

The mediating role of University-Industry linkages for value co-creation in Engaged Universities

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Purpose – Linkages between university and industry (UIL) are considered a key factor in order to facilitate economic development as well as render benefits to universities and industry. They play a strategic role in building a engaged university. Adopting Service Dominant Logic perspective, authors develop the concept and strategic role of UIL in building a engaged university through the identification of actors engaged and an analysis of linkages among them. Linkages are presented as the basis to improve connectivity and enhance active resources through actor engagement (AE). Considering the university as a complex service and an ecosystem, we provide a deeper understanding of the role of linkages on the interplay between engagement disposition, engagement behaviors and relational connections within the service ecosystem.

Design/Methodology/approach – This paper is conceptual but supported by three illustrative case studies: Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Technical University of Madrid and *Link by UMA-ATech* (University of Málaga). These universities represent a national reference for their high activity regarding university – industry relationships, and their strategy designing linkages that improve resource density through actors engagement. We develop a case-study and abductive research approach (Gummesson, 2017; Dubois and Gadde, 2014). This approach is considered useful for developing theories for managing new and changing contexts, by combining theoretical and empirical data. Abductive reasoning allows us the flexibility to design a nonlinear, non-sequential, and iterative process to link literature with empirical data, through which results based on literature can be reconceptualized, as suggested by the empirical findings.

Findings – It is not the attributes of resources by themselves that make them valuable, but how the linkages among them are structured and managed. The present paper develops the strategic role of linkages in achieving a Engaged University (EU) as key to develop the idea of actor engagement (AE). The results represent a contribution to the theory, as it highlights the strategic mediating role of linkages between actor engagement and value creation. Implications for theory and practice derive from this approach in the context of the university-industry complex system management, in which many actors exchange resources at every level of the ecosystem (micro, meso and macro), resource density will depend on resource linkages.

Practical implications (if applicable) –The results of the research has implications for management, putting the focus of management in the university context on how resources are mobilized and linked. The stakeholder perspective identifies the university as a complex system where actors exchange resources. The service-dominant logic perspective gives all actors dual identities: they are both providers and value beneficiaries. The blurring roles of actors in systemic markets implies that the locus of value creation moves beyond the borders of the organization towards the linkages. Strategies for managing UIL are presented.

Originality/value – Hereto the mediating role of linkages in the university-industry context to improve value co-creation has not had enough theoretical nor empirical contribution. Literature demands for the development of knowledge in this context, as universities account for a high degree of resources and UIL can increase resource density if they are properly managed. The theoretical contribution of the present paper frames on the axiom 3/ FP 9 of service-dominant logic (all social and economic actors are resource integrators) and axiom 2 /FP 6 (value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary). Brodie et al. (2019) frame on service-dominant logic to broaden the actor engagement theory from the dyad to the network. In this context, we frame our research on FP 3 of actor engagement (AE), which states that “AE is a multidimensional concept,

subject to the interplay of dispositions and/or behaviors and the level of connectedness among actors”.

The empirical approach frames the midrange theory, which is “context specific (...) and provides frameworks that can be used to undertake empirical observation and models to guide managerial practices” (Brodie and Peters, 2020, p.2). This perspective builds the theory-practice gap (Vargo and Lush, 2017; Gummesson 2004, 2017; Nenonen et al 2017; Fendt, Kaminska-Labbé, & Sachs, 2008), and frames the theoretical – empirical approach adopted in our work.

Key words (max 5): Actor engagement (AE), service-dominant Logic (SDL), engaged university (EU), University-industry linkages (UIL), resource density.

Paper type –Research paper