

# Cross-Sector Partnership Research at Theoretical Interstices: Integrating and Advancing Theory across Phases

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**ABSTRACT** Cross-sector partnerships (XSPs) are embraced by policymakers and practitioners to address complex social and environmental challenges that no single sector can tackle alone. However, extant research on XSPs has primarily focused on isolated phases and singular theoretical perspectives. In our paper, we synthesize XSP research in the public policy and management fields to deliver a comprehensive and coherent understanding of XSPs' different phases and theoretical perspectives – the XSP 'theoretical topology'. We introduce two approaches for theoretical enrichment: informing and interacting. We emphasize the significance of 'theoretical interstices' as undominated spaces for new knowledge exploration. Through our integrative cross-phase, cross-theoretical approach, we address fundamental yet open questions on XSP effectiveness, value, and impact. Our work challenges existing understandings and opens new research possibilities; offers implications for practitioners; and informs current policy debates on mandating XSPs and on the role of 'big data' – powered algorithms in the XSP landscape.

**Keywords:** cross-sector collaborations, theoretical interstices, XSP formation, XSP management, XSP value creation

## INTRODUCTION

Our world is confronted with complex societal, environmental, and economical challenges (Crowley and Head, 2017), such as health equity, poverty, education, and climate change. These 'grand challenges' (George et al., 2016) surpass the capacities of private, public or third sectors to address in isolation (Clarke and Crane, 2018; Gray

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and Purdy, 2018; Selsky and Parker, 2005). In response, there has been a growing recognition among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers of the pivotal role played by partnerships that bring together public, private, and non-profit sectors to address these challenges (e.g., Emerson et al., 2012; Forrer et al., 2010; Stadler and Karakulak, 2020).

Cross-sector partnerships (hereafter: XSPs) are voluntary collaborative agreements among organizations from two or more different sectors, wherein they cooperatively attempt to address issues identified by the public policy agenda (De Bakker et al., 2019; Le Ber and Branzei, 2010; Waddock, 1991), such as how to mitigate the effects experienced by vulnerable local populations during the global COVID-19 pandemic (UN Partnership Accelerator, 2020), how to foster resilience in the face of future crises (Henry, 2023), and how to advance the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Lawson-Lartego and Mathiassen, 2021; Vestergaard et al., 2020). The participation of at least two sectors distinguishes XSPs from same-sector alliances and business-to-business agreements. The deliberate sharing or co-development of resources, products, technologies or services (Le Ber and Branzei, 2010) also distinguishes XSPs from arrangements such as contracting-out and certification.

Driven by the potential of XSPs to generate substantial social impact and intrigued by their widespread diffusion, researchers in the fields of management and public policy have contributed a significant and impressive body of knowledge on XSPs (Quélin et al., 2017), spanning contexts such as healthcare and water management, from local to global initiatives (Glasbergen et al., 2007; Mitzinneck and Besharov, 2019). XSP studies provide insights to address critical questions, including partner selection (Seitanidi et al., 2010), choice of structures (Margerum and Robinson, 2016), and conflict resolution within XSPs (Lewicki et al., 2003), that can help practitioners and policymakers navigate these complexities.

While extant research provides a rich foundation of valuable insights, it is also characterized by shortcomings that limit our ability to further enhance our understanding of how XSPs can be leveraged for social good. First, this literature lacks a comprehensive and coherent view of XSPs across different phases. This hampers our current understanding of the overall XSP process, which is essential to address fundamental yet open questions on XSP effectiveness, value and impact (or lack thereof). Second, extant literature is characterized by limited intellectual exchange across scholarly communities adopting different theoretical perspectives on the study of XSPs. Each theoretical perspective offers insightful, but inevitably partial representations of the phenomenon, and few have explored opportunities to synthesize insights across theoretical perspectives (Bryson et al., 2015; Quélin et al., 2017). As a result, scholarly conversations have evolved largely independently from one another and appear relatively compartmentalized theoretically. When complex and intertwined XSP mechanisms are examined in isolation and through single theoretical lenses, this contributes to simplistic understandings of why XSPs fail, and limits our ability to support XSP success.

Our comprehensive review of research on XSPs helps address fundamental yet open questions on XSP process, purpose and impact, and to examine the untapped potential of cross-pollinating theoretical perspectives on XSPs. In the first direction, we systematically categorize prior research into three phases – which we refer to as (a) formation, (b) management, and (c) value creation, dissemination and expansion – offering an

integrated view of XSPs as a multi-phase process, and identifying phase-specific open questions for theory, practice and policy. In the second direction, we review past XSP literature to reveal (what we call) a ‘topology’ of theory on XSPs. We define the ‘theoretical topology’ of XSPs as the metaphorical terrain involving the key theoretical perspectives through which the XSP process has been examined, and we find it encompasses five key theoretical perspectives – institutional, micro-economic behaviour, capabilities and resources, managerial and organizational cognition, and stakeholder and social evaluations. This topology provides a comprehensive depiction of a growing field.

Beyond our two-pronged investigation and systematic synthesis of extant XSP literature, our work pushes the field of XSP research forward in three significant ways.

First, we layer our comprehensive insights from XSP phases onto the novel theoretical topology of XSPs. This innovative approach departs from prior reviews of XSP research (i.e., Bryson et al., 2006; Clarke and Crane, 2018; Quélin et al., 2017; Selsky and Parker, 2005) in that it enables the simultaneous integration of cross-phase *and* cross-theoretical insights from extant XSP literature and delivers an XSP research model that goes beyond what is currently available to scholars and practitioners. Our approach and resulting model allow us to propose new directions in XSP study to address open questions on XSP process, purpose and impact.

The second way in which we leverage our work to push new frontiers in XSP research is achieved by leveraging our mapping and deep understanding of XSP theoretical topology. We highlight and illustrate how each of the five dominant theoretical perspectives may *enrich* other perspectives. We identify and propose two distinct approaches through which this enrichment may emerge: (a) when a theoretical perspective *informs* (an)other perspective(s), whereby we invoke the image of a dominant theoretical perspective stretching towards the metaphorical space of another, in order to inform the other. In this first approach, the theoretical model, concept, framework or methods used to inform another theory represent the focal points anchoring into a dominant theoretical perspective. And (b) when theoretical perspectives *interact* at (what we call) *theoretical interstices*, imagined as conceptual spaces outside what is claimed by each of the five XSP theoretical perspectives; that is, spaces where no theoretical perspective takes dominance. The two approaches are clearly distinguished through their underlying assumptions on theoretical dominance. Specifically, theoretical interstices in our work invoke the image of unclaimed territory that falls between, rather than within, the figurative boundaries of accepted theoretical perspectives. Thus, theoretical interstices are also distinct to theoretical gaps, which refer to a specific absence, limitation, or unexplored aspect within a particular theory. By contrast, theoretical interstices in our work are imagined and operationalized as inclusive spaces that encourage the exploration and development of new knowledge.

In this paper, we show how both approaches to theoretical cross-pollination (that is, when a theoretical perspective informs other perspectives or when theoretical perspectives interact at theoretical interstices) may address open questions on XSP policy and practice. We also show how both approaches may contribute to advance our knowledge of caused for XSP failure - so far, limited through examining complex XSP interdependencies through standalone theories. Our insights generate tangible implications for managers willing to effectively cope with such complexities, which we articulate together with suggestions.

Third, our work helps the advancement of XSP research as a field through offering a synthesis, a roadmap and – equally importantly – a toolkit to XSP researchers. In our work, we showcase an innovative approach to synthesize simultaneously across phases and across theories; we identify two routes for theoretical cross-pollination – informing and interacting; we define and offer the notions of ‘theoretical interstices’ and ‘theoretical topology’; and we highlight the role of theoretical interstices in theoretical cross-pollination. The toolkit of approaches and notions offered in this paper, may hopefully accelerate the advancement of XSP research.

## METHODOLOGY

Research on XSPs has been reviewed before (Bryson et al., 2006; Clarke and Crane, 2018; Quélin et al., 2017; Selsky and Parker, 2005). Theoretical and empirical work, however, has advanced significantly since early reviews (Bryson et al., 2006; Selsky and Parker, 2005) were published. Compared to more recent ones, we broaden Clarke and Crane’s scope (2018), to cover factors affecting the formation, management, and value creation and dissemination of XSPs, and do so from different theoretical perspectives. Unlike Gray and Purdy (2018), we identify multiple theoretical perspectives in prior XSP research (we find five dominant perspectives, one of which is the institutional) and delving into XSP dynamics across phases. Theoretically, we expand Quélin et al. (2017) focus on three perspectives (institutional, resource-based, and micro-economics) and on value creation, by considering the broader XSP process and recognizing two additional perspectives (managerial and organizational cognition; stakeholder and social evaluations, together accounting for 87 additional articles).

### Scope, Sources, and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria for our Systematic Review

Our review used *Business Source Complete* as the main database. We searched this database through an extensive list of single keywords such as ‘public-private’ and ‘XSP\*’, and combinative keywords such as ‘(Multi-stakeholder or “Cross-sector”) AND (collaboration\* or partnership\* or tie\* or initiative\* or collaborating or coalition\* or cooperation\*)’, applied to the title, abstract, or subject terms of articles published between 1980 to 2021. We did not use keywords such as ‘private-private’, ‘same-sector’ or ‘strategic alliances’ because these types of partnerships are mainly among private firms and the focus of our study is on the partnerships formed across sectors. The complete list of keywords is provided in Table I.

The 27 academic outlets listed in Figure 1 were derived through a combination of two major journal rankings, which allowed us to restrict our search to high-quality academic outlets. Based on the Academic Journal Guide (2018) by Chartered ABS, we focused on the 4\* and four outlets in Ethics-CSR-Management, Entrepreneurship and small business, International Business, Innovation, Organization Studies, Strategy, and Public sector categories yielded a selection of 23 journals. Based on the *Financial Times* top 50 journals, we

Table I. List of keywords used to extract relevant articles from the selected outlets

Public – private	+ [collaboration(s), partnership(s), tie(s), initiative(s), collaborating, coalition(s), cooperation(s)]
Public – [Third-party or Third-sector]	
Private – [Third-party or Third-sector]	
Public – [Not-for-profit or non-profit or NFP]	
Private – [Not-for-profit or non-profit or NFP]	
Multi-party or multi-stakeholder or multi-sector or multi-sectoral	
Cross-sector or cross-sectoral or between sector or sectoral	
XS	
Collaboration or partnership(s)	+ across sectors
Collaborating or partnering	
XSP(s), PPP(s)	



Figure 1. The distribution of the selected papers across journals

complemented the above list of journals with those included in the Management, Ethics, Entrepreneurship, and International Business categories of the FT 50 list, thus adding two extra journals to the pool of previously selected outlets. Finally, to account for the fact that research on XSP originally initiated in ethics-related and non-profit journals, we included *Business & Society* and *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* in our analyses, resulting in the 27 high quality and highly-relevant academic outlets listed in Figure 1.

This selection resulted in a set of 561 publications. We categorized publications based on their relevance and excluded those in which the label of XSP was attributed to agreements which do not present the key distinguishing characteristics of XSPs: voluntary, collaborative, cross-sector, engaging in intentional exchange and the co-development of resources, aimed at public issues (Le Ber and Branzei, 2010; Waddock, 1991). Further, we excluded those articles that provide a descriptive account of XSPs or discuss specific cases of XSPs without theorizing about relevant causal relationships. Our final sample of articles consists of 289 empirical (quantitative and qualitative) and conceptual papers (Appendix A1 in Supporting Information) (Figure 2). We also sampled and analysed prominent books in the field. We started with six highly cited and well-known ones, and then through citation analysis, added four more (we report our findings in depth in Appendix A2 in Supporting Information).

Overall, our analysis indicates similarities in terms of the phases of the process these works identify, and the theoretical perspectives they adopt. For each phase, we synthesized the main findings of prior work into broader categories (which we provide in depth in Appendices A3a–c in Supporting Information). We then identified the main theoretical perspectives adopted by prior literature to examine each phase (Table II). Finally, we explored how the five theoretical perspectives could be used to enrich one another and to provide new directions for future research (see also Appendices A4a–e) in Supporting Information.

## A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW OF THE XSP PROCESS

Despite decades of XSP research, scholars and practitioners continue to grapple with fundamental questions on XSP process and how this may ultimately affect their impact (or lack thereof). We started our exploration this process by organizing past research on XSPs around three broad phases that characterize their unfolding. Some studies focused on the *formation* of the partnership, examining the conditions that foster recourse to this organizational form. Others examined the tensions that may arise as these partnerships begin to operate – a phase we refer to as *management* – and how these tensions can be resolved. Finally, other research focused on the outcome of these partnerships, in terms of *value creation, dissemination, and expansion*.

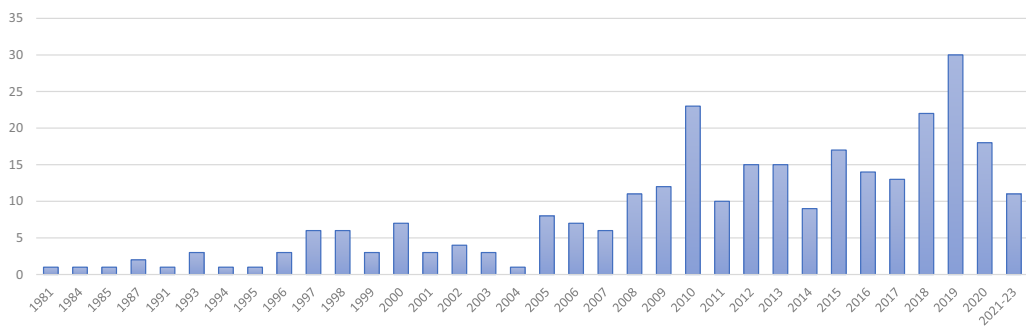


Figure 2. The distribution of the selected papers across years. The number of articles for the last column i.e., year 2021–23 is reflective of those papers that were accepted for publication before September 2021, the date when we finalized the sample for our literature review. Some of these articles appeared in press after 2021

Table II. Theoretical perspectives on XSPs

	<i>Institutional</i>	<i>Micro-economic behaviour</i>	<i>Capabilities and resources</i>	<i>Managerial and organizational cognition</i>	<i>Stakeholder and social evaluations</i>
Theoretical focus	Tensions and opportunities associated with institutional complexity	Transaction and agency costs arising from partners' motivations and contractual arrangements	Generated, shared, and required capabilities and resources among partners and between partners and external stakeholders	The overlap or incompatibilities among leaders' and also members' identities, values, and interpretative processes	External stakeholders' social evaluation of partners and the partnership
Theoretical references	Institutional theory	Transaction Costs Economics; agency theory	Resource dependence theory; knowledge-based view; dynamic capabilities	Identity theory; social and cognitive psychology	Stakeholder theory; social evaluations theory; social movement literature
Central concern in XSP Formation phase	Assessing potential conflicts between different logics	Safeguarding against possible partners' opportunism and staffing decisions about employees' motivations	Maximizing potential opportunities for learning and resource sharing	Minimizing potential identity threats and value incongruences and choosing the communication approach	Ensuring the legitimacy of the partners and the partnership
Central concern in XSP Management phase	Managing logics through combining, prioritizing, oscillating, tolerating, or challenging	Re-evaluating and, if necessary, renegotiating contract terms and governance modes	Facilitating the integration and sharing of resources; assessing resource-fit and capability-fit with the partner	Designing an efficient identity model and facilitating an open context for members' communication	Addressing and/or countering sources of legitimacy threat

(Continues)

Table II. (Continued)

	<i>Institutional</i>	<i>Micro-economic behaviour</i>	<i>Capabilities and resources</i>	<i>Managerial and organizational cognition</i>	<i>Stakeholder and social evaluations</i>
Central concern in XSP value dissemination	Recognition of parties' role in conflict navigation	Reducing other parties' ex-post opportunistic behaviour	Avoiding the spillover and enabling the storage of knowledge; fair assessment of parties' resource values	Minimizing identity loss after XSP; recognition of parties' role in identity and discourse management	Recognition of parties' role in legitimacy or marginalization work

### XSP Formation Phase

Prior studies in XSPs have investigated the factors that influence the likelihood and type of partnership formed among parties (Appendix A3a in Supporting Information). We have detailed these factors into categories i.e., *institutional and market conditions* such as political and market uncertainty (e.g., Gutiérrez et al., 2016; Kivleniece and Quelin, 2012), *partners' needs* like access to complementary resources or the need to share risks (e.g., Di Domenico et al., 2009; Greenwood and Empson, 2003; Lazzarini, 2020), *partners' values* such as organizational mission and political ideology (e.g., Seitanidi et al., 2010), *partners' strengths* including managers' technical expertise and partners' social embeddedness (e.g., Bruce et al., 2019; Lashitew et al., 2020), *partnership characteristics* such as the levels of investment in the partnership (e.g., Simpson et al., 2011), and *social evaluations* of partners and the partnership by different actors (e.g., Fransen and Burgoon, 2014; Zeimers et al., 2019). In the formation phase, parties may intentionally or unintentionally ignore factors whose consideration proves to be important only later when partnership evolves. These factors include *structural and operational considerations* such as postponing the design of an appropriate partnership configuration (e.g., Van Tulder and Keen, 2018), and *problem characteristics* including social issues/ complexities (e.g., Gray, 1985; Waddock and Post, 1995).

### XSP Management Phase

*Sources of internal and external conflicts in XSPs.* XSPs' management phase is fraught with conflicts between parties (i.e., internal conflicts) or parties and actors outside the partnership (i.e., external conflicts). As detailed in Appendix A3b in Supporting Information, internal conflicts can emerge between the parties because of a number of reasons, including the *divergence of goals and values* among parties (e.g., Cabral, 2017; Jay, 2013), *practice differences* in e.g., communication approaches (e.g., Koschmann et al., 2012), *power imbalances* between parties (e.g., Paik et al., 2019), *contractual and trust-based frictions*



emerging from e.g., perceptions of opportunism (e.g., Kivleniece and Quelin, 2012), and *learning tensions* that usually arise when partners have different learning strategies (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2017). Conflicts can also be external emerging from *legitimacy challenges* expressed by e.g., community or activists (e.g., Logue and Grimes, 2022), *authority violation* that increases the disapproval by stakeholders who favour maintaining public standards regarding the appropriate exercise of the state authority (e.g., Bhanji and Oxley, 2013), and *stakeholders' power and voice* that can naturally escalate the frictions around partnerships (e.g., Boghossian and Marques, 2019).

*The resolution of internal and external conflicts in XSPs.* Different strategies can be employed to resolve internal conflicts including *frame management* by e.g., prioritizing one frame or integrating frames into a unique one (e.g., Ahmadimab and Chowdhury, 2019; Reay and Hinings, 2005), *effective communication and emotion guidance* through e.g., creating 'spaces for negotiation' among individuals, *practice demarcation* which entails e.g., the clarification of practice boundaries among employees (e.g., Rivera-Santos et al., 2017), *improved monitoring* (e.g., Murphy et al., 2015), and *knowledge organization* (Caldwell et al., 2017). External conflicts can be resolved through *trust building* by e.g., engaging conveners as the 'brokers of trust' (e.g., Trujillo, 2018), *legitimacy work* by e.g., increasing XSPs' external transparency and the enforcement of rules (Mena and Palazzo, 2012), and *bridging* that engages fringe stakeholders and increases the social embeddedness of the partnership (Murphy and Arenas, 2010). *External managerial capabilities* e.g., the ability to manage stakeholder diversity (Powell et al., 2018) and *inter-convening abilities* (e.g., Jayawarna et al., 2020) can improve the resolution of external conflicts.

### **XSP Value Creation, Dissemination, and Expansion Phase**

*Value creation and dissemination within XSPs.* As presented in detail in Appendix A3c in Supporting Information, the creation and dissemination of value within XSPs can be influenced by partners' *capabilities* and *experience* e.g., conflict management capability and prior experience in forming XSPs (Kort and Klijn, 2011; Murphy et al., 2015), *shared resources and knowledge* among parties e.g., financial resources and partnership-specific investments (e.g., Weber et al., 2017), *governance* regarding e.g., self-enforcing safeguards (e.g., trust), relational commitment (e.g., Kasabov, 2015), accountability structures, and explicit targets (Alonso and Andrews, 2019; MacDonald et al., 2019), and the *failure to resolve conflicts* regarding e.g., partners' opportunism and stakeholders' social activism (Kivleniece and Quelin, 2012).

*Value expansion beyond XSPs' boundaries.* XSP outcomes can go beyond the boundaries of the partnership and its intended beneficiaries and lead to *capability development* such as absorptive capacity (e.g., Parente et al., 2021) and dynamic capabilities (Dentoni et al., 2016), or *capability destruction* by e.g., detrimental learning races (Kim and Parkhe, 2009), *new partnership experience* (Quelin et al., 2019) or scaling down in partnership formation (Egels-Zandén and Wahlqvist, 2007), *regulation formation* through cooperation among firms and co-opting government agencies (e.g., Faerman et al., 2001; Zhou, 2017), and *innovation*

beyond the focus of XSP by e.g., improving patenting outputs, social innovation, and regional entrepreneurship (Kaiser and Kuhn, 2012; McDermott et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2019). Figure 3 summarizes the key topics in XSPs' three phases and illustrates cross-phase linkages.

### A THEORETICAL TOPOLOGY OF XSP RESEARCH

Scholars have leveraged various theoretical perspectives to the examination of XSPs, each importantly contributing deep insights into XSP purpose, process, and impact (or lack thereof) (e.g., Bryson et al., 2015; Emerson et al., 2012). Our review reveals the use of five major theoretical perspectives – including two perspectives unaccounted for in prior XSP reviews (e.g., Quélin et al., 2017). In this section, we explain the theoretical focus and references of each perspective, as well as their central concern regarding each phase of XSPs. We also discuss which concerns have been adequately addressed by prior work on XSPs (See Table II), and the absence of some. By doing so, we produce what we refer to as a *theoretical topology* of XSPs. In the next few sections, we leverage our within-perspective deep insights to identify ways to push the frontier of XSP research by bringing together these perspectives in a cross-theoretical synthesis.

### Institutional Perspective

An institutional perspective has been adopted to examine how various elements of the institutional context, such as institutional uncertainty (Gutiérrez et al., 2016), institutional

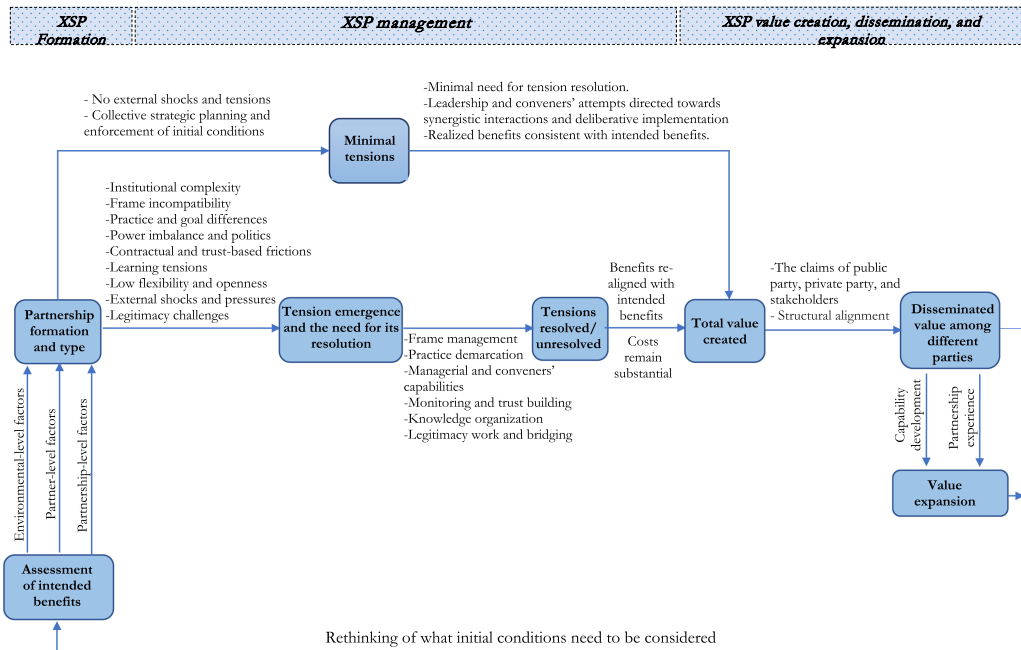


Figure 3. An overview of extant XSP literature per phase

pluralism (Coston, 1998), institutional support (Busom and Fernández-Ribas, 2008; Lamine et al., 2021), institutional entry barriers (Xing et al., 2020), institutional development (Quelin et al., 2019), and institutional coherence (Vurro et al., 2010) affect XSP operations and performance.

Research in this perspective has also used the notion of institutional logic – understood as a set of foundational organizing principles that characterize different institutional spheres (Friedland and Alford, 1991) – to examine the influence of the different goals, values, and priorities that characterize private and public partners (e.g., Battilana et al., 2017). They argued that XSPs operate in conditions of institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011) – because of the fundamental conflict between what they have referred to as ‘state’ and/or ‘community’ logics vs. ‘market’ logic (e.g., Hesse et al., 2019) – and looked at how this complexity affects the partnership as collaboration unfolds, as well as factors and conditions that may intensify or mitigate this conflict.

This perspective drew attention to how tensions between partners may reflect conflicting logics (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhuri, 2021; Ashraf et al., 2017; Hesse et al., 2019), and have highlighted the importance, in the initial phase, of prior experience in cross-sector collaboration to mitigate this conflict (Murphy et al., 2015); in this phase, joint pilot projects and displays of commitment will also help reconcile differences (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhuri, 2021). Other studies have focused on how, in the management phase, frictions between partners can be addressed by prioritizing one logic over the other (Reay and Hinings, 2005), oscillating between logics as the collaboration unfolds (Jay, 2013; Murphy et al., 2015), embracing and tolerating complexity (Nicholls and Huybrechts, 2016), or integrating different logics into a new set of frames, goals and principles (Ahmadsimab and Chowdhuri, 2019; Le Ber and Branzei, 2010; Stadler and Van Wassenhove, 2016) or a new organizational identity (Reissner, 2019).

While this perspective has been widely applied to investigate tensions arising in the management phase, and how they can be managed, more work is required to understand the role of the institutional context and institutional logics in XSP formation, and value creation and dissemination. For example, regarding value dissemination, the party that in the management phase, has put more effort into managing the logic conflicts or adapting to the unfavourable institutional factors may be entitled to receive a greater share of the valued created.

### **Micro-Economic Behaviour Perspective**

This perspective’s main focus is on the costs involved in organizing the partnership and the ones associated with the risk of opportunistic behaviour of partners, external stakeholders, and conveners with regard to contractual agreements (Greenwood and Empson, 2003; Kivleniece and Quelin, 2012; Simpson et al., 2011). The theoretical foundations of this perspective are rooted in transaction cost economics (Williamson, 1979) and agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). The central concern of the perspective in the formation phase is designing safeguards, either contractual or informal, that minimize post-partnership opportunistic behaviour by partners. These safeguards can also help

partners' staffing decisions and monitoring of employees' opportunistic behaviour (e.g., free-riding) (Rivera-Santos et al., 2017). The main concern in the management phase will be partners' flexibility to re-evaluate and re-negotiate contractual terms and selected modes of governance (Cabral, 2017). The absence of such flexibility can lead to holdup and non-cooperative behaviour and damage value creation (Alonso and Andrews, 2019). Our review reveals that most of the current studies have focused on the role of this perspective in XSP formation of XSPs, with a few recent examples trying to apply micro-economic behaviour to value creation (e.g., Kivleniece and Quelin, 2012). More research is required to understand the role of this perspective in the management and value dissemination phases.

### **Capabilities and Resources Perspective**

According to this perspective, partners and external stakeholders are dependent on respective resource exchanges (Malatesta and Smith, 2014) and generate or share different types of resources and capabilities within XSPs (e.g., McDermott et al., 2009; Reast et al., 2010). This perspective mainly draws on resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), resource-based and knowledge-based views (Barney, 1991; Grant, 2002), and dynamic capability research (Teece et al., 1997). The central concern of the perspective in the formation phase is for each party to verify the existence of complementary resources and opportunities for learning and resource sharing. However, limited managerial attention and the difficulty of gauging the value of partners' resources reduce the accuracy of assessing the potential for resource synergies. Consequently, many partnerships are formed with sub-optimal levels of resource complementarities and knowledge synergies, damaging value creation. Thus, the central concern in the management phase is the constant re-assessment of the resource- and capability-fit among partners and facilitating the creation, integration, and sharing of knowledge. However, value creation comes with hazards such as knowledge leaks and losses (Stadtler and Van Wassenhove, 2016). Thus, the focus of the perspective in the value dissemination phase is on deterring parties from excessive value extraction, avoiding knowledge spillovers, and storing co-created knowledge and capabilities.

### **Managerial and Organizational Cognition Perspective**

Individuals working in XSPs may have different interpretations and cognition of partnerships' processes and how they may impact their identities and values. The managerial and organizational cognition perspective focuses on understanding the overlap and incompatibilities among partners', leaders', and employees' interpretative processes such as identities, values, and emotions (Murphy et al., 2015; Reypens et al., 2021). This perspective draws on theories of identity (e.g., Albert and Whetten, 1985) as well as social and cognitive psychology (e.g., Stets and Burke, 2000) to understand such interpretative processes. The central concern in the formation phase is thus to minimize the formation of those partnerships that can threaten values, identities, and emotions of different individuals. However, such threats may be disguised, suppressed, or ignored by managers to lure the other party into partnering. Hence, in the management phase, the perspective

focuses on how parties can resolve identity, value, and emotion conflicts. The perspective's main concerns in the value dissemination phase centre on finding ways to minimize partners' identity loss post-partnership and designing mechanisms that account for parties' contributions in identity conflict resolution and discourse management to help them increase the share of the value they can gain. Our review indicates that the main focus of studies within this perspective has been understanding the role of managerial and organizational cognition in the XSP management phase, and hence more research is needed to connect this perspective with the XSP formation and value creation and dissemination phases.

### **Stakeholder and Social Evaluations Perspective**

This perspective concerns the engagement and evaluations of external stakeholders (e.g., communities, social activists, media) in XSPs (e.g., Gillespie et al., 2020; Mena and Palazzo, 2012). Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), social movement literature (Della Porta and Diani, 1999), communication and media research (McQuail, 1987), and theories of social evaluations (e.g., reputation, legitimacy, and stigma) (e.g., Pollock et al., 2019) inform this perspective. In the formation phase, the main concern of this perspective is the evaluations of partners' and the partnership's legitimacy because stakeholders may have different expectations on what an XSP addresses and who forms that XSP and may thus approve of specific problems to be addressed only by certain parties. Nonetheless, many partnerships are formed despite negative social evaluations by stakeholders possibly due to the scarcity of socially approved partners and the diversity of social problems. Hence, the focus of the perspective in the management phase is on ways partners can use to address the lack of legitimacy or even counter the sources of negative evaluations, through legitimacy and marginalization work (Boghossian and Marques, 2019; Rueede and Kreutzer, 2015). The main concern in the last phase is how the created value can be distributed among partners and stakeholders. Higher values can be captured by parties that played an important role in legitimacy work, and by stakeholders with higher power within the partnership ecosystem (Kivleniece and Quelin, 2012). According to our analysis, while prior work has investigated the role of stakeholders in the management and value creation phases, how stakeholders can facilitate or constrain XSP formation and how their evaluations can influence value dissemination in XSPs have been underexplored.

## **AN INTEGRATIVE CROSS-PHASE, CROSS-THEORETICAL VIEW OF XSPS**

The XSP *theoretical topology* presented in earlier sections maps the XSP field's five dominant theoretical perspectives and offers a synthesis of the vast accumulated knowledge within each perspective. It also highlights the limited synthesis of insights across theoretical perspectives, with few exceptions (Bryson et al., 2015; Quélin et al., 2017). Cross-theoretical synthesis holds the promise to mitigate the limitations of individual theories and overcome blind spots in their understanding of XSPs. Even more, cross-theoretical views may

particularly benefit the study of XSPs because XSPs are complex – including but not limited to the multiple layers of decision making (i.e., public managers, private managers, conveners) and multiple types of outcomes and their beneficiaries (e.g., social outcomes and social beneficiaries versus economic outcomes and financial outcomes' claimants).

Table II depicts our initial step in synthesizing across the five dominant XSP theoretical perspectives. It presents our understanding of how these perspectives may be brought together to cross-pollinate XSP research. Each cell in the table draws upon our earlier synthesis of within-perspective insights to identify key questions regarding the process and impact of XSPs. Each cell individually, and the Table as a whole, demonstrates the untapped potential in studying XSPs through multiple theoretical perspectives to address existing open questions.

However, our work goes beyond the insights presented in Table II. By overlaying insights from Table II, our within-perspective synthesis, and our deep exploration of XSP phases, our cross-phase, cross-theoretical integration provides valuable insights into how each perspective can *enrich* other perspectives (refer Appendices A4a–c in Supporting Information). We identify different ways in which these enrichment possibilities may occur – *informing* other perspectives or *interacting at the theoretical interstice* between perspectives – and identify specific research directions through each. We also emphasize the risks associated with overlooking these possibilities in XSP studies, underscoring the untapped potential of cross-pollinating theoretical perspectives to enhance our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

### **Institutional Perspective as the Enricher**

By highlighting the influence of institutional context and logics in cross-sector partnerships, an institutional perspective has the potential to *inform* other perspectives in different phases.

In the formation phase, for example, the concept of institutional complexities can sensitize scholars to consider complexities associated with resources parties can bring into partnerships (i.e., whether partners' resources are difficult to imitate or integrate, Henderson et al., 2022) as well as those related to partners' agencies, values, and social evaluations (Table A4a in Supporting Information). In the management phase, the institutional perspective can inform the analysis of micro-economic behaviour, for instance, by highlighting institutional foundations of trust, as resting on perceived similarity of goals and values and encouraging research on how trust can be built, for instance, by ensuring transparency – if not convergence – of logics among partners. In the XSP value phase, finally, research has shown that the existence of a favourable institutional environment e.g., through the prevalence of quality of national institutions can enhance XSPs' value creation (Quelin et al., 2019). This can inform the value mechanisms of other perspectives by inviting them to account for the influence of the broader context on the degree of trust and opportunism displayed by the parties, as well as national resources, values, collective identities, and national reputation as potential antecedents of value creation and capture.

At the *interstice* between institutional perspectives and other perspectives, untapped but significant possibilities are abundant. In the formation phase, concepts such as conflicting

logics or unfavourable institutional environment may interact with factors considered by other perspectives such as opportunistic behaviour (Lamothe and Lamothe, 2012) or external social evaluations (Kim et al., 2012). To illustrate this point, we note that the existence of resource complementarities is one of the main antecedents of XSPs' formation (Di Domenico et al., 2009). However, this relationship has been examined mainly without consideration of institutional factors. Thus, by accounting for the interaction of logics and resources, a new but intriguing question that emerges naturally is whether and how institutional complexity will influence the formation of XSPs in the presence of resource complementarities among partners. To what degree, for instance, does institutional complexity affect the parties' willingness to explore complementarities, or their ability to detect them in the first place?

In the management phase, future research may ask whether methods used to resolve institutional conflicts can facilitate or constrain other perspectives' efforts in the management of frictions. The emergence of conflicting logics in the management phase may, indeed, increase parties' motivations to behave opportunistically and ultimately generate value loss in the partnerships. Also, extant literature examining the role of institutional factors in XSPs' management has implicitly assumed that institutional logics and complexity remain stable over time. By relaxing this assumption, we can ask the question of whether and how changes may occur as the XSP operates, and how they will influence the cognition and emotions of partners (Sloan and Oliver, 2013).

Finally, research at the interstice between institutional perspective and stakeholder theory may help illuminate contextual factors shaping XSPs' social evaluations. How does the institutional context affect the capacity of social activists to influence the outcomes of cross-sector partnerships and the dissemination of value among social beneficiaries? How can social activists and/or employees, mobilize logics to accomplish their goals?

*Ignoring the enriching role of institutional perspective and XSP failure.* Whether directly informing, or at the interstice with other perspectives, ignoring the institutional perspective can limit our understanding of XSPs' failure to achieve the desired impact. For the XSP formation, ignoring '*complexity heterogeneity*' i.e., the existence of varieties of complexities regarding resources, agency, values and identities, and third parties' social evaluations can lead to the formation of sub-optimal XSPs because conflicts will emerge out of unaccounted complexities. Besides, ignoring how unfavourable institutional factors can weaken the effects of resource complementarities, opportunism, values/identity, and legitimacy on XSP formation may lead to an '*over-estimation fallacy*' i.e., over-estimating the importance of each factor on the success or failure of XSPs. That is many XSPs may fail in an unfavourable institutional context despite e.g., presence of complementary resources and positive social evaluation about these XSPs.

In the management stage, ignoring how managers can be informed by institutional-related methods of conflict resolution, can lead to '*underestimating the practice repertoire*' available to resolve knowledge, trust, values/identity, and legitimacy frictions and thus inefficient management of XSPs. Furthermore, ignoring how logic resolution efforts can influence attempts to reduce other sources of conflicts (e.g., opportunism) may prevent

managers from addressing conflict sources in one perspective (e.g., legitimacy) by the many strategies developed in the institutional perspective, and thus leads to the development of a ‘*myopic view towards conflict resolution*’.

In the value outcomes phase, ignoring the ‘*institutional relevance*’ i.e., the capacity of institutional/national context for value creation and dissemination and its link to trust, resources, values/identity, and legitimacy at the national and institutional level may limit the spillover of the value to actors beyond the focal partnership. In addition, ignoring how factors in the institutional environment can interact with mechanisms of value capture in other perspectives (e.g., partner’s opportunism) leads to the consideration of ‘*isolated value mechanisms*’ that misleads partners and researchers about the amount of value that needs to be assimilated to each actor (Figure 4).

*Managerial implications of using institutional perspective as the enricher.* Managers’ awareness and monitoring of key complexities beyond institutional complexity (such as these we illuminate on Table A3a in Supporting Information) for XSP formation can prepare them to form better partnerships. Besides, managers’ assessment of the degree of institutional factors’ interaction with factors suggested by other perspectives helps managers focus more on factors with the highest co-impact on the formation likelihood of successful partnerships. Managers can also approach the conflicts in trust, emotions, resource sharing and integration, and stakeholder relationships in XSP by considering methods in dealing institutional conflicts (e.g., trust oscillation). In the

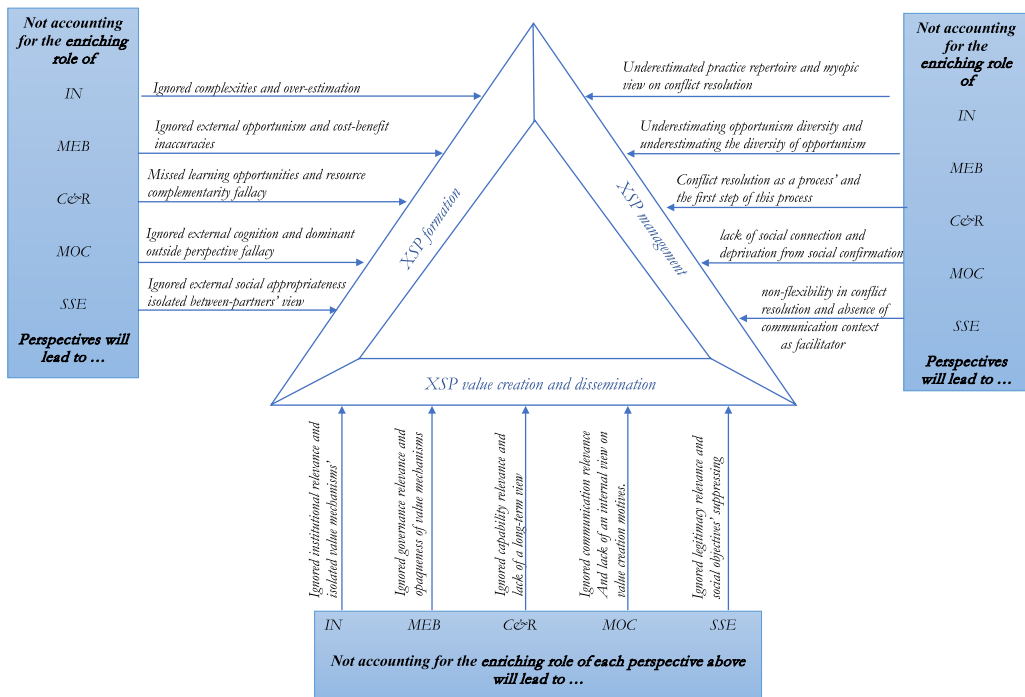


Figure 4. Mechanisms that lead to XSP failure when informing and interstice among theoretical perspectives are ignored



value dissemination phase, managers need to understand and measure institutional, national, and global capacities in trust, resources, values/identity, and legitimacy as important contributing factors to the value outcomes in XSPs.

### **Micro-Economic Behaviour Perspective as the Enricher**

The micro-economic behaviour perspective considers the costs associated with XSPs' transactions as well as actors' opportunistic behaviours (e.g., Greenwood and Empson, 2003; Kivleniece and Quelin, 2012), and focuses on governance designs and contractual agreements that minimize such costs.

This perspective *informs* other perspectives through contributing concepts of opportunism and trust to other perspectives' core concepts and mechanisms (see Table A4b in Supporting Information for details). In the formation phase, the main concepts of micro-economic behaviour perspective i.e., trust, agency, and opportunism can inform the consideration of novel concepts in other perspectives. For example, specific institutional environments may drive different levels of a partner's opportunistic behaviour. Thus, the novel concept of institutional opportunism can be explored and expanded in the institutional perspective. Similarly, social evaluators' opportunism or the role of agency in resource control can be other concepts that can be seeded by micro-economic behaviour perspective. In the management phase, the important question is whether the main methods of conflict resolution in this perspective (e.g., trust building, monitoring, and procedural fairness) can inform novel mechanisms in conflict management in other perspectives. For example, the institutional perspective can take a fairness approach in dealing with conflicts in the management phase. Similarly, the stakeholder and social evaluations perspective can be informed with the insights of the micro-economic behaviour perspective on trust-building to understand how trust can be built between partners/partnership and external evaluators. Finally, in the value outcomes phase, micro-economic behaviour perspective's value mechanisms e.g., governance forms with explicit targets, relation-specific investments and mutual trust can inform those mechanisms in other perspectives. For example, enforcing contracts for generating a mutual identity (management and cognition perspective) could have material implications for XSP value creation and dissemination. Also, bridging the concept of contractual agreements with the stakeholder perspective, one might expect different value outcomes in the presence or absence of formal contracts with civil society actors.

At the *interstice* between micro-economic behaviour perspectives and other perspectives, promising possibilities emerge when MEB concepts of e.g., trust and opportunism may strengthen or weaken the effect of other perspectives' elements on XSP formation. While the existing focus of this perspective is to minimize the opportunistic behaviour within XSPs when it comes to resource sharing and value capture (Alonso and Andrews, 2019), this sparks new research directions at the interstice with institutional perspectives, as it provides insights on how partners need to design contracts and choose governance modes (before the XSP formation) to mitigate the emergence of logic conflicts and resolve the emerged conflicts based on formal contractual terms. Future research would benefit to consider whether concepts that give rise to or the mechanisms to minimize partners' opportunism can in fact facilitate or

constrain the effect of other perspectives' elements in the management of frictions. For example, exploring the interaction of micro-economic behaviour and capability/resource perspectives can generate interesting avenues for future research. One important yet underexplored question is whether and how partners' history of opportunistic behaviour can impede the co-development of capabilities and sharing of resources among partners. The micro-economic behaviour can also inspire new research avenues for XSP research when considered in tandem with the managerial and organizational cognition perspective which is mainly concerned with identity, emotion, and values (Hesse et al., 2019). The violation of contractual agreements and the partner's opportunistic behaviour can for example interact with managers' and employees' cognitive outcomes (e.g., identity) and escalate frictions among partners. Finally, micro-economic behaviour can interact with other perspectives' elements in the creation and dissemination of value and co-determine such outcomes in XSPs. For example, by linking the micro-economic perspective with the stakeholder approach, scholars can provide answers to the pressing question of whether and when different governance modes (e.g., integrative versus autonomous) or contractual agreements (e.g., formal versus informal) with conveners can maximize the value disseminated to XSP social beneficiaries?

*Ignoring the enriching role of micro-economic behaviour perspective and XSP failure.* Whether directly informing, or at the interstice with other perspectives, ignoring the MEB perspective can limit our understanding of frequent XSPs' failure to achieve the desired impact. In the formation phase, ignoring '*external opportunism, trust, and agency*' i.e., sources of opportunism and trust in actors beyond the potential partners may lead to the formation of XSPs with unforeseen frictions. Besides, ignoring agency and uncertainty factors can distort managers' cost-benefit analysis in the XSP formation based on factors related to logics, resources, identity, and legitimacy, and thus lead to '*cost-benefit inaccuracies*' which are usually harmful to the success of formed XSPs. In the management stage, ignoring multiple sources of opportunistic behaviour in institutional, resource-sharing, values/identity, and social evaluation contexts can lead to '*underestimating the diversity of opportunism sources*' and inefficient management of conflicts. Furthermore, ignoring the positive effect of publicizing trust-building attempts on other efforts to resolve conflicts (e.g., identity unification or legitimacy work) may reduce the effectiveness of efforts directed towards other conflicts i.e., the problem of '*wasted efforts in conflict resolution*'. In the value outcomes phase, ignoring the '*governance relevance*' i.e., possessing a governance mindset towards the issues of logics, resources, values and identity, and legitimacy hurts the creation and dissemination of value because it leaves room for subjective interpretation of partners' contribution in resolving conflicts and collaboration efforts and thus makes it difficult to objectively quantify partners' value contributions and deserved shares. In addition, ignoring the moderating role of contractual agreements on value mechanisms related to issues of logics, resources, values/identity, and legitimacy leads to the lack of understanding about whether positive or negative value outcomes being determined by formal contracts and governance structures or by informal decisions and processes i.e., '*opaqueness of value mechanisms*'. This opaqueness might reduce partners' motivation to

contribute to value creation in XSPs by removing logic conflicts, sharing resources, embracing value differences, and managing legitimacy.

*Managerial implications of using micro-economic behaviour perspective as the enricher.* Accounting for the enriching role of micro-economic behaviour perspective leads to key implications for managers' coping with XSPs' inefficiencies and negative outcomes. Managers' awareness and monitoring of key sources of opportunism, beyond the partner opportunism, can ensure the formation of more successful partnerships. Besides, managers' assessment of the degree of opportunism impact on other key factors can help them combat the inaccuracies of cost–benefit analysis in XSP formation. As per XSP management, managers' understanding of the importance of trust-building, fairness, and monitoring in issues beyond the relationship with the partner (e.g., with third-party evaluators or social beneficiaries) can lead to low-friction experience with the XSP management. Along the same lines of argument, managers' understanding of the mitigating effect of trust-building and monitoring on other sources of friction in XSPs can facilitate the entire process of conflict resolution.

### **Capabilities and Resources Perspective as the Enricher**

The capability and resource perspective focuses on the exchange and co-development of resources and capabilities among partners (e.g., Alonso and Andrews, 2019; Ashraf et al., 2017).

This perspective *informs* other perspectives in different phases (see Table A4c in Supporting Information for detailed explanations). In the formation phase, concepts such as resources, capabilities, and learning can inform the consideration of new concepts in other perspectives. For example, learning processes (e.g., knowledge integration, knowledge creation, knowledge preservation) might vary across different institutional contexts. Also, learning can happen at the collective level among institutions of a specific environment. Thus, the institutional perspective can be informed by the resources perspective through the concept of institutional learning. Similarly, the capabilities and resources perspective can also seed other concepts such as uncertainty coping capability and social evaluations' dealing capability in other theoretical perspectives. In the management phase, the key question would be whether the main methods of conflict resolution in capabilities and resources perspective e.g., resource-flow facilitation, capability development, and knowledge sharing/integration can inform novel mechanisms for other perspectives' management of conflicts. For example, the stakeholder and social evaluations perspective can be informed with insights from the capabilities and resources perspective in understanding the resource relationship between partners and social evaluators (e.g., social activists, and media). Similarly, the micro-economic behaviour perspective can take a capability development approach towards the ability to resolve trust conflicts and examine whether and how such capabilities develop and what consequences they can have on future conflicts. Finally, in the value outcomes phase, the capabilities perspective's value mechanisms e.g., avoiding knowledge spillovers, accrued capabilities, and resource complementarities can inform those mechanisms in other perspectives. For example, it would be intriguing

to understand how trust among different actors within the partnership can be stored because such preservation can have a substantive impact on XSP value creation and dissemination. Furthermore, linking the concept of logics from the institutional perspective and knowledge spillover from the resources and capabilities perspective, one could wonder about the possibility of logic spillover from one partner to another or to actors in the broader context. Such possibility while challenging the current perceptions about logics i.e., they require resolution, opens new avenues about how logics can be dealt and how they impact XSPs' value outcomes.

At the *interstice* between the capabilities and resource perspective and other perspectives, we argue that concepts of e.g., knowledge, capabilities, and resources may moderate the effect of other perspectives' elements on XSP formation. For example, by integrating the assumptions and predictions of resource/capability and micro-economic behaviour perspectives questions such as the following could be answered: whether the mere possession of no-tangible resources (e.g., a secret recipe or exclusive access to the community) by one partner may raise its perception of other partners' intention to act opportunistically without the behaviour actually turning into action. In the management phase where the interactive role of resources and capabilities with the effect of other perspectives' elements in the management of frictions is concerned, one could think of the following areas of cross-pollination: First, the capability/resource perspective can feed the institutional perspective by accounting for the role of resource dependencies among partners in whether and how institutional conflicts escalate or get resolved. One could argue that the presence of tight resource dependencies motivates partners to suppress any potential conflicts including the logic conflict to minimize the loss in value creation. One could also argue that when resource dependencies become asymmetric, the powerful partner may decide to impose its logic over all members of the XSP. Future research can shed light on these questions by considering the interaction of logics and resources. Second, the capability/resource perspective can also be fruitfully linked with the managerial and organizational cognition perspective. The co-development of capabilities and the sharing of resources often require mutual learning and collaborative interactions between the employees and managers of two parties as well as those of the conveners. The collaboration among these individuals may influence how they perceive their professional identities, the identity of their organization, and the XSP's identity and can evoke different forms of emotions. By bridging the two perspectives, scholars can understand when and how resource collaborations and efforts to develop capabilities can lead to positive or negative identity perceptions and experienced emotions. Finally, in the value creation and dissemination stage, one would expect to see resource-related mechanisms ease or hinder the effect of other perspectives' elements on XSPs' value outcomes. For example, consider the capability/resource and the stakeholder and social evaluations perspectives. While the link between these two perspectives has been widely overlooked in the extant XSP research, one can argue that the co-development of capabilities and resource sharing can positively influence the social evaluations by internal and external stakeholders. For example, partners' employees may evaluate the partnership to be more legitimate when both parties contribute to capability-building and resource-sharing in a constructive manner. Similarly, external stakeholders may

also become satisfied with the smooth exchange of resources among partners and the efficient allocation of those resources to value-creation paths. Overall, future research can examine those resources and capabilities that each audience values, so that it expresses a positive social evaluation of the partnership and partners. This is important because audiences' positive social evaluations can reduce tensions in value creation and align future claims to gain a share of that value.

*Ignoring the enriching role of capabilities and resources perspective and XSP failure.* Whether directly informing, or at the interstice with other perspectives, ignoring the capabilities and resources perspective can limit our understanding of noted XSPs' failure to achieve the desired impact. In the formation phase, ignoring 'learning opportunities and capabilities' i.e., sources of learning opportunities and capability identification beyond the domain of partners' tangible and intangible resources may constrain the overall level of potential in formed XSPs. Learning can occur about the partner's logics and monitoring processes as well as external evaluators' motivations and strategies. Besides, ignoring the interactive nature of capabilities and resources with other factors important for XSP formation has led to the failure of many XSPs primarily formed based on one factor i.e., resource complementarities. We label this bias in the formation of XSPs as a 'resource complementarity downsides fallacy'. In the management stage, ignoring to see conflict resolution in different perspectives as a process that takes time demotivates partners to develop relevant capabilities required to cope with the conflicts. This 'conflict resolution as a process' view is informed by the gradual nature of capability development and resource sharing/integration processes in the capabilities and resources perspective. Another failure in XSP can originate from the perception that does not consider knowledge creation and integration as the pre-requisite for any interactions and conflict resolution efforts among parties i.e., 'naturally the first step in conflict resolution'. Such a mistake makes the consideration of other conflicts irrelevant. In the value outcomes phase, ignoring the 'capability relevance' for other concepts i.e., the possibility of spillover, storage, and accrual regarding logics, trust, values/identity, and legitimacy leads to inefficient value dissemination and expansion. In addition, due to the long-term nature of capability development and knowledge creation, ignoring the moderating role of learning, knowledge, and innovation on issues of logics, trust, values/identity, and legitimacy leads to failure in capturing the long-term effect of these issues on value outcomes i.e., 'lack of a long-term view'.

*Managerial implications of using capabilities and resources perspective as the enricher.* Managers' awareness and identification of critical sources of learning and capabilities beyond those of partners before the formation of the partnership can broaden the capacities of the formed XSP. Besides, managers' assessment of the degree and direction of resource complementarities' influence on other key factors required for XSP formation can reduce the blind reliance on resources in XSP formation. In the management phase, managers need to understand the value of capability development and sharing in domains beyond financial resources and knowledge (e.g., partners' logics, and partners' monitoring processes). In the value outcome phase, managers' understanding of the importance of applying spillover, storage, and accrual mechanisms to concepts of logics, trust, values

and identity, and legitimacy can help them avoid value losses. Finally, managers' ability to choose the optimal level of knowledge sharing, integration, storage, and spillover can minimize the value capture frictions driven by e.g., logic frictions, stakeholder pressures, and identity threats.

### **Managerial and Organizational Cognition Perspective as the Enricher**

The managerial and organizational cognition perspective mainly focuses on managers' and employees' interpretative processes i.e., identities, emotions, and values within XSPs (e.g., Sloan and Oliver, 2013).

We articulate our understanding of how this perspective *informs* other perspectives in different phases (see [Table A4d](#) in Supporting Information for detailed explanations). In the phase of formation, cognition- and interpretative-related concepts such as identity, values, and emotions can inform novel concepts to emerge in other perspectives. For example, the concept of cognitive resources can be suggested by informing role of cognition perspective on capabilities and resources view. Similarly, opportunistic communication frames and institutional communication context are other concepts that can be informed by the cognition perspective and further explored. The informing role of the cognition perspective in the management phase concerns how methods of conflict resolution e.g., identity model, communication openness and resonance, and practice demarcation, inform novel conflict resolution mechanisms in other perspectives. For example, the institutional perspective can be informed with insights from the cognition perspective in understanding whether and how logic can become flexible over time and communicated in a way that minimizes partners' perception of conflict. Similarly, by drawing on the concepts of frame plurality and compromising frames as strategies to cope with identity conflict, the capabilities and resources perspective could consider what it means to have plurality in resources and resource compromise in the management phase.

At the *interstice* between the managerial and organizational cognition perspective and other perspectives, we argue for the potential of concepts such as identity, values, emotion, and interpretations to generate new insights into the main concepts, conflicts, and outcomes of other perspectives in each XSP phase. For example, in the management phase, the space between the cognition perspective, identities and institutional logics may be particularly fruitful. One may argue that divergent identities may become more compatible or divergent when logics are aligned or misaligned (Battilana et al., 2017; Jay, 2013). Similarly, the cognition perspective can interact with elements of the stakeholder perspective to understand whether and how external actors e.g., media and social activists approve of the outcomes of partners' identity work ranging from a unified identity (Mair et al., 2012; Moss et al., 2011) to the co-existence of multiple identities (Logue and Grimes, 2022). Finally, in the value creation and dissemination phase, the influence of interpretative processes on value mechanisms related to capabilities and resources can be explored. More specifically, what happens to partners' resource-sharing, XSP-specific investments, and associated value outcomes for social beneficiaries when identities are compatible at the managers' level but misaligned at the employee level?

*Ignoring the enriching role of managerial and organizational cognition perspective and XSP failure.* Whether directly informing, or at the interstice with other perspectives, ignoring the cognition perspective can limit scholarly and practical knowledge about the failure of XSPs. In the formation phase, ignoring the ‘*external cognition and communication approaches*’ i.e., differences in partners’ cognitive, interpretive, and communicative approaches towards institutional context, opportunism, resource sharing, and social evaluations may explain why some XSPs with high potential for value creation are never formed. Besides, ignoring the interaction of cognitive elements with other factors important for XSP formation may provide only an outside and objective view of how these factors influence formation i.e., ‘*a dominant outside and objective perspective*’ that lacks the other side of the story which is an internal and cognized view of these factors’ influence in the XSP formation. In the management phase, ignoring the importance of communication aspects in the resolution of conflicts regarding logics, trust, resources, and legitimacy will make the process time-consuming and ambiguous i.e., the problem of the ‘*non-flexibility in conflict resolution process*’. Finally, in the value outcomes phase, ignoring the ‘*communication relevance*’ and the possibility of a collaborative and communicative approach in issues of logics, trust, resources, and legitimacy leads to inefficient value dissemination and expansion.

*Managerial implications of using managerial and organizational cognition perspective as the enricher.* Managers’ awareness and identification of critical sources of cognitive biases and communication barriers in the institutional environment, resource interactions, interactions with stakeholders, and contract designs can improve the formation of XSPs. Also, managers’ assessment of the importance of cognitive, interpretive, and communicative elements relative to other key factors can lead to the dominance of objective or subjective criteria in XSPs’ formation. In the management phase, managers’ valuing of flexibility and communication in tandem with issues from other perspectives can facilitate conflict resolution. Furthermore, through flexibility, communication, and collaboration, managers can significantly reduce the time, ambiguity, and hardships in all types of conflict resolution attempts suggested by other theoretical perspectives.

### **Stakeholder and Social Evaluations Perspective as the Enricher**

The focus of this perspective, whose development in the context of XSPs has started only recently, is the engagement of stakeholders in XSPs’ processes and their social evaluations of the partnership and partners (e.g., Mena and Palazzo, 2012; Rueede and Kreutzer, 2015).

We articulate our understanding of how this perspective *informs* other perspectives in different phases (see Appendix A4e in Supporting Information for a detailed explanation). In the phase of formation, specific concepts highlighted in this perspective e.g., conveners’ support, legitimacy of partners and partnership, and stakeholder claims and voice can inform the emergence of new concepts in other perspectives. For example, the social evaluations of opportunism i.e., how partners’ opportunism is perceived by external evaluators, partners’ social evaluations of conveners, and conveners’ identification

with the partnership. In the management phase, the informing role of the stakeholder and social evaluations perspective concerns how stakeholder-related mechanisms of conflict resolution e.g., legitimacy work and bridging, can inform new conflict resolution mechanisms in other perspectives. For example, the institutional perspective can be illuminated with the application of the concept of legitimation in logics. Existing research on XSPs has mostly provided a non-flexible account of institutional logics, where they stay unchanged over the course of the XSP development. Logic legitimation on the other hand assumes some levels of agency for partners in trying to legitimize their preferred logic for the partner and other actors around the XSP. Finally, in the value creation and capture phase, it would be intriguing to understand how partners marginalize stakeholders' activism against the partnership by suppressing their logics and resources, mechanisms that have been underexplored in the current work.

At the *interstice* between the stakeholder and social evaluations perspective and other perspectives, we highlight significant untapped potential to push our knowledge of XSPs' outcomes in the formation, management, and value phases. In the formation phase, the interstice generates new broad questions (e.g., on the moderating role of external stakeholders on the link between institutional factors and XSP formation) as well as targeted inquiries (e.g., the effect of social activism on the political and institutional uncertainty around XSPs). The involvement of social activists can disrupt internal processes as well as the partners' relationships with other stakeholders (e.g., customers, communities, politicians) (Den Hond and De Bakker, 2007). This disruption, thus, has substantial consequences on the political and institutional uncertainties and thus the motivation of partners to form XSPs or choose certain types of partnerships. These dynamics can be explored in the interstice between stakeholder and institutional perspectives. In the management phase, the stakeholder and social evaluations perspective can interact with e.g., the capabilities and resources perspective to provide novel insights. While current literature examines the reputational hurdles that negative social evaluations can generate for partners' resource exchanges with actors in the external environment (Mena and Palazzo, 2012; Rueede and Kreutzer, 2015), less is known about how social evaluations can influence the capacity to mobilize and integrate complementary resources within the partnership. For example, positive social evaluations may incentivize long-term resource commitments by partners and less conservative approaches in resource sharing. Positive social evaluations may also motivate conveners to be more openly associated with the partnership and its partners, hence facilitating the flow of resources among different actors in the partnership and minimizing knowledge frictions. The integration between stakeholder and resource perspectives can cast some light on these underexplored areas. Finally, from a value point of view, the implications of the stakeholder and social evaluations perspective can interact with e.g., those of the managerial and organizational cognition perspective. Most of the research on the outcomes of professional or organizational identities for XSPs has focused on the identity incompatibilities perceived by internal actors i.e., employees and managers. However, according to the stakeholder perspective, organizational and professional identities can be evaluated by actors external to the partnership. Hence, it is important to understand the consequences of external stakeholders' social evaluations of XSPs' managerial and professional identities for the partnership in terms of value creation and dissemination.



*Ignoring the enriching role of stakeholder and social evaluations perspective and XSP failure.* Whether directly informing, or at the interstice with other perspectives, ignoring the potential of this perspective in cross-pollinating XSP research may impede our collective learning about XSPs' frequent failures. In the formation phase, ignoring 'social appropriateness' i.e., the social evaluation aspects of institutional context, opportunism, resource sharing, and values/identity may explain why some XSPs are formed despite considerable social backlash. In the management step, ignoring to consider the importance of the social evaluation aspect in the resolution of logic, trust, resources, and identity conflicts will make these processes isolated, unbalanced, and vulnerable to abrupt external pressures ('lack of social connection in conflict resolution processes'). In addition, ignoring the interactive role of legitimacy work and bridging on other sources of conflict will deprive partners' efforts in addressing these conflicts from the positive externalities of social approval i.e., the problem of 'deprivation from social confirmation'. Finally, in the value phase of XSPs, ignoring the 'legitimacy relevance' i.e., the role of social evaluations in issues of logics, trust, resources, and identity can lead to failure in the realization of social benefits specific to each issue. Moreover, ignoring the moderating role of social evaluations on issues of logics, trust, resources, and identity may explain why many XSPs' fail to reach their intended social objectives in the value creation and dissemination phase i.e., 'social objectives' suppressing'.

*Managerial implications of using stakeholder and social evaluations perspective as the enricher.* In the formation phase, managers' awareness and identification of sources of social evaluations and stakeholder pressures at all levels of the XSP (e.g., logics, resources, identity) can reduce potential conflicts in the future that can be detrimental to the XSP's success. Besides, by assessing the significance of legitimacy and stakeholder claims relative to other key factors that impact formation decisions, managers can better decide to allocate their scarce attention between internal vs external factors. In the management phase, managers' capitalization on the positive externalities of social approval and legitimation efforts can smooth the resolution of logic, trust, resources, and identity frictions. Finally, in the value creation and dissemination phase, managers' ability to contextualize the social elements of logics, trust, resource sharing, and identity can improve each perspective's socially oriented value outcomes. Also, managers' ability to choose the optimal level of conveners' and stakeholders' engagement can minimize value-capture frictions driven by logic, trust, resource, and identity conflicts.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Cross-sector partnerships (XSPs) are increasingly embraced by policymakers and practitioners to address complex social, economic, and environmental challenges (Henry, 2023; Lawson-Lartego and Mathiassen, 2021; Vestergaard et al., 2020; UN Partnership Accelerator, 2020). XSPs are mobilized towards tackling longstanding 'grand challenges' (George et al., 2016) but also towards newly-arising issues such as the regulation of emerging Artificial Intelligence technologies (e.g., UK Government Office for Artificial Intelligence, 2023).

## Contributions Towards Integrating the XSP Field

In this paper, we systematically review past XSP research in the public policy and management fields to deliver a comprehensive and coherent view of XSPs across different phases and theoretical perspectives. Our cross-phase, cross-theoretical view on extant XSP research is unique among prior XSP reviews (i.e., Bryson et al., 2006; Clarke and Crane, 2018; Quélin et al., 2017; Selsky and Parker, 2005) and beyond what is currently available to XSP scholars and practitioners.

Our work brings substantial value by effectively categorizing and synthesizing disparate research findings in a vast field of study. We categorize the XSP process through *three XSP phases*: formation; management; value creation, and dissemination and expansion. We identify *five dominant theoretical perspectives* used to examine the XSP process: institutional, micro-economic behaviour, capabilities and resources, managerial and organizational cognition, and stakeholder and social evaluations. We synthesize past XSP research insights within-phase and within-perspective. Through our systematic approach, we uncover and map – what we refer to as – the *theoretical topology* of XSPs, offering a robust foundation for further interrogations of the past XSP literature and towards the future.

In examining past XSP literature, our integration of cross-phase *and* cross-theoretical insights reveals the relationships between different XSP phases and the untapped potential in bringing together theoretical perspectives to the study of XSPs. This unique integration is summarized in Table II. By shifting the current research paradigm on XSPs from a phase-specific focus to a cross-phase approach, we open up new possibilities for a more integrative research agenda. By moving decisively beyond synthesizing past XSP research within-perspectives, to synthesizing XSP research across perspectives, we deliver a cross-theoretical view that offers a comprehensive understanding of XSPs. This not only reveals the blind spots of theoretical perspectives, but also uncovers new research opportunities and identifies practical intervention points for addressing complex challenges. In doing so, an integrative cross-phase, cross-theoretical view on XSP research redresses the limitations of the XSP research field and addresses fundamental yet open questions on XSP effectiveness, value and impact (or lack thereof).

This cross-phase and multi-theoretical integrative framework not only offers a new, comprehensive understanding of XSP research but also challenges existing understandings of past XSP research. For example, while some extant XSP studies show that the existence of incompatible logics can negatively impact the value creation by XSPs (e.g., Ashraf et al., 2017), other studies have argued for a positive effect (AhmadSimab and Chowdhury, 2019). Locating these contrasting findings within a particular nexus of ‘XSP phase/theoretical perspective’ within the vast XSP topology – which this integrative view allows researchers to do – may suggest plausible arguments for their co-existence. In this specific example, drawing insights from our work we would suggest that incompatible logics can indeed impede XSPs’ value creation in the absence of developed capabilities and shared resources (in the management phase), but simultaneously their co-existence is possible when a partner is chosen with sufficient complementary resources and capabilities (in the formation phase). This illustration

highlights that, while our review is grounded in past XSP literature, the integrative framework we developed allows researchers to systematically compare past research findings and also to re-examine seemingly contrasting findings in past research. Even more, it serves as a foundation to take stock, categorize and benefit from findings as they accumulate in the future. As we attempt to cohere disparate literatures and theoretical perspectives into a model (depicted in Figure 3), we simultaneously acknowledge the potential risk of reducing the XSP phenomenon into its elements and the promising potential of leveraging our model for pursuing future research.

We leverage our cross-phase and multi-theoretical integrative view to provide insights into how each of the five theoretical perspectives can *enrich* other perspectives (Appendices A4a–e in supporting information). By systematically exploring the potential extensions of each perspective in the study of XSPs, our work provides a broader, significant contribution to the scholars within each of these theoretical communities.

### **Contributions Towards Advancing the Frontier of the XSP Field**

Our work contributes value beyond insights within-perspective and within-phase by identifying the avenues through which enrichment possibilities may emerge across theoretical perspectives and phases. We label these as *informing* other perspectives and *interacting at the theoretical interstice* between perspectives. We highlight specific instances where cross-pollinating across theoretical perspectives unlocks the untapped potential to enhance our understanding of this complex phenomenon, underscoring the risks of overlooking these possibilities in the study of XSPs, and offering tangible implications for managers navigating these complexities.

We argue that our work – concepts, insights and approaches we present in this paper – may effectively direct future XSP research towards a diverse, pluralistic, and significantly expanded research landscape that is more likely to address the needs of a growing field faced with pressing practitioner concerns on XSP impact, newly-arising policy issues, and important policy debates.

By uncovering the scope and range of possibilities through the cross-phase, theoretical cross-pollination, we reveal the great number of potential research directions and trajectories and pathways that XSP researchers may pursue. This allows researchers and practitioners to select from more and more robust choices, and to avoid historical research pathways and potentially the application of ill-suited theories and frameworks. The latter may reproduce deeply ingrained traditions and assumptions which, under the weight of evidence, has rendered our extant understanding of XSP success limited. What we contribute, in essence, is a diversified and pluralistic approach to the study of XSPs. This, however, requires researchers to upskill themselves to adequately understand, synthesize and evaluate potentially novel cross-theoretical lenses on XSP study. Since insights from such research would generate tangible implications for managers in coping with such complexities, it is also important for managers to allow themselves to embrace multidimensional views of XSPs and their insights.

However, it is not our intention to suggest that XSP scholars should focus only on the array of cross-pollination directions and combinations that we systematically unveil in our work and present in detail in this paper. Rather, we argue that what is needed is

instead to improve the toolkit through which we can avoid future lock-in and path dependencies that may lead to stalling future XSP research.

In this direction, our work contributes new notions and approaches for the advancement of XSP research as a field. We leverage the notion of ‘theoretical topology’ to conceptualize a comprehensive mapping of the XSP theoretical field; we innovate in overlaying our insights from XSP phases to our XSP theoretical topology to provide their simultaneous integration; we propose two approaches through which theoretical cross-pollination may emerge – informing and interacting – and we highlight the role of ‘theoretical interstices’. We distinguish theoretical interstices from a theory informing another as well as from theoretical gaps, by imagining theoretical interstices as inclusive spaces that encourage the exploration and development of new knowledge. It is in such undominated spaces that new diversified approaches and new knowledge on XSPs have the strongest potential to emerge. This review, thus, offers a synthesis, a roadmap, and a toolkit to XSP researchers, effectively directing future XSP research towards a diverse, pluralistic, expanded research landscape.

### **Contributions Towards Current Policy Debates**

Our work and approach in delivering our insights also delivers insights into current and pressing policy debates concerning longstanding and newly-emerging issues that may affect XSP purpose and impact.

The most prominent policy debate centres on the open question of whether XSPs may be rendered mandatory in certain instances, such as when the need for addressing the grand challenge is pressing. Even though the XSP field is fragmented, there is a body of accumulated knowledge on the XSP process, purpose, and impact which nevertheless is underpinned by the assumption of XSPs being characterized by their voluntary nature. Past XSP research, therefore, offers no direct insight into this debate, as it does not hold immediate insights into the process or outcomes of XSPs that are not voluntary. Empirically, however, we may locate examples when mandated XSPs have generated positive outcomes in instances of pressing issues that require innovative ways to deliver services (such as the global COVID-19 pandemic; Henry, 2023), and to overcome the monopolies of established dominant actors in, typically, the private sector (such as the technical, processing and talent resource advantage of technology companies in the Artificial Intelligence field; Mazzucato et al., 2022). There are also multiple examples whereby the state has offered incentives for the creation of cross-sector partnerships towards policy aims (Mazzucato et al., 2021), such as the incentivization of the creation of XSPs aimed at increasing healthcare coordination, known as ‘Ontario Health Teams’ in Canada (Sarta and Aristidou, 2024). Such incentivized initiatives may be, thus, perceived as ‘semi-mandated’; being in the liminal space between voluntary and mandated. By relaxing the ‘voluntary’ characteristic of XSPs in order to account also for the reality of this liminal space, and by identifying a range of possibilities (voluntary, semi-mandated, mandated) instead of a binary option (voluntary/mandated), insights from past XSP research may be introduced into this debate thoughtfully and be empirically tested to add a valuable extension to our knowledge of the XSP research impact in cases of semi-mandated and mandated

XSPs. This, in turn, will offer tangible recommendations for policymakers and practitioners enmeshed in this ongoing conversation.

If, however, the magnitude of the aimed ‘shared good’ and the urgency of the grand challenge may be theoretically leveraged to relax the voluntary assumption in XSP research, as these possibilities implicitly suggest, then we are required to first critically examine what constitutes ‘shared public good’ and ‘grand challenge’. We are not highlighting mere definitional debate, but rather an onto-epistemological concern with the potential to impact the debate between voluntary and mandated XSP initiatives, and the potential to affect the directionality of XSPs’ purpose. Water management, seen as a grand challenge and shared public aim to be addressed through XSPs may not be seen as an equally urgent public issue in some contexts. Artificial Intelligence, the regulation of which is seen as a public aim to be addressed through cross-sector partnering (e.g., Mikhaylov et al., 2018), might not present a concern of the same magnitude in different contexts. These examples amply illustrate the tangible risks of ignoring the interaction between resource view and institutional context, which is a contribution unique to our review as it is directly derived from our cross-theoretical synthesis.

A related debate, which we propose should be central to any conversation on the future of XSPs, concerns the future of the third sector in a world where ‘data’ becomes a key resource. The role of ‘big data’-powered algorithms in transforming the public sector is celebrated (UK Government Office for Artificial Intelligence, 2022) and this generates new opportunities for cross-sector partnering (Mikhaylov et al., 2018; UK Government Office for Artificial Intelligence, 2022). While moving in this new direction for XSPs, concerns are raised that the large datasets required to train algorithms are predominantly in the public and private sectors, thus rendering third sector organizations less desirable XSP partners compared to previously. Empirically, this development threatens the diversity of partners in XSPs where data-rich technologies are central.

We provide some insights derived from our review and located at – what we refer to as – the theoretical interstice between the stakeholder theoretical perspective and the capabilities and resources perspective. In this space, the interaction between these theoretical perspectives would generate propositions that might frame thinking through this emerging conundrum for third sector organizations. This interstice may contribute expansive and impactful strategies, such as initiating associations that will serve to increase the reputation of the third sector when it comes to producing, managing, and leveraging data. One way would be to initiate locally-based consortia of third sector organizations. Furthermore, third sector may proactively engage in the process of data generation (e.g., collecting the attributes and preferences of communities when it comes to important societal issues). By expanding their collective resources and by co-opting the resources within the community in reach, firms in non-profit sectors could increase their access to those resources (data) which are key for staying relevant in the XSP field as attractive partners for cross-sector collaborations. In addition, third sector organizations wishing to position themselves as desirable partners in such data-rich XSPs might consider ways to further legitimize themselves in regard to big data management. In regard to large datasets of sensitive data, e.g., such as those required to co-deliver a health service, the data holders (typically the state) may not

have enough evidence yet to trust third sector organizations with data access. In order to address these concerns, the third sector could self-organize to self-regulate and legitimize themselves in regard to data-rich XSPs. This strategy has benefited firms in private sectors such as the chemical industry, where firms self-regulated to protect their common reputation (Barnett and King, 2008). Our propositions in the direction of empowering third sector organizations in a future where XSPs are big data-focused are derived from our cross-theoretical examination of past XSP work and allow us to problematize a newly-arising issue for future XSP research.

## CONCLUSION

Although the literature on XSPs does not lack diversity in perspective, future work benefits from integrating the existing and new theoretical perspectives and cross-pollinating elements that are central in each perspective and phase to advance the knowledge on how XSPs are formed, managed, and lead to value creation and dissemination. This cross-pollination – through informing and interacting at the theoretical interstice – is critical in understanding why XSPs fail frequently because of ignoring the complexities rooted in multi-level interdependencies among different aspects of partnerships. It can also have positive externalities for managers and how they view, evolve, and lead partnerships in face of such uncertainties, and contribute decisively to current policy debates.

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