

THE COMPLEXITY OF CO-CREATION THROUGH CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN BUSINESS

AUŠRA PACEVIČIŪTĖ¹

Klaipėda University (Lithuania)

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, managing co-creation has become an important topic among practitioners and researchers, but there has been little research on addressing and managing the challenges faced by the complexity of co-creation. The paper argues that co-creation should also be understood as a complex, dynamic phenomenon. The purpose of the paper is to summarise and classify extant research into co-creation. The paper reviews complexity as a new way of understanding co-creation processes for corporate social responsibility in business. A review of the literature has established that corporate social responsibility, along with the complexity of co-creation, can produce successful results for businesses.

KEY WORDS: *co-creation, complexity, business, corporate social responsibility.*

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Introduction

Co-creation is a powerful way to co-create new business value with your most important customers and other stakeholders by closely iterating throughout the complexity of the co-creation process. Co-creation has become an important source of competitive advantage for many businesses in the modern world.

In pursuit of further clarity in defining the complexity of the concept of co-creation, the critical review is based on three themes: (1) What is co-creation? In the literature, co-creation of value is the most common concept of co-creation. So this theme focuses on how co-creation has been understood in the reviewed articles. The review also identifies how the occurrence of co-creation as a phenomenon has been measured, and from which perspectives.

(2) Who initiates and who participates in co-creation? According to Biraghi and Gambetti (2013), the branding literature has been dominated by a metaphorical view of co-creation, emphasising collaboration and participation, yet failing to specify the roles of the parties involved.

(3) How does the complexity of co-creation affect corporate social responsibility in businesses? Baccharini (1996) proposes that complexity be operationalised in terms of differentiation and interdependency, and applied to dimensions relevant to the project management process, such as organisation, technology, environment, information, decision making and systems. According to Ahen and Zettinig (2015), corporate social responsibility value co-creation is a kind of strategic alliance between a firm, consumers, business and non-business players, in ethically, responsibly and innovatively creating socio-economic and environmental gains. Its main objectives are to identify the different theoretical perspectives and research streams that characterise and define the co-creation literature, and to highlight the connections between complexity of co-creation and corporate social responsibility.

¹ Aušra Pacevičiūtė – lecturer at Klaipėda University, Management Department
Scientific field: complexity of co-creation in business, corporate social responsibility
E-mail: ausra.paceviciute@ku.lt

Complexity of co-creation was chosen as the subject of the research. This article aims at answering a relevant scientific problematic question: how can the complexity phenomenon of co-creation create economic value for corporate social responsibility in business?

The aim is to analyse theories of the complexity of co-creation through corporate social responsibility in business.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks were formulated:

- to analyse the concept of the complexity of co-creation;
- to highlight the connection between the complexity of co-creation and corporate social responsibility in business.

Research methods: qualitative methods, such as scientific literature synthesis.

1. An overview of co-creation concepts

The term value co-creation was first used by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). They described co-creation of value as an initiative by the customer who is dissatisfied with the available choices, and therefore acts.

The very literal meaning of co-creation is together (co-) to make or produce something (new) to exist (creation). Co-creation has its origin in co-production, where consumer participation is integrated into the supply chain (Wever *et al.*, 2016). Oertzen *et al.* (2018) emphasise that 'co-creation is rooted in the verb create, which is defined as bringing something into existence, causing something to happen as a result of one's actions, and in co, which means together with another or others.' Typically, value co-creation is seen as being based on collaboration in service interactions, and defined as 'joint collaborative activities by parties involved in direct interactions, aiming to contribute to the value that emerges for one or both parties' (Grönroos, 1984). Co-creation demands that both managers and consumers make the necessary adjustments. Lambert and Enz (2012) tried to value co-creation as a social process.

Jaakkola *et al.* (2015) reviewed the service (customer) experience literature for perspectives on co-creation, and concluded that a multi-dimensional picture emerges. High-quality interactions that enable an individual customer to co-create unique experiences with the company are the key to unlocking new sources of competitive advantage. Furthermore, there is a growing acceptance that consumers and partners are an excellent source of ideas, solutions and creativity. The co-creation process is a complex process that involves a long-term relationship between employees and customers or clients (Hakansson, Johanson, 1993). Companies usually use marketing employees to maintain the knowledge combination between employees and clients (Richey *et al.*, 2008). The authors also involved a dynamic demand that urges higher adaptive performance from the employees. It is emphasised that employees must acquire skills that adapt easily to dynamic work situations. The customer co-creation process is also one of the resources for companies to build sustainable competitive advantage through a collaborative process of ideas in a product development process that suits market needs without information asymmetry.

According to Galvagno and Dalli (2014) and Leclercq *et al.* (2016), there are three different subjects of co-creation: consumer, service management, and innovation management.

There is a growing body of literature on co-creation innovation in which users at companies and other relevant stakeholders generate value through interaction in a collective creative environment (Patricio *et al.*, 2018). According to Von Hippel (1986), companies face many choice options for collaborating with external partners, but little academic interest has been given to the chosen problem of the innovation method. Furthermore, the mission of innovation co-creation is to nurture different stakeholders in innovation and entrepreneurial culture, by bringing in cutting-edge technologies and establishing strong partnerships and collaboration with businesses, to build a successful innovation solution and create social and economic impacts.

A review of recent literature indicated that cooperation links between companies are positive and important for innovation. Fischer and Varga (2002) affirmed that relations between customers and suppliers are more important for innovation than the horizontal cooperative links (between company and competitors).

Table 1. An overview of the literature of co-creation

VALUE CO-CREATION	
Scientists	Definitions
Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004)	Value co-creation means joint creation of value by the company and the customer.
Vargo, Maglio and Akaka (2008)	Value co-creation occurs through the integration of existing resources with those available from a variety of service systems that can contribute to system well-being as determined by the system's environmental context. Each service system accesses resources from other service systems through exchange.
Spohrer and Maglio (2010)	Value co-creation is the preferred change realized as a result of communication, planning and/or other purposeful interactions among multiple entities
Edvardsson, Tronvoll & Gruber (2011)	Value co-creation necessarily follows social structures and takes place within social systems in which the actors (customers and companies) adopt certain social positions and roles as they interact and reproduce social structures.
Lambert & Enz (2012)	Value co-creation is an economic and social process in which individuals have established roles that condition their behaviors and perceptions.
INNOVATION CO-CREATION	
Scientists	Definitions
Von Hippel E. (1986)	The notion of consumer participation has a rich history in the literature on innovation, where customers are involved in the value creation process
Ind, N., Iglesias, O., & Schultz, M. (2013)	Co-creation with consumers have strong advantages for companies, as it leads to fruitful and effective innovations and new chances in business.
Martinez (2014)	Innovation co-creation represents cooperative innovation across firm's connections and environments with inputs from network of collaborators varying from suppliers, research organizations and consumers that produce value.
Djelassi and Decoopman (2013)	Crowdsourcing as a method of co-creation and consumer-driven type of innovation.
RELATIONSHIP CO-CREATION	
Scientists	Definitions
Kim, H. R., Lee, M., Lee, H. T., & Kim, N. M. (2010)	Employees has the opportunity to suggest the nature of CSR initiatives, they are more likely to identify with their organization and, in turn, to report higher levels of commitment to the firm's goals.
Etgar 2008; Hoyer et al. (2010)	For instance, participants in co-creation might anticipate economic benefits, social benefits, or psychological benefits.
Gyrd-Joyne & Kornum (2013)	Developed a broader perspective by viewing value co-creation as a complex interaction of a network of stakeholders, each holding specific and individual identities
Korschun and Du (2013)	Co-creation can improve organization-stakeholder relationships, as well as add value to the firm and society at large.

Source: Compiled by the author, based on scientific literature analysed.

Innovation is an important tool for businesses to create a potential of differentiation from other competitors in the market. Martinez (2014) asserts that an essential variable to achieve a consumer-driven innovative culture is to have a culture where purchaser opinion is important, since it supports the organisation's system and exercises. According to him, co-creation of innovation represents cooperative innovation across a firm's

connections and environments, with input from a network of collaborators, varying from suppliers, research organisations and consumers, that produces value.

Based on a review of the literature, we can say that companies have begun to explore new ways to innovate, including strategic partnerships and collaborations. Co-creation is a means to improve and foster the participation of end-users by actively involving them in innovation processes. This is believed to yield several benefits, including bringing in additional knowledge and creativity, building partnerships and trust, increasing end-user satisfaction, and fostering legitimacy and acceptance.

The field of marketing has recently seen a shift in terms of increasing the involvement of consumers in the creation of brand identities, experience, communication, and even products (Hoyer *et al.* 2010). According to Etgar (2008) and Hoyer *et al.* (2010), the different participants in co-creation might anticipate economic benefits, social benefits, or psychological benefits, and each of these might differentially motivate participants, and thus moderate the effects of co-creation. Work in partnerships also brings advantages, with a great exchange of experiences and learning in co-creation projects, beyond displaying the problems of confidential information, patent sharing and limits of contribution, inherent to companies that work under a competitive capitalist model. The current literature study provides insights into the relationship between experiential value and consumer engagement, resulting in brand relationship performance outcomes that in turn lead to value co-creation intentions.

Furthermore, on a closer investigation of the two classifications above, we can conclude that since the fundamental goal of co-creation is to mutually create value, then the term goes beyond open innovation and crowdsourcing, and could include any collaborative activity. Open innovation and crowdsourcing are an inclusive social approach to refining and enhancing processes to produce mutual value through external and internal collaboration. Therefore, we suggest that these concepts share similar challenges, as they all come fully under co-creation.

A characteristic of these reviews is that they demonstrate the multitude of approaches and goals that have been used to apply co-creation as a concept. For co-creation to pay off handsomely over time, companies must focus on activities that deliver a sustainable competitive advantage. Researchers have taken several different approaches to examine definitions of co-creation, including value co-creation, innovation co-creation, and relationship co-creation. Most of the research has put a strong emphasis on explaining and exploring how value is co-created with two types of stakeholders: customers and consumers. To analyse the complexity of co-creation as a phenomenon, we need to do more research into stakeholders in the co-creation process.

2. Complexity of co-creation

The topic of value co-creation has attracted interest from researchers and practitioners as a concept that aims to describe collaboration between multiple stakeholders (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004). Many actors interact with companies, and companies in complex decision-making situations should consider those stakeholders.

According to Shneider *et al.* (2017), an organisation can increase its capacity to adapt and react to changes in its environment in two different ways: by creating either internal complexity or collaborative complexity. Value co-creation incorporates several different stakeholders (depending on the definition), such as customers, partners, competitors, firms or public organisations (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo, Lusch, 2011). Collaboration between a company and its stakeholders can help organisations learn and adapt to the constant change in a business's competitive advantage. A review of the literature reveals that co-creation is typically perceived as a process of interaction or influencing among stakeholders, and that brands evolve continuously among multiple actors. According to Janamian *et al.* (2016), co-creation is predicated on participants being experts in themselves, with this expertise used to inform their contributions to the co-creation process.

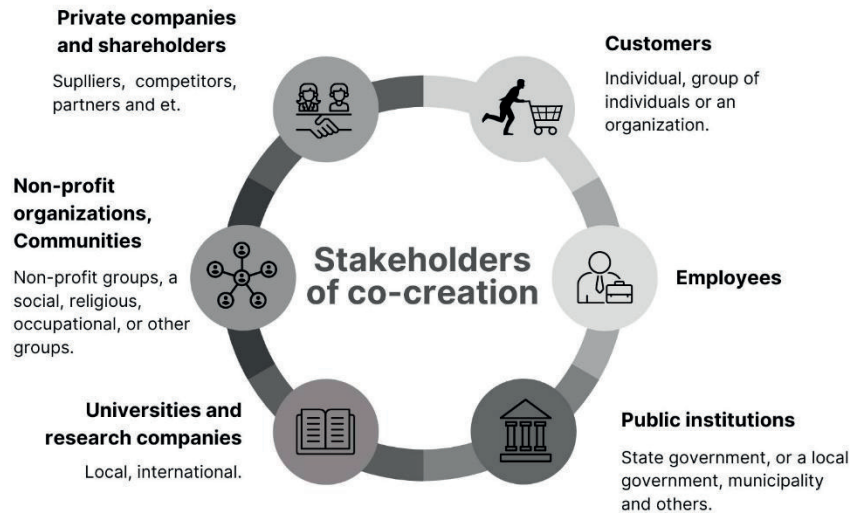


Figure 1. Stakeholders in co-creation

Source: Compiled by the author, based on Prahalad, Ramaswamy (2004), Vargo, Lusch (2011), and A. Schneider et al. (2017).

The central idea of complexity theory is that reality takes the form of emergent, dynamic and self-organising complex systems, interacting in ways that significantly influence the probabilities of later events (Urry, 2005).

Organisations can increase their capacity to adapt and react to changes in their environment (i.e. their requisite variety) in two different ways: by creating either internal complexity or collaborative complexity. Fig. 2 illustrates schematically the key differences between these two types of complexity (Schneider *et al.*, 2017). Internal complexity describes structures and processes that are established in an organisation, and has been amply covered in the literature. Collaborative complexity, which has only been marginally explored to date, describes structures and processes between organisations, which may consist of elements of the participating organisations as well as elements that lie outside them.

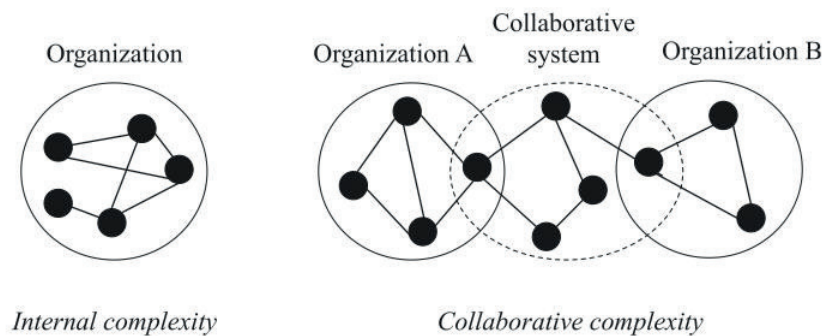


Figure 2. Internal and collaborative complexity

Source: A. Schneider et al. (2017).

According to Schneider *et al.* (2017), collaborative complexity is analytically distinct from internal complexity, because the former involves the complexity of other organisations with which a specific organisation shares a segment of its environment.

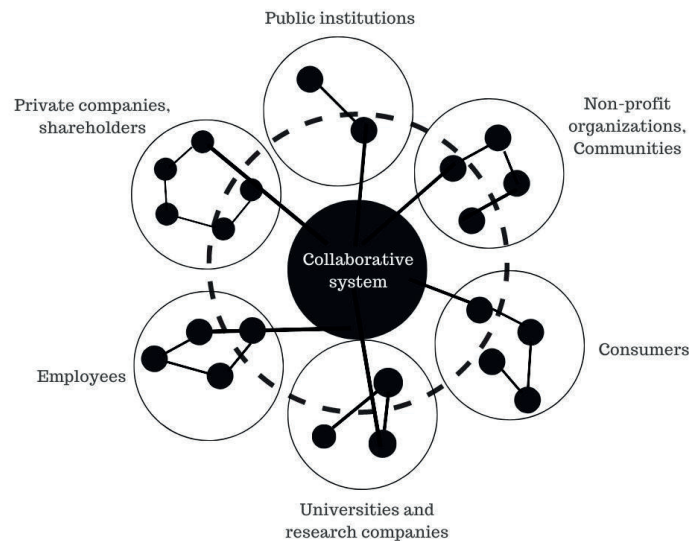


Figure 3. Collaborative complexity of co-creation

Source: Compiled by the author, based on A. Schneider et al. (2017).

The stakeholder theory postulates that the purpose of a business is ‘to create value for all stakeholders’ (Freeman *et al.*, 2010). The sustainability management concept urges companies to provide ‘an important contribution toward the sustainable development of the economy and society’ (Schaltegger, Burritt, 2005). Both concepts thus extend the view beyond short-term shareholder value maximisation or accounting-based profits to ‘share a broader understanding of the embeddedness, dependencies, obligations, abilities and possibilities of companies’.

The strategic value of collaboration is also recognised in stakeholder theory, which views organisations to be at the centre of a network of stakeholders who can affect or are affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives (Freeman, 2010).

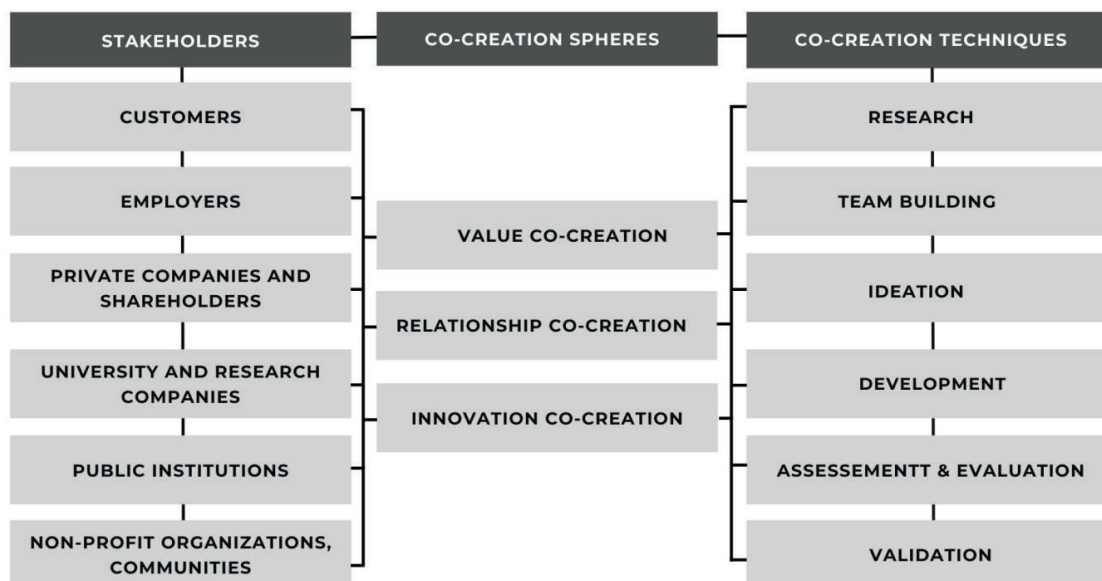


Figure 4. Complexity of co-creation

Source: Compiled by the author, based on a review of the literature.

From the literature review, we can agree that a business cannot function without its stakeholders. Each stakeholder group has a role to play and different levels of influence on co-creation in business processes. To understand the impact that different types of stakeholders have on its business, an organisation requires access to the leading indicators of any potential change in the attitudes those stakeholders have towards the organisation. Companies attract stakeholders when they operate in ways benefiting society and the environment, as opposed to ways that are seen as detrimental to either. That is why to be able to develop a corporate social responsibility strategy (CSR), a company must first be responsible to itself and its stakeholders. Also, as CSR is essentially a relationship strategy, the more visibly successful a company is, the greater its responsibility to set standards of ethical behaviour for itself and its peers.

3. An overview of complexity of co-creation between corporate social responsibility

For a business to grow, it needs to keep innovating, doing new things, developing new projects, and attracting customers, including other stakeholders. This theme merges in the review of literature on the complexity of co-creation on how organisations can maximise the benefits of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Corporate Social Responsibility is the idea that a company should play a positive role in the community, and consider the environmental and social impact of its business decisions. It is closely linked to sustainability, creating economic, social and environmental value.

According to Werther and Chandler (2011), CSR is a strategy through which organisations are found to be accountable for their role in society, while seeking the achievement of goals, maximising profits, and attaining and preserving stakeholder satisfaction. Sustainability is achieved by increasing stakeholders' participation in the process of design and selection of such programmes, so that transparency is maximised, and trust can be built with the lasting benefits of the complexity of co-creation.

Tuan *et al.* (2019) explore the role of CSR in fostering customer value co-creation in the tourism industry, and conclude that value co-created with customers contributes to the sustainable growth of tour companies. Merz *et al.* (2018) develop a set of a measurement scale for assessing the value created by customers in the brand value co-creation process. Thus, this paper contributes to the extant literature through an alternative method of studying the value co-created by enterprises along with their stakeholders, specifically from a CSR perspective, and in the context of a typical controversial industry.

The literature has shown that CSR boosts customer satisfaction (Luo, Bhattacharya, 2006), and when customers are satisfied with a specific brand, they are more likely to engage in the co-creation activities of that brand (Ind *et al.* 2013).

To conclude, we can say that for socially responsible businesses to stay successfully in the market, the existence of cooperation among different stakeholders through the complexity of co-creation, which can help overcome needs, alone would be difficult to meet. The result of synergy accelerates economic growth, especially in developing regions and international projection.

Conclusions

The analysis of the literature has revealed the limited existence of co-creation in corporate social responsibility, and even more importantly, empirically tested models for managing the complexity of co-creation. This study of co-creation allowed the author to identify three main groups of co-creation: value co-creation, innovation co-creation, and relationship co-creation. These three groups should be analysed as collaborative activity between the company and its stakeholders. Such a co-creation process can help organisations learn and adapt to the constant changes to the business's competitive advantage.

This study showed that complexity of co-creation is a new subject for corporate social responsibility. While both corporate social responsibility and co-creation are social and collaborative processes, there is still little research examining whether CSR can boost co-creation. The results show that corporate social responsibility influences company competitive advantage directly and indirectly, through the complexity of co-creation elements. How many and which elements of co-creation complexity dominate may be different for various types of companies, and more research on this is recommended.

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Santrauka

Šiandienos globalūs pokyčiai ir staiga pakitę visuomenės lūkesčiai, įpročiai, pasitikėjimo praradimas neigiamai paveikė net sveikiausią verslo aplinką. Verslai išgyvena transformacijos laikotarpį, tad yra priversti dėmesį sutelkti ne į konkrečią problemą ir jos priežastis, bet į visą sistemą bei jos mechanizmus. Taigi inovatyvūs, drąsūs pokyčiai tampa esminiu organizacijų darnaus vystymosi bei konkurencingumo veiksniumi ir būtina visuomenės poreikių tenkinimo sąlyga. Pamažu verslo procesuose įsitvirtino *bendrakūros* sąvoka, apibūdinanti mąstymo pasikeitimą nuo organizacijos, kaip vertės kūrėjos, link įsitraukimo proceso, kur bendradarbiauja visuomenė ir kiti verslo aplinkos dalyviai. Bendrakūros reiškinyje – gana naujas tyrimo objektas, aktyviau analizuoti pradėtas tik pastarąjį dešimtmetį.

Šiuo tyrimu siekta nustatyti bendrakūros kompleksiskumo svarbą socialiai atsakingame versle. Jis nagrinėtas tik išteklių, tiekimo grandinės valdymo ir atvirųjų inovacijų teorijų sandūroje, tačiau išgyvenant transformacijų laikotarpį svarbu suvokti, kad verslo sėkmė apibūdinama ne vieninteliu rodikliu – pelnu, ji susijusi su daugeliu suinteresuotųjų šalių: nuo klientų iki darbuotojų, tiekėjų, visuomeninių organizacijų ir net konkurencingų įmonių. Atlikus tyrimą nustatyta, kad bendrakūros kompleksiskumo pritaikymas socialiai atsakingose įmonėse sėkmingas tik įgyvendinant sistemiškai, apimant visus vidaus ir išorės verslo aplinkos dalyvius per tris pagrindines bendrakūros grupes: vertės ir inovacijų kūrimo bei bendradarbiavimo.

Nors socialinės atsakomybės taikymas verslo veikloje turi daug privalumų, kartais kritikuojama, kad tam tikruose sektoriuose tai mažina finansinę grąžą. Siekiant įvertinti bendrakūros kompleksiskumo įtaką socialiai atsakingų įmonių konkurencingumui, vien teorinių įrodymų nebeužtenka, būtini empiriniai sprendimai, bendrakūros kompleksiskumo metodikos mažoms ir vidutinėms socialiai atsakingoms įmonėms kūrimas.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *bendrakūra, kompleksiskumas, verslas, įmonės socialinė atsakomybė*

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