi-actor social care service systems. Following Epp and Velagaleti (2014, p. 912), we adopt a relational perspective (e.g. Kelleher et al. 2019) in characterizing family caregiving. Specifically, we seek to recognize the dynamic, informal, and often unpaid nature of family cocreation (caregiving) that occurs as family members adapt and respond to dependent relatives' needs. Adopting a revised relational perspective of value cocreation, we theoretically and empirically examine the relations among multiple interdependent actors in service systems, with particular attention given to how these relations impact the coordination of value cocreation.

Methodology

Our empirical study followed a relational engagement approach (Davis and Ozanne 2019) and included both academic and non-academic stakeholders to increase its societal impact. The study involved three caregiver associations (two national and one regional) and focused on understanding the nature, experience, and impact of family caregiving. Data was collected through loosely structured in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 22 caregivers (12 women and 10 men) who cared for parents, spouses and adult children suffering from stroke, Alzheimer's disease, cancer, and other physical and psychological illnesses. Caring took place in the home and often continued when the dependent relative entered a residential care setting. The wide range of caring contexts enabled a comparison of a rich variety of caregiving practices and experiences (Epp and Velagaleti 2014). The data analysis, which followed Spiggle's (1994) qualitative interpretation guidelines, explored how families coordinated and experienced the provision of care for dependent relatives.

Outcomes and Findings

Our findings, which are presented in Figure 1 provide important insights into the dynamics of value cocreation among multiple actors and the multifaceted impact of these dynamics on value in service systems. We identify three mechanisms involved in orchestration: assembling, performing, and brokering and argue that orchestration is a primary means by which relational value is cocreated. We present relational value as interdependent actors' experiences of negative and positive wellbeing in service systems, comprising emotional (gain-loss), social (connection-isolation), physical (strength-deterioration), and financial (enrichment-impoverishment) wellbeing.

Our work contributes theoretically and practically to service research in three important ways. First, we focus beyond process- and outcome-based dyadic perspectives of value cocreation to explicate how multiple actors orchestrate value cocreation in service systems. Second, we differentiate and delineate three orchestration mechanisms which reveal how actors create, access, mobilize, and share resources within service systems. Thus, we answer the call for more empirical research on actor resource integration (Edvardsson et al. 2014). Third, we characterize additional forms of relational value as multiform, interactive and often contested experiences of negative and positive value outcomes that emerge among interdependent actors.

Our study has important implications for service providers, public policy makers, and state-level actors charged with optimizing coproduction in health-care systems. Our findings show how those involved in orchestration for vulnerable or dependent referent actors are central for understanding value cocreation in service delivery and service systems. Recognition of the interrelations among different orchestration mechanisms and relational value outcomes may decrease the negative impact of orchestration for actors, and enhance resource access and allocation and improve value outcomes in the overall service system (Vargo and Lusch 2016). Our findings extend beyond health and social care to a broad range of complex service systems, including education, consultation, user-driven and open innovation, which necessitate sustained optimization of inter-actor resources and value cocreation.

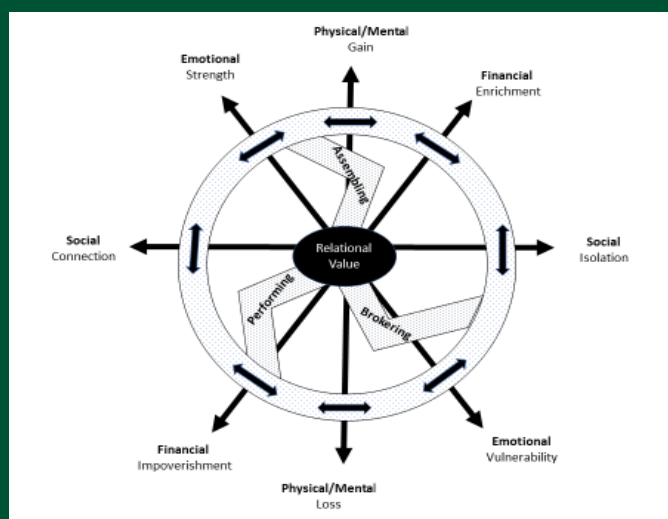


Figure 1:

Orchestration of relational value cocreation in service systems

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