

Value co-creation through the lens of cultural-historical activity theory

Abstract

This paper contrasts cultural-historical activity theory with our current approaches to value co-creation in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the evolving roles and processes that underpin value co-creating interactions. Through the lens of cultural-historical activity theory, value co-creation consists of mediated relations between individuals, communities and their objects of transformation. Moreover, the view of interacting activity systems, mediated action and development implies tying operations while coordinating multiple perspectives of value. Contrasting with our current understandings of stable and neutral notions of value, and conflict-free processes of co-creation, the cultural-historical activity theory perspective provides new avenues to explore value interests, conflict and change management.

Keywords: value co-creation, cultural-historical activity theory, conflict, change, knotworking

Introduction

Contemporary studies have brought to the fore new considerations on value and on how suppliers and customers engage and perform in market interactions. In this novel understanding, suppliers and customers undertake new roles and relations. Suppliers are value facilitators (Grönroos, 2008). This means that suppliers support value creation by the customers (Grönroos, 2011). In turn, customers experience value in their own terms (Ramaswamy, 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003). Facilitating and experiencing value takes place in the context of service systems (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Vargo, 2009; Vargo et al., 2008) and resource integration (Vargo and Lusch, 2011). Service systems concern a network of players interconnecting people and technology through sharing information and methods (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008). In

resource integration, these service-based relationships originate the co-production of value through mutual influence and reciprocal support (Grönroos, 2011; 2008; Vargo and Akaka, 2009).

The integration of resources through service systems is also a political activity. Market interactions involve different mental models and diverging perspectives (Wang, Arnett, and Hou, 2016). However, contemporary studies approach value co-creation as collaborative endeavours (e.g. Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Ordanini and Pasini, 2008). Thus far, the main focus of value co-creation theory is on mutual collaboration and suppliers' support for facilitating customers' value creating activities (FitzPatrick et al., 2015), whilst explanations of how to achieve co-operation within a host of divergent perspectives of value has been underexplored. Moreover, current value co-creation approaches sustain traditional views of transformation based on temporary groups as related to time-bounded task and well defined goals (e.g. Frow and Payne, 2008; Payne et al., 2008). The majority of value co-creation studies assume value as a stable and neutral concept, wherein co-creating processes and interactions are conflict-free and unproblematically determined by management.

There is the need to explore an integrated framework considering the fluid and changing nature of value within a web of diverse interests. In the following, I will present the contemporary models of value co-creation and discuss cultural-historical activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 1999a; 2010) as a framework that explores the contradictory nature of collective activity. I will then contrast cultural-historical activity theory with our current approaches to value co-creation in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of: (a) the delineation of the value idea within complex interactions and diverging interests; (b) the origin of changing movements for co-creating value; (c) the evolving roles and processes that underpin value co-creating interactions; and (d) the

managerial facet of the value co-creation endeavour. Finally, I will also address the relevant implications for research and practice.

Background

Value co-creation frameworks

In the tradition of established value co-creation frameworks, customers are fundamentally active resources for value creation (i.e. operant resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2004)). The desired behaviours consist in customer engagement, pro-activity, creativity and innovativeness (Grönroos, 2011; Nambisan and Baron, 2009; Sawhney, Verona, and Prandelli, 2005). Thus, these models translate the search for transforming customers into active participants for the joint creation and production of value.

Below, I provide a general idea of these frameworks by considering the extent to which they draw on: a) integrating resources and, as a result, enhancing customers' processes (Gummesson and Mele, 2010); b) creating platforms for customer engagement and experiencing value co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004); c) designing value co-creating encounters (Payne et al., 2008). Overall, I found that these frameworks represent key advancements related to matching and enhancing processes, eliciting customer participation and aligning mutual capabilities. However, they pay little attention to the emergence of difficulties and to the contradictory value standpoints that may permeate interactions.

a. Integrating resources

The model of managing value co-creation through resource integration relies on many-to-many marketing principles (i.e. Gummesson, 2006). In this sense, successful resource integration requires internal configuration of processes and activities, as well as external

configuration throughout multiple interactions (Gummesson and Mele, 2010). Therefore, value functions as an orientation for each participant to integrate relevant resources:

“The value creation potential of an actor does not only arise from its core competences and distinctive resources, but also from its capability to match, to position itself in a network and to contribute to its success and evolution”

(Gummesson and Mele, 2010, p. 194)

Interactions for co-creating value comprise matching resources, activities and processes amongst suppliers, customers and other participants. These performances of interacting and integrating activities involve learning, resource transfer and dialogue. A key learning effort is to integrate and transform the multiple resources of the network into effective processes (i.e. Gummesson and Mele, 2010). Thus, learning to co-create value is learning how to perform interactions for providing and receiving resources (Paulin and Ferguson, 2010).

b. Creating engagement platforms

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) name dialogue, access, risk-benefit and transparency (DART model) as the fundamental aspects of co-creating interactions. Dialogue, access and transparency are the primary aspects of interactions towards value co-creation that, once performed, can help reduce risk for the customer. In order to reduce risk, the suppliers need to consider the customers' perceptions for decision making and taking and, thus, focus on the construction/ facilitation of the customer experience.

The scope of value co-creation is about directing customers' feelings and thoughts. This framework addresses the identification, satisfaction and commitment of participants within the market interactions. Thus, engaging the customers is a central feature and key for this type of commitment is the development of engagement platforms by the

supplier (i.e. Ramaswamy, 2008). Engagement platforms are tools and systems supporting ongoing dialogue between supplier and stakeholders. They are expected to prompt participative ways of creating value by influencing perceptions and enabling active participation of the customers. Nonetheless, the DART framework does not explore the consequences of empowered customers in relation to the suppliers' need of managerial control of market interactions.

c. Designing encounters

The marketing management framework developed by Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) - here referred to as MEP ("Managing the Encounter Process") - depicts supplier-customer interactions as mutual exchange connections. The core idea of MEP is that a number of evolving transactions take place at each point of the interactive encounter. MEP emphasises the process. In the MEP framework, market interactions constitute a series of opportunities for the supplier to facilitate value co-creation.

As MEP focuses on facilitating these encounters, key activities aim at identifying and designing the opportunities for providing co-creating experiences to the customers. This proposition refers to formatting activities translated into the specification of small operations that supplier-customer interactions consist of (Vargo and Lusch 2006, p. 53). The design of these "procedures, tasks, mechanisms, activities and interactions" (Payne et al., 2008, p. 85) is directed at influencing customers' cognitive and emotional processes in the terms thinking, feeling and doing value co-creation.

Activity theory

Activity theory primarily stems from research aimed at developing a psychological theory based on Marxist thought (Bedny and Karwowski, 2004, Blackler, 1993).

Following Marxist tradition, activity theory advances the view of work in terms of its

purposive and social character (Bedny et al., 2000). The main explanation refers to the influence of work and material relations on behaviour.

Vygotsky (1978) developed foundational explorations of the socio-cultural nature of mental operations. Regarding language as primary sign system, Vygotsky advanced the relevance of language as a cultural tool. For Vygotsky the development of the mind requires situated relations of people with their tools through language:

‘[...] internal development processes [...] are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with peers.’ (p. 90)

Knowledge therefore develops by acquisition of culture and stems from internalisation of signs, which is a historical and contextual process as it occurs through interactive work (Roth and Lee, 2007).

Through the work of Leont’ev (1978), cultural-historical activity theory initiated an exploration of the constitution of activity in terms of actions and operations. Leont’ev (1978) examines the dynamic relations of activity, action and operation with goals and motives. Activity is therefore goal-directed and motives are underpinning goals. The activity as the unit of analysis encompasses social, cultural and historical dimensions as origins of consciousness and, consequently, of interpretations people form about an activity (Blackler et al., 2000).

Engeström (1987; 2000a; 2000b) expands the unit of analysis from activity to mediated activity systems. Activity systems, in his view consist of mediated relations between individuals, communities and their objects of transformation (see inner triangle of figure 1). In activity systems, concepts mediate individual activities and the object of transformation. Rules mediate the relation of individuals and the wider community

engaged in the specific activity. Division of labour is the mediator between community and the object of activity.

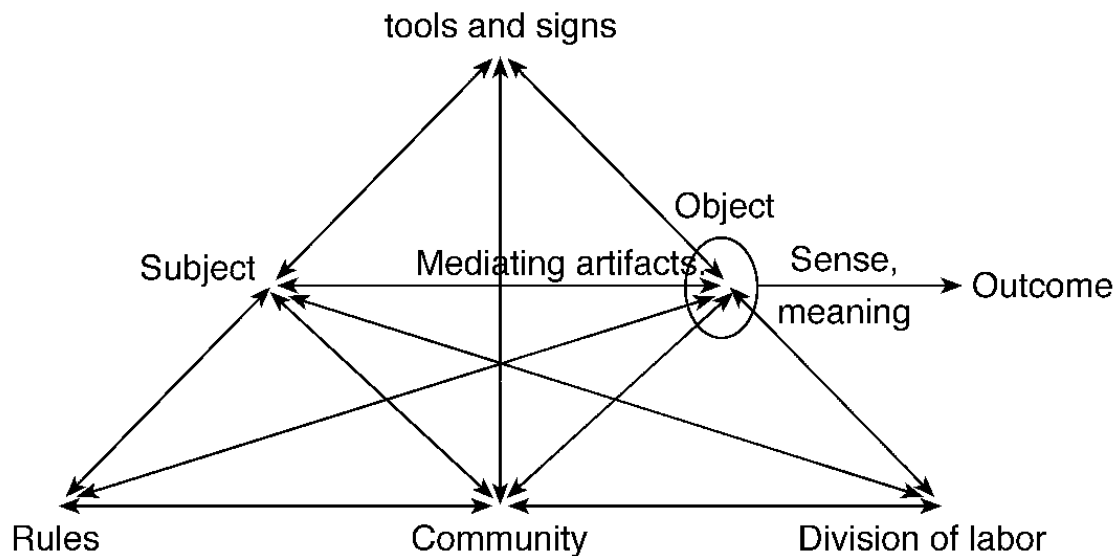


Figure 1 The structure of a human activity system

(Engeström, 1987, p. 78)

The approach advanced by the idea of work within activity systems dissolves traditional dualities of knowledge such as social versus technical and individual versus collective. Knowledge is constantly evolving through contradictions, conflict and tensions that are inherent to every activity system (Engeström, 1999a; Blackler, 1993). There are contradictory aspects within and between activity systems. These contradictions provide the basis for expansive learning processes and change (Engeström, 2001). Expansive learning refers to significant transformations, which resolve contradictions and occurs through collective reflection and movements within and between activity systems (Engeström, 1987). In identification and resolution of contradictions by expansive learning, activity systems are transformed and the object of activity can be modified (Engeström, 2000b). The notion of work development by means of activity systems

contests the idea of knowledge as something that individuals possess. As it has been highlighted, the main premise of this theory is that knowing and activity are mutually engendered by the inherent contradictions related to systems of activity. The following section presents the basic concepts of cultural-historical activity theory. The purpose is to lay the foundations for further analytical discussion.

Fundamental tenets of cultural-historical activity theory

a. Hierarchical structure of activity

Activity corresponds to three layers forming a hierarchical structure. At the top of the structure is the activity itself. All activity has collective orientation to an object. When a collective need encounters a potential fulfilment of the need, a communal motive takes shape and embeds the object of activity (Engeström, 1999a). The activity level is thus collective and object-driven (Engeström, 1999c). The second layer relates to actions. Actions are individual and conscious movements. As an integral part of activity, actions concern individual performances within a sense of collective enactment. Actions refer to conscious, goal directed, performances. Goal-directed actions live a shorter period than enduring object-oriented activity (Engeström, 2000a). Actions constitute activity as sub-units. The lower level units, which constitute actions, are operations. Operations relate to unconscious routines comprising automatic tasks. The nature and context of activity conditions the conduct of operations.

The hierarchical structure of activity in the system of three layers allows the examination of collective motivation, individual goals and operational routines in service-based businesses. The analysis of activity, action and operation can inform investigations of why actors engage in market interactions and collective activity, what actors do and how they perform. However, the idea of activity as structured in three

hierarchical levels is not sufficient for explaining these issues or for understanding the origin or course of transformations towards value co-creating practices. These issues require a further elaboration of the tenets of cultural-historical activity theory, which is offered in the following sections.

b. Mediated action

A complex system represented by tools, concepts, language and culture mediates the approach to the object of activity. This system reflects the structure of the material and non-material world allowing and constraining activity. Collective action refers to the accumulation of experiences and understandings that permeate social forms of producing and using mediating tools (Engeström, 1999c). Thus, mediated action relates to the use of this complex system of culture and knowledge for applying the transformation of the object by the subject.

Mediated action occurs in systems of activity as previously presented (Figure 1). In collective activity, the concept of the object embeds ambiguity concerning communal and personal understandings. The general historically developed object as transformed by society or the focus of attention of social groups is also the object of individual interpretation for particular approaches and specific action (Engeström and Sanino, 2010). This means that collective challenges involve individual conditions. Collective perspectives can differ from individual standpoints causing ambiguity and contradiction. Thus, mediated action is inherently tensioned by dilemmas and disturbances within and between activity systems.

Systems of activity present the following elements of mediation (i.e. Engeström, 1987). Tools and concepts are instruments used in the subject-object interaction. Community concerns individuals, groups and subgroups involved in the same purposeful activity

and motive. The subject approaches the object using instruments and community as mediators. Rules mediate the interaction of the subject with the community. Rules constrain actions as they consist in norms, standards, conventions, and regulations (Engeström and Sanino, 2010). Division of labour relates to the distribution of tasks and power relations between members. The division of labour defines the roles and shapes the interactions of the community with its object of attention. Different positions in the distribution of labour generate *multi-voicedness* (Engeström, 2001). The principle of multi-voicedness underpins the multiple interests stemming from different positions and histories of participants. Finally, mediated activity presents an outcome, i.e. the result of the transformation of the object.

The concept of mediated relations within activity systems can render accessible the complexity of interrelations permeating service-based networks. The perspective of mediated actions can enable a view on the complex interactions of business relations regarding the social forms, i.e. prior experiences, knowledge and current understandings, surrounding market activity. Approaches to collective motives, individual conditions and multi-voicedness in the distribution of labour can disclose the diversity of interests. Moreover, mediating elements can unveil the material relations and the character of these complex interactions. Ultimately, both the concept of mediated action and the idea of the hierarchical structure of activity provide the foundation for further elaborations on the issue of change and learning within networks. These issues are also implicated in the development concerns discussed below.

c. Development

Development relates to a journey of resolving difficulties, reflecting upon dilemmas and envisioning potentialities. Dilemmas, daily problems, difficulties, tensions and small innovations embed contradictory relations as the source of transformations and learning

(Engeström, 2000c). “Contradictions are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). Significant transformation and learning emerge within the resolution of contradictory relations. The notion of learning by expansion, i.e. Expansive Learning (Engeström and Sanino, 2010), relates to the collective envisioning of novel potentialities through reconceptualization of the motive of activity and object of collective attention. As cultural-historical activity also approaches development as a research methodology, i.e. Developmental Work Research (Engeström, 2005), Chapter 5 (Methodology) will further discuss key concepts related to development, i.e. Zone of Proximal Development and Expansive Learning Cycle.

The conceptual foundation concerning development in activity theory can provide a basis of analysis for transformations and learning in service-based market interactions. The exploration of routinized disturbances can disclose the source of change in service-for-service relations. The envisioning of resolutions of contradictions and potentialities of a new object can trace learning paths in the direction of value co-creation. Ultimately, developmental concepts of activity theory can allow a view on managing change and marketing knowledge and learning as intertwined processes of co-creating value.

d. Interacting activity systems

Recent developments of cultural-historical activity theory included the perspective of activity systems interacting with other activity systems. The analytical focus consequently shifted from activity system to interacting systems of activity (Engeström and Kerusuo, 2007). Interacting activity systems partially share the motive of activity and object of attention (figure 2). The partially shared object represents the focus of attention and the motive of activity amongst two or more interconnected

activity systems (Yamazumi, 2009). This means that collective activity in interacting activity systems embeds mutual needs and shared the envisioning of potential benefits.

Interacting activity systems multiply multi-voicedness (Engeström, 2001). Significant transformations occur in interconnected systems of activity. These transformation stem from knowledge creation allowing the solution of networked difficulties (Miettinen, 1999, p. 331). Thus, change in interacting activity systems refers to a socio-expansion affecting the entire network.

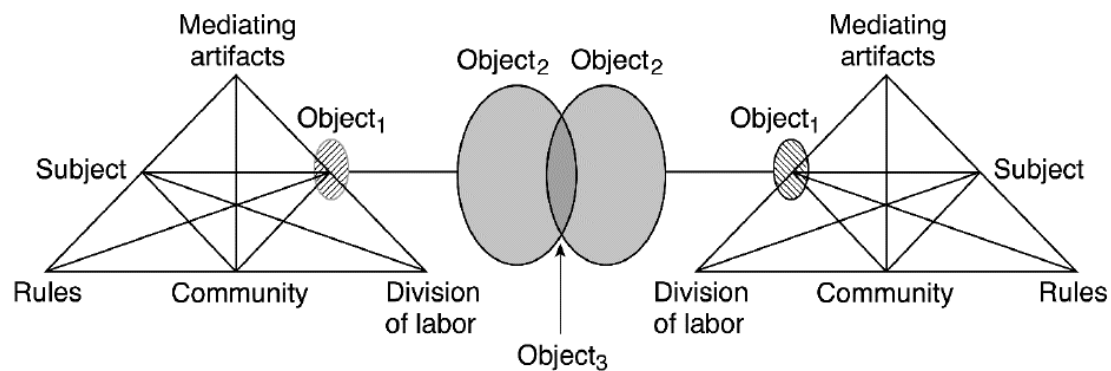


Figure 2Two interacting activity systems partially sharing an object of attention

(Engeström, 2001, p. 136)

The view of interacting activity systems, as well as the combination with the other three tenets explored here, i.e. the hierarchical structure of activity, mediated action and development, might imply interesting transformations in the way we see value co-creation. An analysis of the interacting activity systems can help capture the complexity of market interactions aligned with the sources of transformations and the historical structures of positions and interests. Exploring this perspective can unlock possibilities for addressing diverging interests affecting value co-creation. The next section, which

is dedicated to applying activity theory to value co-creation, will examine and discuss these potentialities.

Applying cultural-historical activity theory to value co-creation

Value-in-activity

Three main concepts underpin current approaches to value. Exchange value describes the monetary amount that is associated with the payment for the improvement of customer processes (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2010). Use value refers to customer's evaluations of the creation of value (Sandström et al., 2008). In turn, the value co-creation thought highlights experiential and contextualised facets of value as value-in-context. Vargo and Lusch (2008) point out that the conceptual approach of value-in-context defines that value "is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary" (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, p. 7). This concept refers to the interactional, temporal and contextual nature of value.

Activity theory provides novel grounds for this conceptual dimension of value. Seen through the lens of activity theory, value is the object of collective activity. As the object of activity is the motive and focus of collective action, value can be examined through the lens of cultural activity theory as such. The object of activity, as Engeström (2000a) indicates, is the central focus and foundational motive for an activity to be collectively endeavoured. Value is, in effect, the focus and motive for every market interaction (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Day, 2000). Value is the object of market relations since it constitutes the centre of collective attention and the motive for market interactions.

Instead of seeing value as in the terms of the properties of products and services, which enable customers to conduct specific activity (Holcomb et al., 2009) and to determine

its perceived benefits (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), by approaching interactions within and between activity systems, value can be viewed in terms of its creation, continuation and discontinuity embedded in multiple interactions. Thus, it could shed further light on the constitution of value through evolving interactions that bring a diversity of standpoints to the fore.

Importantly, the view of cultural-historical activity theory on value highlights the contradictory relations underpinning the dynamics of market interactions. This perspective enables an explanation of the relevance of articulating the nature of value with environmental influences. There are critical environmental features that cultural-historical activity theory can bring to the fore. As Engeström and Sannino (2010) note: “[...] the rhythm of overall concept-level transformations is accelerated. In other words, what needs to be mastered is variation in the sense of constantly shifting product, production and business concepts.” (p. 3)

The notions of temporality and context need articulation with environmental influences and the inherent *transformative nature of value co-creation*. Following Engeström and Blackler (2005), the notion of activity advances the interplay of material and human relations, as well as the cultural and psychological features. The main notion of object places emphasis on activity systems aimed at possibilities and change. Thus, *the conceptual dimension of value in the context of value co-creation principles could relate to the collective activity within which participants share collective motives while presenting individual standpoints*. Furthermore, activity theory can explain how actors initiate the resolution of tensions and dilemmas and, consequently, develop capacities for engaging in transformative action.

Table 1 summarises the proposition for seeing value-in-activity as a complement of value-in-context.

The value co-creation notion of value-in-context	Complemented and extended by the concept of value-in-activity
Value is <i>contextual</i> : it is impossible to understand it in isolation from the circumstances of the environment and its situation.	Value is the object of activity systems: individual and collective interests delineate shared notions of value. Value-in-activity embeds collective motives and individual perspectives.

Table 1 Value-in-activity

Value co-creation initiated by internal conflicts allowing transformations for integrating resources

Studies on value co-creation assume knowledge as skills and capabilities for prompting the change of processes and increasing performance. These studies rely on the view of learning as the acquisition of skills through a source of transfer or from own experience, or both (e.g. Hamel, 1991; Inkpen, 1998; Elkjaer, 2004). Furthermore, extant research assumes the existence of competent participants knowing what should be learned (e.g. Gummesson and Mele, 2010; Payne et al., 2008). The recognition of knowledge as the main resource for accomplishing integration amongst a vast array of participants (e.g. Grant and Baden-Fuller, 2004) is an important advance, but it does leave problematic views on knowledge and learning within changing environments. As Engeström (2001) explains:

“People and organizations are all the time learning something that is not stable, not even defined or understood ahead of time. In important transformations of our personal lives

and organizational practices, we must learn new forms of activity which are not yet there. They are literally learned as they are being created. There is no competent teacher.” (pp. 137-138)

Cultural-historical activity theory’s concern with change and discontinuity widens the focus of integrating resources beyond process improvements for value co-creation.

Learning within activity theory includes both the unpredictability of process transformation and the conflicted nature of change (Engeström and Kerosuo, 2007). Examining tensions and dilemmas, rather than knowledge transfer and acquisition, highlights the problems of process discontinuity and conflict resolution.

Emphasising contradictions and conflicts also helps address the shortcomings of resource integration as a functional service system. Whenever tensions aggravate and actors identify *internal contradictions*, relentless learning efforts can emerge. Actors engage in collaboration in order to develop new instruments and concepts, or new rules and a fresh division of labour, which mediate their approach to the object of activity, i.e. approach to value. Transformation is initiated as activity systems are “energized by their own inner contradictions.” (Engeström, 2001, p. 140). Activity and learning are thereby simultaneous, and the constitution of novel material relations within transformed activity systems initiates value co-creation. Table 2 summarises:

The value co-creation process of resource integration	Initiated and allowed by the process of development
Key resource integration occurs through the mutual influence and reciprocal support of combining and assimilating resources including knowledge, skills and capabilities.	Relevant mutual transformation of processes is prompted by the internal contradictions, which could initiate the search for the construction of novel tools, concepts and mediated relations, which, in turn, could prompt resolution of conflicts

	and dilemmas.
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Table 2 Value and development

The co-configuration of value through knotworking

The idea of knotworking is proposed in this section as a crucial element of value co-creation. Engeström (2005) points out that “knotworking is characterized by a movement of tying, untying and retying together seemingly separate threads of activity” (p. 308). In other words, interactions take place in the course of collaboration, which is distributed amongst rapid and improvised encounters between participants. Engeström (2000a, p. 972) also notes that the “locus of initiative changes from moment to moment within a knotworking sequence.”

The concept of knotworking brings to the fore the multi-layered format of team work. This format, which represents a redefinition of temporary groups (i.e. Meyerson et al. 1996), may be triggered by the on-going co-configuration of the object of activity. Current value co-creation approaches sustain traditional views of transformation based on temporary groups as related to time-bounded task and well defined goals and participants (e.g. Frow and Payne, 2008; Payne et al., 2008). However, dynamic interactions in complex and changing environments require procedures of constant change of partners within rapid negotiations and improvisation (Engeström, 2000a).

The approach of co-configuration through knotworking stresses the formation, dissolution and reformation of encounters amongst participants with diverse interests. This is in contrast with the perspective of prompting value propositions following a continuous process improvement through cooperation within established schedules and centralised coordination. Co-creating value through knotworking represents a departure

of proposing value to multiple participants in a centralised fashion. As Kangasoja (2002, p. 5) states, “demanding the transition towards knotworking is when traditional rules, divisions of labour and power positions are strongly present, but no longer sufficient to guide the collaboration”.

Through the idea of co-configuration through knotworking, activity theory enables studying mutual relations of knowledge exchange and reciprocal learning. Learning in co-configuration can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, one could envision the structure of interacting activity systems and the construction of social spaces through boundary crossing and tying knots, i.e. *activity fields* (Engeström and Kerusuo, 2007) or *landscapes of learning* (Engeström, 2004, 2002). Secondly, one could view learning at the level of action, where participants negotiate and interact through knotworking and through bridging small and otherwise trivial transformations (Engeström, 2004). This means that value co-creation refers to tying operations, personnel and resources vertically, i.e. in activity systems, and horizontally, i.e. between activity systems, while interacting through navigating in multiple sites. In order to face challenging transformations individuals can experience the search for relevant interactions by means of crossing boundaries and finding knotworking partners.

The value co-creation approach on interactional features	Challenged by the concept of co-configuration through knotworking
Fixed supplier roles whereby they act by means of articulating value propositions and facilitating value creation with central coordination of interactional tasks, schedules and places	Value co-creation relies on the construction of social spaces as activity fields wherein participants negotiate and interact through knotworking and through bridging small and otherwise trivial transformations

Table 3 Value co-creation as co-configuration through knotworking

Value co-creation as change management

In order to develop an explanation of *marketing as change management*, the present section explores the work of Blackler, Crump and McDonald (2000). These authors provide an extension of activity system's terminology following Boland and Tenkasi's (1995) ideas concerning the construction of perspectives in "communities of knowing". The key difference between Blackler's et al. (2000) model and the original cultural-historical activity theory is that Blackler et al. (2000) look at the managing of meditational elements of activity systems through the practice of perspective shaping, perspective taking and perspective making (figure 3).

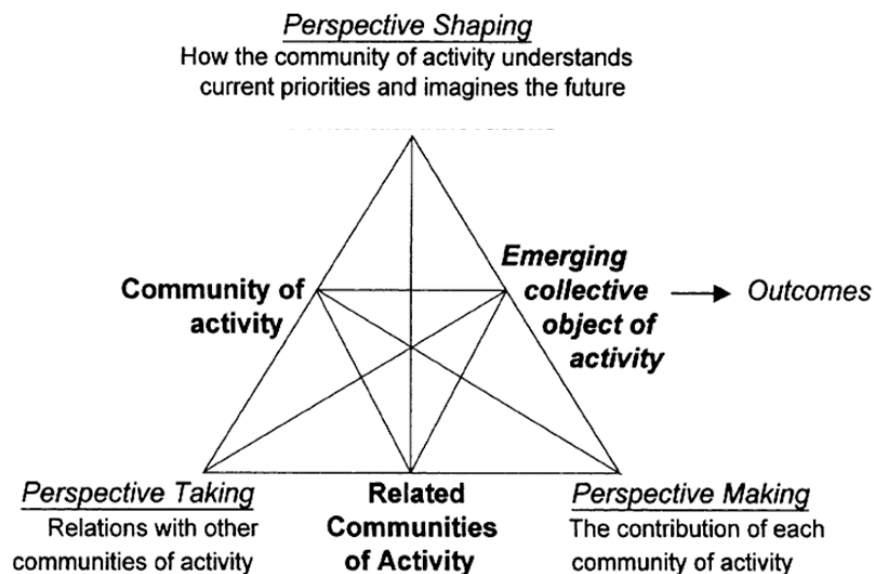


Figure 3 Organising through networking

(Blackler et al., 2000, p. 283)

There are a number of reasons why these managerial assumptions in the context of cultural-historical activity theory should be related to the process transformations and conflicting perspectives issues of value co-creation. An important aspect of cultural-

historical activity theory as elaborated by Blackler et al. (2000) is the ability to articulate change and diversity of interests with organising in multiple interactions. Two main features operationalise this framework. On the one hand, strong central control hampers the transformation of activities, while temporary and task oriented groups that are self-organised within the processes of perspective shaping, perspective taking and perspective making are able to conduct effective transformations. On the other hand, these relevant transformations stem from three main factors: participant's familiarity with the collective activity as a multi-faceted practice, collective understanding of the broader cultural and procedural history of the development of the activity system, and actor's response to emerging contradictions and dilemmas. This means marketing management must be able to recognise the origins and nature of conflicting market interactions, and to understand how to interact in the construction of perspectives and articulate task oriented groups throughout the broader multifaceted net of interests permeating the activity of value co-creation.

It is argued here that marketing management cannot be viewed as an organisational mechanism of control in its networked relations towards value co-creation. As Engeström (2004; 2001; 2000) emphasises "the centre does not hold." Marketing as value co-creation needs to be viewed as an emergent, distributed and decentred practice. Value co-creation requires exploration of the variety of activities that are involved. Players sharing common objects of collective attention and desired outcomes achieve stronger bonds for stabilising the performed transformations (Engeström, 2007b). This means exploration of perspective shaping, taking and making that is implicated in the co-production of value. Finally, marketing as value co-creation is, through the lens of cultural-historical activity theory a practice of communicating and acknowledging that

the mutual transformations of processes in networked relations require working with complex and possibly competing interests and priorities.

Current view	Activity theory lens
Focus on communication that could enable interest alignment and resource integration.	Focus on the articulation of diverse perspectives towards the resolution of contradictions and the consequent transformation of the processes.
Emphasis in the creation of networking patterns and in setting metrics of performance and objectives.	There is no control. Collective activity is decentred, distributed and emergent.
Highlights the delineation of tasks and activities through regulating network participation.	Highlights collective participation and engagement for the resolution of disturbances.

Table 4 Marketing management and the lens of activity theory

Final considerations

Current perspectives of managing value co-creation has given little attention to the host of conflicting interests permeating market interactions. Thus, the need for developing current considerations of value co-creation, required a fresh theoretical perspective that could advance issues related to value interests, conflict and change management, and provide a comprehensive understanding of how these issues intertwine for enabling value co-creation.

The present paper introduced cultural-historical activity theory in terms of its foundations, its fundamental tenets and its potentialities for application in value co-creation theory. This was done against the background of the growing attention dedicated to the distributed, fluid and emergent character of interactions in organisational and management studies. Within the latter view, value is seen not only in

context but also in activity: it derives from routines and communication embedded in collective activity towards the delineation of a shared notion of value.

Future research could benefit from this approach not only in terms of expanding our current understandings of value, but also in terms of its conflicting standpoints within market interactions. The examination of marketing and value through the cultural-historical activity theory lens is a promising framework for the study of value co-creation as a collective activity embedded in contradictions and diverse perspectives.

Within the cultural-historical perspective on value co-creation, practitioners could manage the process of resource integration through initiating a collective search for the construction of novel tools, concepts and mediated relations, which could prompt resolutions of conflicts and dilemmas. Accordingly, they should focus on the articulation of diverse perspectives towards the resolution of contradictions and the consequent transformation of the relevant processes.

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