A COMMUNICATIVE FRAMEWORK OF VALUE IN CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

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Cross-sector partnerships (XSPs) are an important part of today's organizational landscape and a favored strategy for addressing complex social problems. However, a discrepancy exists between the popularity and prevalence of XSPs and evidence of their ability to produce value with respect to the problems they address. We therefore offer a framework for increasing and assessing XSP value based on an alternative conception of organizational constitution rooted in communication theory. Our central argument is that the overall value of XSPs is not merely in connecting interested parties but, rather, in their ability to *act*—to substantially influence the people and issues within their problem domain. This ability, we argue, comes from the constitution of organizational forms that are distinct from their members and that display *collective agency*—the capacity to influence a host of relevant outcomes beyond what individual organizations could do on their own. Our primary contributions are developing a framework for understanding XSP constitution in terms of communication processes and explaining how XSP value can be increased and assessed through communication practices.

Addressing complex social issues such as poverty, crime, economic development, and public health cannot be managed by any single entity; increasingly, such problems require collaboration across multiple organizations (Selsky & Parker, 2005). These cross-sector partnerships (XSPs)—involving businesses, government, and civil society groups—make up a unique form of social organization. XSPs are multilateral collectives that engage in mutual problem solving, information sharing, and resource allocation (Provan & Kenis, 2009; Rein & Stott, 2009; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009) and, as such, represent a distinct line of interorganizational research (Gray, 2000; Isett & Provan, 2005). We use the term cross-sector partnership and its acronym, XSP, to capture a variety of interorganizational relationships described in the literature, such as cross-sector social partnerships (Nelson & Zadek, 2000; Seitanidi, 2008; Selsky & Parker,

2005; Waddock, 1989, 1991); multistakeholder collaboratives (Turcotte & Pasquero, 2001); cause-based partnerships (Parker & Selsky, 2004); social, collaborative, or multiparty alliances (Berger, Cunningham, & Drumwright, 2004; Stone, 2000; Zeng & Chen, 2003); multi- or cross-sector collaboration (Gray, 2000; Hardy, Lawrence, & Phillips, 2006); social service partnerships (Takahashi & Smutny, 2002); public-private partnerships (Linder, 1999; Lund-Thomsen, 2008); business-community partnerships (Loza, 2004); and business or government nonprofit partnerships (Austin, 2000; Gazley & Brudney, 2007).

Because of their tremendous promise, XSPs are often mandated by funders (Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010), expected by local communities (Provan & Milward, 2001), and assumed by policy makers to be the best way of working on social problems (Isett & Provan, 2005). Yet despite their prevalence and popularity, XSPs are also complicated and problematic. They are often perceived to produce limited results (Bendell & Murphy, 1999; Jamali & Keshishian, 2008; Turcotte & Pasquero, 2001), involve members with contrasting goals and approaches (Selsky & Parker, 2005), are prone to gridlock and fragmen-

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tation (Gray, 2000), frequently do not achieve their intended goals (Idemudia, 2008; Kern & Willcocks, 2000; Lund-Thomsen, 2008; Takahashi & Smutny, 2002; Wettenhall, 2003), and sometimes appear to exacerbate the very problems they are trying to solve (Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006). Additionally, the empirical evidence of XSPs' effectiveness is scarce (Provan & Milward, 1995), making it difficult to understand and assess their actual value. Thus, the collectives that seem to have the potential to address society's most complex problems often appear to produce little of value. This discrepancy begs the following questions: How can the value of XSPs be increased? And how should this value be assessed?

The existing research consensus is that there is no single best way to assess the value of XSPs. Gray's (2000) review lists several ways XSPs are evaluated in the literature, including problem resolution or goal achievement, generation of social capital, creation of shared meaning, changes in network structure, and shifts in power distribution. What these measures of assessment all have in common, however, is the existence of a single organizational entity that has the capacity to act, to exhibit agency, or to otherwise "make a difference" for the participants involved, their member organizations, and the broader communities and problem domains in which XSPs exist. What this suggests is that any assessment of XSP value should consider XSPs as distinct organizational forms, beyond the sum total of their individual members; unfortunately, this level of analysis has not been the focus of most XSP research to date.

Research on XSPs has been driven primarily by resource dependence and transaction cost theories, where value tends to be defined economically and from the perspective of a focal firm (Phumpiu & Gustafsson, 2009). These theories often assume a level of individualism and rationality that takes for granted the sociocultural factors that influence organizational behavior; consequently, they tend to neglect the value-laden aspects of meaning construction and reduce communication to instrumentally driven self-presentation (Kuhn & Ashcraft, 2003). However, a growing body of research foregrounds processes of social construction and interpretation, holding that resource flows and economic efficiencies are not the primary forces structuring XSPs (e.g., Gray, 1989; Hardy et al.,

2006; Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005; Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Keyton, Ford, & Smith, 2008; Lewis et al., 2010; Turcotte & Pasquero, 2001). Theoretical approaches in this literature include institutional theory (e.g., Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002) and stakeholder theory (e.g., Butterfield, Reed, & Lemark, 2004), but, as with the economics-based arguments, they still focus on individual organizations and do not necessarily account for XSPs as distinct organizational forms. In so doing, they fail to assess the value of XSPs *as XSPs*. In other words, the task is to assess value at the partnership level, but doing so is beyond the logics of most existing XSP theorizing. Thus, to better understand the value in and of XSPs, we need an alternative theoretical perspective capable of explaining XSPs' ability to demonstrate collective agency.

Our purpose in this article is to offer a framework for increasing and assessing XSP value based on an alternative conception of organizational constitution rooted in communication theory. Our central argument is that the overall value of XSPs is not merely in connecting interested parties but, rather, in their ability to *act*—to substantially influence the people and issues within their problem domain. This ability, we argue, comes from the constitution of organizational forms that are distinct from their members and that display *collective agency*—the capacity to influence a host of relevant outcomes beyond what individual organizations could do on their own. Our primary contributions are developing a framework for understanding XSP constitution in terms of communication processes and explaining how XSP value can be increased and assessed through communication practice. Our stance, thus, is based on an understanding of value outside of the economic use of the price mechanism; we consider how XSPs, as collectives, constitute themselves in ways that manage member coordination to generate emergent capacities for action and enable substantive impact within their problem domains (Arvidsson, 2010; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010).

We take an ontological approach to constitution, referring to the composition of organizational forms and their mode of being. Yet the ability of an XSP to constitute itself as a collective agent is not merely an issue of structural arrangements or antecedent conditions; it is a process of emergence resulting from communication processes that are distinct from market or

hierarchical mechanisms of control (Lawrence et al., 2002). Thus, we argue that to better understand and assess the value of XSPs, we need to investigate their communicative constitution and the ways in which communication processes facilitate the emergence of distinct organizational forms that have the capacity to act upon, and on behalf of, their members. We assume that questions of value are always preceded by ontological considerations: the value of something depends on what it is, the character of its being. XSPs are distinct organizational forms, and their ontological character indicates how we can increase and assess their value. Because XSPs are constituted primarily through communication patterns (and not hierarchies, markets, or resource flows), we argue that increasing and assessing their value should be based on processes associated with communicative constitution.

We present our argument in four sections. First, we establish the need to assess XSPs at the partnership level, beyond the performance of individual organizations that make up an XSP. Second, we present a theoretical framework of communicative constitution and discuss how communication processes can create higher-order systems that are conceptually distinct from individual member organizations. Third, we describe specific communication practices that facilitate the emergence of collective agency in XSPs and increase their value potential, with corresponding theoretical propositions to guide future scholarship. We conclude with a discussion about the implications of our framework for theory, research, and practice.

PARTNERSHIP-LEVEL ASSESSMENT OF XSP VALUE

Most XSP literature, to date, has focused on assessing value at the organizational level (for a review see Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007). That is, research has examined the performance of member organizations to assess the value of an XSP; the value of the partnership, in turn, refers to whether it helps individual organizations achieve their objectives. A key exception, however, is the work of Provan and his colleagues (Human & Provan, 1997, 2000; Isett & Provan, 2005; Provan et al., 2007; Provan, Isett, & Milward, 2004; Provan & Kenis, 2009; Provan & Milward, 1995, 2001; Provan, Veazie, Staten, &

Teufel Shone, 2005), who have argued that XSPs should be assessed at the partnership or network level instead. This involves assessing XSPs as organizational forms that are conceptually distinct from individual member organizations—what Provan and colleagues call the "whole network" (although they also acknowledge that terms such as *partnership*, *alliance, collaboration*, and *coalition* are common in the literature). Partnership-level value assessment is important because XSPs have partnership-level properties (e.g., density, centrality, governance) and produce partnership-level outcomes (e.g., knowledge, service coordination, social capital) that cannot be reduced to the contributions of single organizations (Provan et al., 2005). Furthermore, the success of XSPs depends on their legitimacy as distinct organizational entities that have an existence beyond individual member organizations (Human & Provan, 2000).

Unfortunately, there is very little existing literature on partnership-level assessments of XSP value (Provan et al., 2007). Most partnership-level studies examine the structure of relationships among XSP members, with "structure" referring to the arrangements and resources that characterize partnership formation. Within that work some attention is also given to network development (e.g., Sydow & Windeler, 1998) and governance (e.g., Provan & Kenis, 2009), whereas other studies explore broader XSP outcomes, such as effectiveness (e.g., Provan & Milward, 1995) and learning (e.g., Kraatz, 1998). Still lacking, however, is a conceptual framework for understanding some of the most important partnership-level attributes of XSP value: their existence as distinct organizational forms and their ability to exhibit collective agency. The key issues for XSP value, we argue, are both their existence as distinct entities and their capacity to act—that is, to "make a difference" for the participants involved and the broader communities and problem domains in which XSPs operate.

As we explain below, we depict XSPs as textual coorientation systems that emerge from situated communication processes. We conceptualize collective agency in terms of the emergence of an authoritative text, the trajectory of which has the capacity to impact subsequent efforts to marshal the willing consent of others so as to attract the necessary capital to be successful. This capacity to act is a collective

property of a partnership, not reducible to individual organizations. Nor is collective agency a structural configuration that can be "built in" to an XSP (like centralized authority). Rather, collective agency is an *emergent* property that is achieved in interaction among XSP members—that is, in communication. Emergence, in its most basic form, refers to the higher-order structures, patterns, and properties that arise from systems of interacting agents, where those higher-order qualities are not properties possessed by any of the systems' components (Goldstein, 1999; Holland, 1998; Kauffman, 1995). Emergence thus concerns the powers an entity possesses because of the specific arrangements and interactions of its constituent parts (Sawyer, 2001). Consequently, we need to examine the communicative constitution of XSPs and how communication processes facilitate the emergence of higher-order systems that have the capacity for collective agency. Accordingly, we turn to theorizing that portrays communication as constitutive of organization ("CCO" theorizing), a central theme in contemporary organizational communication scholarship.

COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF XSPs AS AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS WITH THE CAPACITY FOR COLLECTIVE AGENCY

How does communication constitute organizational forms such as XSPs? In CCO theorizing, communication is rendered rather differently than it is in most management and organizational literature. Instead of being the mere transmission of information or the outward representation of actors' internal dispositions, communication is understood as a complex *process* of meaning negotiation and construction by which contextualized actors use symbols and make interpretations to create (and/or maintain, transform, destroy) the meanings that coordinate and control activity and knowledge (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009). Meaning, here, is not simply that which resides inside individuals' heads but, rather, the intersubjective product of coordinated interaction. Placing communication at the center of organizational explanations assumes that our knowledge of the phenomenal world and hence our engagement with it materialize in communication. Thus, a focus on *communication* can be seen as distinct from a concentration on *discourse*: the latter typ-

ically signifies an attention to the linguistic forms eligible for appropriation in organizing, or to the ways encompassing ideologies work their ways into organizations through activity, whereas the former attends to the complex, symbolic, meaning-centered processes (which certainly draw upon discourses) by which coordination and control are accomplished (Jian, Schmisseur, & Fairhurst, 2008).

Our purpose is to develop a framework of XSP value rooted in CCO theorizing. Since the main issue for XSP value is the emergence of collective agency (in terms of the trajectory of an authoritative text, which we explain below), the key question concerns how XSPs are constituted as distinct organizational forms that have the capacity to act. Additionally, if XSPs are communicatively constituted, as we argue, then we should look at their communication practices to increase and assess their value. Below we summarize key tenets of CCO theorizing that provide the foundation for our theoretical framework, illustrated in Figure 1. Following this explanation we present our theoretical framework for increasing and assessing XSP value, including theoretical propositions to inform future research.

Coorientation, Conversations, and Texts

A full explanation of CCO theorizing is beyond our purposes here (for summaries see Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), but a few key points are necessary to ground the theoretical framework we develop in the following section. Central to our framework is the notion of communication as *coorientation*, whereby two or more individuals align actions in relation to a common objective through an ongoing dialectic of *conversations* and *texts* (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Conversations are observable interactions—the "site" where organization is accomplished and experienced (Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Quinn & Dutton, 2005). Texts, in turn, are the symbolic "surface" upon and through which conversations develop; they are how organizational forms are identified, described, and represented. Texts can be figurative and metaphorical, such as an XSP's implicit norms of operation, or they can be relatively concrete inscriptions of procedures, as in an XSP's bylaws or a memorandum of understanding (Kuhn,

FIGURE 1
Communicative Constitution of XSPs As Authoritative Texts with the Capacity for Collective Agency
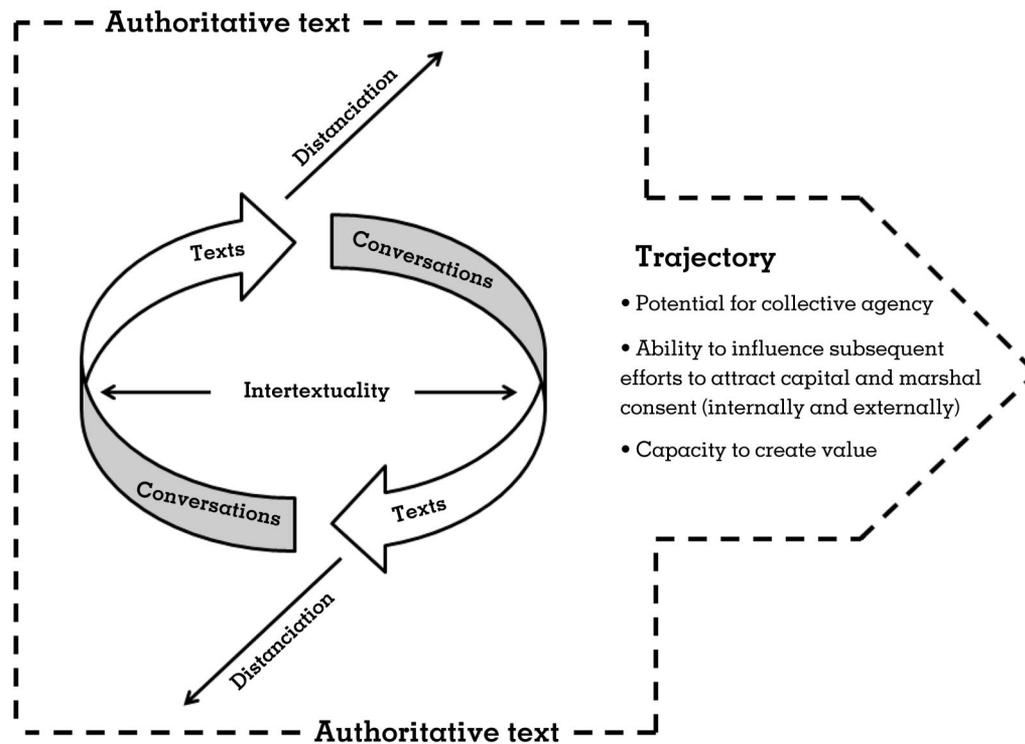
2008; McPhee, 2004). Texts are simultaneously the inputs to and outcomes of conversation, forming a self-organizing loop. As texts are appropriated in this dialectic, they can take on a life of their own, as occurs when actors ascribe to them motive and obligation (e.g., "The bylaws won't let us do that"; Cooren, 2004; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). In Figure 1, then, coorientation is represented by circulating texts and conversations, which inform one another through actors' efforts to coordinate and control conjoint action.

From this text-conversation perspective, organizations can be seen either as metaconversations (Robichaud, Giroux, & Taylor, 2004) or as texts writ large—abstract representations of the content of organizational practices (Taylor, 1993). For XSPs the textual approach is particularly relevant because "concrete" texts (Kuhn, 2008)—such as mission statements, policy documents, websites, white papers, and reports about outcomes—are the elements most likely to be displayed to actors outside the group and to be drawn on to (re)create a sense of unity, continuity, and value. Thus, we portray texts as a

"mode of being" (Cooren, 2004) to understand XSP constitution.

Intertextuality, Distanciation, and Authoritative Texts

But how is it that localized conversations and textual practices "scale up" (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009) to organizational forms that have a distinct existence and the capacity for collective agency? This is the fundamental question for increasing and assessing XSP value—not whether certain people are at the proverbial table but whether participants' coorientation facilitates the emergence of a higher-order system with the capacity to act (i.e., collective agency). This requires additional communication processes of *intertextuality* and *distanciation*, which lead to the emergence of an *authoritative text*. Intertextuality refers to all the ways that texts vie to influence, alter, or make possible other texts (Keenoy & Oswick, 2004; Kuhn, 2008). The key question from a constitutive communication perspective is how diverse participants compete conversationally to insert texts that

will shape the content and direction of an XSP. Distanciation is a process whereby organizational texts become "distanced" and expand their influence beyond situated conversational circumstances (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996). What is produced through distanciation, then, is a "reified representation of what is no longer a situated set of conversations but what has instead become an organizational template so abstract that it can be taken to represent not just some but *all* the conversations it refers to" (Taylor et al., 1996: 26).

It is these collections of reified representations (texts acting from a distance across space and time) that constitute the emergence of an authoritative text (Kuhn, 2008), which we know and experience as organizational forms, such as XSPs. The authoritative text represents the collective, shows how its activities are connected in relative unity, and portrays the relations of authority and criteria of appropriateness that become manifest in practice (see also Taylor & Van Every, 1993). The term *authoritative* implies both that the text disciplines practice through its power as a collective construction and (connecting with our claim about intertextuality) that members often vie to "author" the text and speak in its name in ways that serve narrower interests. The authoritative text is also able to represent the intentions of the members, mediate their future conversations, direct their attention, and link their disconnected practices into a coherent depiction (Kuhn, 2008).

Textual Trajectory, Attracting Capital, and Marshaling Consent

To this point we have described communicative constitution and the existence of XSPs as distinct organizational forms that cannot be reduced to individual member organizations. But we have not yet explained how these organizational forms develop collective agency. It is not just the mere existence of an XSP that entails agency (and subsequently generates value) but, rather, its ability to act meaningfully in a respective problem domain.

How, then, do we go from the entativity of an XSP to its collective agency? What gives an XSP, represented by an authoritative text, the capacity to act? We argue that collective agency (i.e., the capacity to produce value) is found in the *trajectory* of the authoritative text and its ability

to influence efforts to attract capital and marshal the consent of relevant parties. By "trajectory" we mean a qualitative component of the authoritative text that indicates its general direction and what it is "on track" to accomplish. *Attracting capital* involves efforts to acquire the necessary resources (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) for operation and continued existence, whereas *marshaling consent* entails securing the willing participation of others for the subsequent accumulation and appropriation of capital (Kuhn, 2008). Ultimately, marshaling consent is the means by which the XSP's authoritative text is authored; it refers to how one party (or coalition) in the XSP persuades others both inside and outside the XSP's boundaries to accept a given definition of the situation, an agenda for problem solving, a conception of insiders and outsiders, procedural rules, or preferred decisional alternatives.

The point, then, is that XSP organizing is communicative not merely in the coorientation involved in activity coordination but also in the ways that members secure and use forms of capital. That is, communication is organizational (versus merely social) because interactants are cooriented around efforts to attract capital and marshal consent.

To summarize, Figure 1 depicts XSPs as organizational forms that are constituted through communication processes involving a reflexive relationship between texts and conversations. The text-conversation dialectic leads to the generation of texts that, because they are deemed successful in attracting capital and marshaling consent in interaction, are repeatedly drawn on in local settings. When these texts are appropriated in patterned and regular ways, they gain distance from their original sites of production and use. As they do so, the texts attain the potential to characterize larger communities of practice and those communities' conversations—as long as the texts continue to prove successful in marshaling consent and securing capital. For XSPs to be *valuable*, however, processes of distanciation and intertextual influence must facilitate the emergence of an authoritative text, the trajectory of which has the capacity for collective agency. It is this trajectory that disciplines members to connect personal interests and identities—including those of their "home" organizations—to the XSP. The authoritative text can also become a resource

for subsequent efforts to accumulate or transform capital (Heath, 2007; Kuhn, 2008; Tuler, 2000). Thus, the capacity for collective agency lies within the trajectory of the authoritative text and its ability to marshal the consent of others and to attract the necessary capital to be successful.

An empirical example can help illustrate these ideas of communicative constitution. Poncelet (2001) described the formation the European Union Partnership for Environmental Cooperation (EUPEC), an XSP focused on environmental sustainability in Europe. A series of initial meetings (conversations), based on a (textualized) representation of environmental issues, led to the formation of a general assembly and an executive committee that would make policy recommendations (texts). Thus, we can understand EUPEC as developing from a process of coorientation, accomplished and experienced within the site of specific conversations and upon the surface of distinct texts.

Furthermore, intertextuality was evident in EUPEC's development when, for example, members offered competing drafts of the preliminary business plan for the partnership and concepts like "reinvented economy" and "sustainable Europe" vied for inclusion in the final operating agreements (authoritative text). Yet what emerged was a largely ineffectual XSP that was unable to have a meaningful impact on environmental policies or to implement substantive changes. Poncelet attributed this failure to two characteristics of the partnership (what we call the trajectory of the authoritative text): (1) an implied norm of nonconfrontation, where EUPEC members (corporations, environmental NGOs, governments) argued politely but restricted their debates to issues of procedure and format, avoiding substantive conflict about EUPEC's objectives and accountabilities, and (2) a logic of "ecological modernization," where environmental protection served the interests of economic development so that environmentalism was measurable in monetary terms. EUPEC did emerge as a distinct entity through its authoritative text, but the trajectory of its authoritative text led it away from considering the sources of environmental dilemmas and toward outcomes that privileged the business sector, thus reproducing (and not challenging) the established socioeconomic order.
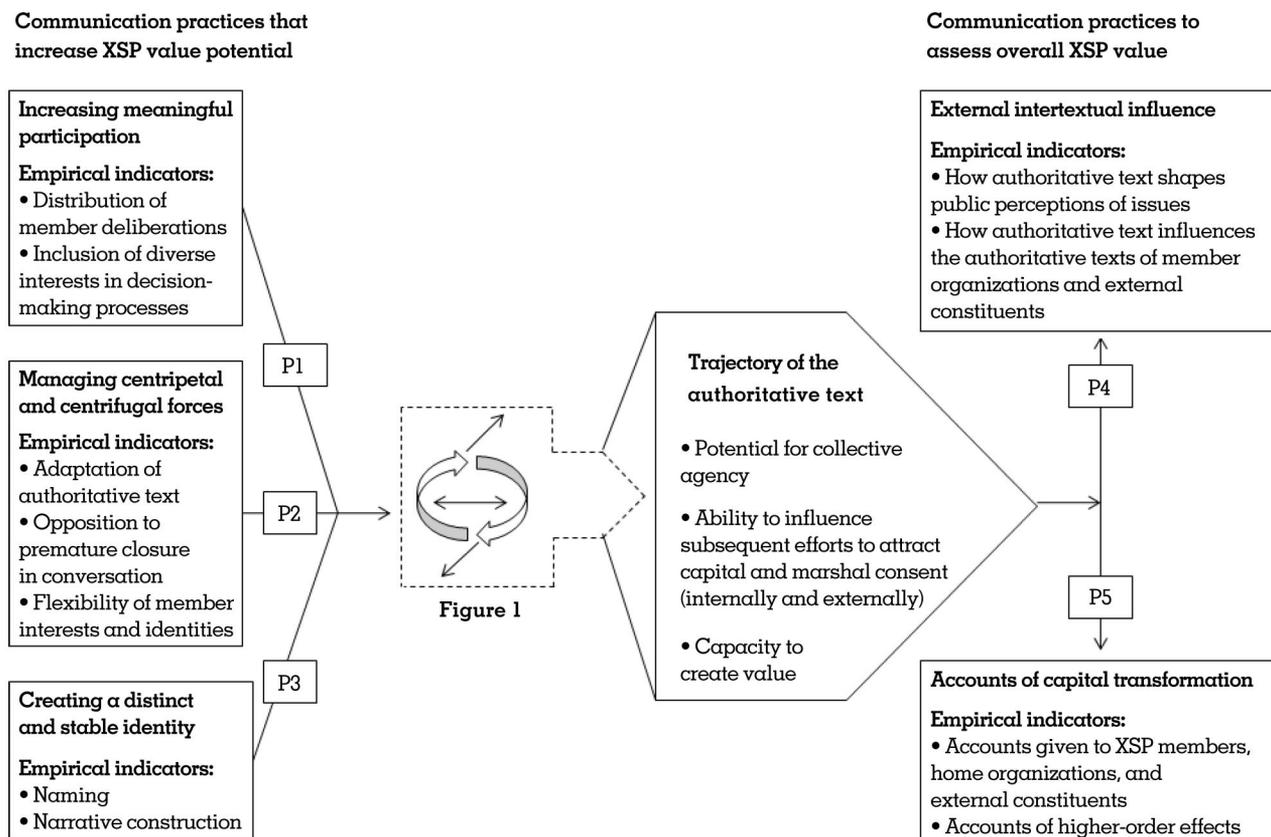
This is an example of an XSP that lacked the capacity to act meaningfully within its problem domain (i.e., to attract capital and marshal consent). In other words, EUPEC lacked collective agency—it had no ability to impose itself on its members and relevant constituents, nor could it discipline their actions or direct their attention. Therefore, to increase and assess the value of XSPs, we need to look more closely at specific texts and conversational practices that make up XSPs and the communication patterns that enhance the potential for collective agency.

INCREASING AND ASSESSING XSP VALUE BASED ON A FRAMEWORK OF COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION

Communicative constitution offers a descriptive framework to explain the existence of XSPs as textual coorientation systems and locates the capacity for collective agency in the trajectory of an authoritative text. As the process of coorientation develops, the potential for value creation increases. The main questions for increasing and assessing XSP value, then, are *what specific kinds of communicative practices are more likely to result in the emergence of an authoritative text, the trajectory of which has the capacity to impact subsequent conversational and textual practices related to attracting capital and marshaling consent, and what communication practices offer evidence of the production of value*?

In this section we describe five such communicative practices, all of which can be examined in terms of both textual and conversational modalities, consistent with our framework of communicative constitution. The first three are specific communication practices that shape the trajectory of an authoritative text and increase the potential for value: increasing meaningful participation, managing centripetal and centrifugal forces, and creating a distinct and stable identity. The final two are communication practices that manifest the XSP's value for the broader set of stakeholders: external intertextual influence and accounts of capital transformation. We offer ways to assess the quality of these communication practices and propositions to guide future empirical research, summarized in Figure 2. Using the "output" of Figure 1 (the authoritative text's trajectory) as its focus, Figure 2 illustrates specific communication

FIGURE 2
Communication Practices to Increase and Assess XSP Value

Communication practices that
increase XSP value potential

Communication practices to
assess overall XSP value

Increasing meaningful
participation

Empirical indicators:
• Distribution of
member deliberations
• Inclusion of diverse
interests in decision-
making processes

External intertextual influence

Empirical indicators:
• How authoritative text shapes
public perceptions of issues
• How authoritative text influences
the authoritative texts of member
organizations and external
constituents

P1

Managing centripetal
and centrifugal forces

Empirical indicators:
• Adaptation of
authoritative text
• Opposition to
premature closure
in conversation
• Flexibility of member
interests and identities

P2

Figure 1

Trajectory of the
authoritative text

• Potential for collective
agency

• Ability to influence
subsequent efforts to attract
capital and marshal consent
(internally and externally)

• Capacity to
create value

P4

P5

Creating a distinct
and stable identity

Empirical indicators:
• Naming
• Narrative construction

P3

Accounts of capital transformation

Empirical indicators:
• Accounts given to XSP members,
home organizations, and
external constituents
• Accounts of higher-order effects

practices that both increase and assess the ca-
pacity for XSP value and empirical indicators to
guide future research.

Communication Practices That Increase XSP Value Potential

Increasing meaningful participation. Valu-
able partnerships do not develop simply by hav-
ing the right people in the room; *how* people
interact is at least as important. Generating col-
lective action in response to complex social
problems—even if that action cannot be ex-
pected to *solve* those problems—requires com-
munication practices that manage both the di-
versity of participants and the tensions between
collaborative and competitive approaches to de-
liberation. Given these challenges, a common
refrain in the literature is that *dialogue* can gen-
erate novel responses. We agree, but our com-
municative perspective urges caution.

The conventional conception of dialogue—in
which the term references ends-oriented talk
that advocates a simplistic openness, urges per-
sonal sharing, and gives precedence to consen-
sus and common ground over conflict and argu-
ment—is not likely to be helpful (Eisenberg &
Witten, 1987; Everett & Jamal, 2004; Penman,
2000). This is because dialogue is seen only as a
special case of communication used when
groups are forced to overcome differences. The
conventional conception of dialogue also as-
sumes that meanings are private and internal
and can be expressed more or less productively
if the situation is structured well, forming the
basis for compromise as a decisional procedure
(and outcome).

A more richly communicative conception por-
trays dialogue as implicit in communication
such that meanings, identities, and agendas are
always constructed and open to reconstruction
(Tsoukas, 2009). Our view of dialogue acknowl-

edges that participants hold different (and often deeply opposed) positions; the "generative mechanism" of intersubjective meaning making is "the interplay of different, often opposing, voices" (Baxter, 2006: 105). Further, a simultaneous ethic of inclusiveness and confrontation is more likely to generate the meaningful participation needed for the creative, integrative, and legitimate solutions participants seek, as the XSP's authoritative text begins to encode the interests of multiple parties and eschews convenient compromises (Kuhn & Deetz, 2008; Lange, 2003). Underlying these claims is the communication theory concern for surfacing and reclaiming—rather than ignoring or suppressing— relevant conflicts as a route to legitimate consent generation and, ultimately, to broader support for collective decisions (Deetz, 1992).

For example, Hardy et al. (2006) described the development of an XSP called the Canadian Treatment Advocates Council (CTAC), which focused on problems of HIV/AIDS treatment across Canada. In response to the growing problem of HIV/AIDS in the mid 1990s, representatives from the pharmaceutical industry, nonprofit organizations, and community activists began organizing around issues related to treatment access and medication affordability. CTAC involved a diverse range of member interests, such as pharmaceutical company members who wanted to ensure profitable commercial enterprises and HIV/AIDS activists who wanted to secure safe and ethical access to treatment programs. According to Hardy et al. (2006), CTAC was most successful when members engaged in meaningful participation that included a broader range of interests and accepted the legitimacy of alternative perspectives (e.g., various approaches to treatment); conversely, CTAC struggled the most when certain ideas and interests dominated the decision-making process (e.g., the superiority of corporate profitability).

The important issue, then, is not merely whether a reasonably full set of representatives is present at the table but, rather, whether their participation is a meaningful part of an XSP's coorientation processes. As those who study corporate governance and public planning have found, powerful actors regularly limit the capacity of people to influence decision making by allowing "input" and expression of concerns but largely ignoring these contributions during closed deliberations (Fainstein, 2000; Westphal

& Zajac, 2001). Especially when dealing with complex social issues, interests and stances may shift over time, as can members' degree of participation (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972; Pfarrer, DeCelles, Smith, & Taylor, 2008); thus, surfacing more deeply ingrained values is central to making XSP communication practices perceived as morally legitimate by members. Although participants are likely to more readily consent to the dictates of an authoritative text in which they see their own interests acknowledged, not every claim to authorship can be treated equally.

Figure 2 depicts the relationship between the meaningful participation of XSP members and the trajectory of an authoritative text, and it highlights two specific indicators of value inclusion in XSP interactions. First is the *distribution of member deliberations*. Observing, or having members recount, the various forms of interaction that constitute XSP problem solving— interaction not, of course, restricted to group meetings—and their degree of participation indicates wide distribution. A second indicator traces the consequences of member involvement on ensuing discussions, especially in terms of including *diverse interests in decision-making processes*. Researchers could observe how themes introduced by particular members become textualized and drawn upon (or ignored) as part of the ongoing conversation to indicate the degree to which members' interests become included in an authoritative text (Shotter, 1993; Tulin, 1997; Woodilla, 1998).

> Proposition 1: Increasing members' meaningful participation in authoring an XSP's authoritative text enhances its potential for collective agency and its capacity to create value.

Managing centripetal and centrifugal forces. In XSPs the drive to come together and create a shared identity can be strong and compelling (e.g., Beech & Huxham, 2003; Hardy et al., 2005; Wood & Gray, 1991). But the requirement to be responsive to the ever-present call of "home" organizations' interests, members oriented to competition, and the claims of nonparticipating parties necessitates a degree of separation and makes simple unity unlikely (and often unfavorable). Consequently, XSPs must continually manage individual and collective interests alongside efforts to create novel solutions to

complex social issues. It is the managing—not resolving—of these tensions that increases the value potential of XSPs. This involves managing what Bakhtin (1981) called the opposing "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces that are intrinsic to human interaction. Centripetal forces draw people together toward a group identity and a resulting *mono*logue, whereas centrifugal forces separate and divide people but are necessary for *dia*logue.

The tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces were evident in the CTAC example mentioned earlier. Hardy et al. (2006) described a tension between lack of identification and overidentification in the partnership. At times CTAC spoke with a "united voice," but this also led to concerns that some members were losing sight of their obligations to represent their home organizations. Conversely, there were times when members seemed so overly committed to the interests of their home organizations that collaboration was stifled. It was the productive management of both forces—the desire for unity and the obligations to home organizations, not the favoring of one over the other—that led to the most successful outcomes.

Figure 2 depicts three mechanisms that enable XSP members to manage the tensions of centripetal and centrifugal forces, influencing the coorientation processes that generate (and alter) the trajectory of an XSP's authoritative text. Use of these mechanisms should be contingent on the circumstances of XSP deliberations and particular disparities between centripetal and centrifugal forces that may arise—not necessarily employed consistently in all situations.

First, managing centripetal and centrifugal forces means that XSP members must maintain an *opposition to premature closure in conversation*, where closure refers to a termination of deliberation, an elimination of conflict, or a refusal to entertain alternatives (Thackaberry, 2004). The intricacy of complex social issues can be cognitively overwhelming and conversation can be perceived as paralyzing (or irrelevant), making XSPs incapable of doing more than collecting and interpreting data (Turcotte & Pasquero, 2001). The temptation in XSPs is to accept a hasty consensus in the hopes of "moving on," or to discourage conversation (implicitly or explicitly) in the interest of "getting along"—both examples of overly centripetal forces that threaten the generative capacity of XSP deliber-

ations. Opposition to premature closure in conversation is also important because the means employed to bring deliberation to an end often involve manipulation or distortion of information; cutting off deliberation hastily makes it unlikely that the XSP will secure members' long-term consent (Deetz, 1992), thus stunting the very processes needed to facilitate the emergence of an authoritative text that has the capacity for collective agency. Although we recognize that endless conversation will eventually lead to diminishing returns—such as when closure is needed to make progress or when consensus already exists—communication theory suggests that the bigger danger in XSPs is too little conversation, not too much. Therefore, XSP members should generally retain openness toward deliberation while remaining judicious about when to make decisions and move on. The issue is not conversations per se—conversations can both unite and divide—but, rather, a mindfulness about how openness or closure in conversation helps manage competing tensions.

Second, the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces challenges XSP members to be *flexible with their interests and identities*. Contemporary theorists of dialogue hold that the potential for communication to transform organizations and partnerships hinges on members' capacity to avoid inserting their own assumptions regarding others, asserting their sectional interests, and believing that their backgrounds provide special insight into the "correct" answers to partnerships' objectives (Barge & Little, 2002, 2008; Barge & Oliver, 2003). For XSP members this means reflexively managing the simultaneous demands of partnership affiliation and the interests of home organizations and communities, manifest in their efforts to author (and to allow others to author) the authoritative text. When participants begin to respond to others in the XSP with a willingness to explore alternatives rather than to enroll others in a preexisting vision, the resulting authoritative text will be more likely to marshal consent and attract capital (from both XSP participants and other stakeholders), thus increasing the XSP's value. This also provides a basis for viewing communication not merely as a means for eliminating differences but, instead, as a way to explore and capitalize on them (Brummans et al., 2008; Deetz & Simpson, 2004). Patterned shifts in interests expressed by

XSP members provide evidence that the constitution of an XSP's authoritative text has involved dialogic encounters. Again, we recognize that unchecked flexibility can produce unfavorable outcomes—such as unmet obligations to home organizations—but the greater threat to XSP value is an unwillingness to alter interests and identities, leading to an overemphasis on centrifugal forces.

Third, managing centripetal and centrifugal forces also depends on the responsiveness of an XSP's authoritative text. As suggested by the discussion of intertextuality above, changes in the contents of an authoritative text are not merely a function of availability of surrounding texts but also of the *authoritative text's level of receptivity* to saturation by those texts. All utterances have the potential to introduce new textual elements into a coorientation system (Robichaud et al., 2004), but members' communicative practices can serve a gatekeeping function such that authoritative text receptivity (or resistance), as enabled by members, varies over time and circumstance. An authoritative text positioned as receptive to intertextual influences would be more responsive to factors such as environmental changes, membership turnover, resource constraints, or new definitions of relevant issues. Receptivity, however, does not necessarily entail change; openness to new ideas could result in confirmation of the current trajectory. Instead, receptivity involves the willingness to consider new ideas (textual influences) in order to manage tensions of unity and division. Clearly, receptivity is not an unqualified virtue—there may be times when an XSP's authoritative text should be unreceptive, such as when irrelevant information is introduced or deadlines are pressing. But the primary risk to XSP value is a rigid authoritative text that is unreceptive to other textual influences. Tracing the change (or stability) in an authoritative text in relation to surrounding texts with the potential to saturate it can provide insight into the responsiveness of an XSP's constitutive communication processes.

Managing centripetal and centrifugal forces via these three mechanisms, then, increases an authoritative text's potential for collective agency and its capacity to create value. Of course, any mechanism must be deployed in complex contexts, and while our discussion has been oriented toward the general case, we ac-

knowledge that situational exigencies condition the emphasis XSP members' deliberations should place on centripetal or centrifugal forces.

> *Proposition 2a: Decreasing opposition to premature closure in XSP conversations will increase an authoritative text's potential for collective agency and its capacity to create value.*

> *Proposition 2b: Increasing the flexibility of members' interests and identities will increase an authoritative text's potential for collective agency and its capacity to create value.*

> *Proposition 2c: Increasing the intertextual receptivity of an XSP's authoritative text will increase its potential for collective agency and its capacity to create value.*

Creating a distinct and stable identity. As we discussed above, an important part of XSP value is the ability to develop a distinct and stable identity apart from home organizations, which enhances legitimacy and helps XSPs secure the right to continue appropriating capital. The concept of a collective identity is well-established in the organizational literature (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Romanelli & Khessina, 2005; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998), although little attention has been devoted to studying identity in interorganizational relationships (see Hardy et al., 2005, for a notable exception). Most of the organizational identity literature focuses on *single* organizations and treats identity as a *cognitive construct*. In contrast, we focus on the development of a *collective* identity among XSP members from multiple organizations as a *communicative process*. The mere presence of a distinct and stable identity is not the main issue; rather, it is its outward manifestation that makes a difference (Kramer, 2006). Therefore, analysis should focus on the collective textual construction, rather than individual cognitions or their analogues (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). For XSPs the key issue is creating a recognizable and distinct identity *as a partnership* to achieve legitimacy, which is critical for overall XSP success (Human & Provan, 2000).

For example, Hardy, Lawrence, and Phillips (1998) described a successful XSP that formed to address unemployment in a Canadian city. The member organizations were called together by a

mandate from a key funding organization, which gave the group a title and dictated its membership. Initially, the group was a mere collection of individuals that struggled to take action and accomplish meaningful outcomes. But Hardy et al. explained an important turning point in a workshop meeting, where the members broke ranks from the funding agency and their original mandate. They changed the title of their group and implemented a nonhierarchical model of decision making and role assignment. Originally, it was hard to see the representatives of these organizations *as* a partnership when their membership was coerced and when objectives were mandated by the funding agency. However, when they asserted their ability to define the group's parameters on their own terms (and notably against the will of the convener), a collective identity emerged that gave legitimacy to their partnership and led to successful outcomes. This case helps demonstrate the importance of identity for effective partnership operation.

We suggest that two key communication practices are involved in creating a distinct and stable identity: *naming* and *narrative construction*. First, naming provides an image of an agreed-upon existence and assumed internal unity, and the reflexivity it implies is central to a set of people becoming recognized (including by themselves) as a distinct entity. For CCO thinking, the *fact* of naming, as an isolated event, is far less important than the *processes* it informs. As an element of the authoritative text, a name is bound up in efforts to "author" the contents of that representation of the collective, a representation continually open to revision and redefinition. Since the authoritative text influences subsequent coorientation and intertextual influence, the name can have important follow-up implications (and perhaps path-dependent relationships) for conversations occurring throughout the life of the XSP (see Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Naming also helps establish a distinct organizational identity that distinguishes an XSP from a mere group or collection of individuals (McPhee & Iverson, 2009; McPhee & Zaug, 2000). As displayed by the Hardy et al. (1998) case, XSP members will be more likely to establish a distinct and stable identity through an authoritative text when engaging in a process of naming that

aligns with the XSP's mission and conveys uniqueness to outside constituents.

Second, narrative construction aids in the development of XSP identity and distinctiveness and thus helps increase XSP value. Narratives are rarely intentionally packaged as stories or created single-handedly; they are constructed collaboratively and retrospectively as people confront a problem and depict the scene, the action required, the responsible parties, and desired or actual outcomes (Taylor, 2009; Weick, 1995). Narratives can refer to the factors creating changes in phases of an organization's life cycle (Browning, 1991, 1992), or they can be morality tales portraying cultural rules of the partnership (Mumby, 1997). Narratives display the valued forms of capital, provide evidence of the organization's definition of its task, portray heroes and villains (e.g., the convener), and exhibit the organization's path of action (connecting its past and future). Seeing communication as constitutive, then, *requires* a narrative with the partnership at the core, because, as Taylor and Cooren (1997) argue, when a group becomes framed as an active agent in a narrative, it gains the distanciation from its local conversational existence necessary for acknowledging it *as* a partnership.

Hardy et al. (2005) approached this issue in a fashion somewhat similar to CCO thinking, suggesting that the ongoing production of particularized and general membership ties (relational bonds among members and connections between the members and overarching issues) results in collective identities that can produce effective interorganizational collaboration. Narrative, however, exists at a higher level of abstraction than conversations and membership ties: as stories about who "we" are and where "we" are going and why, narratives are textual (more than conversational) vehicles for coorientation and for the constitution of a relatively stable authoritative text. Studying these narratives could involve surfacing a prominent story about the formation and subsequent operation of the XSP; it could also involve eliciting a report regarding a particularly interesting event the XSP experienced. The narrative could be generated either from a facilitator leading members of the XSP to sketch a story of their organization, or it could be a post hoc extraction of the elements of a story line from ostensibly disconnected statements about events (Abbott, 1992;

Golant & Sillince, 2007; Law, 1994). What is essential across these empirical possibilities is that the "story" of the XSP, as an element of its authoritative text, portrays a reflexive understanding of the XSP as an entity distinct from its member organizations and evinces rules (even if held tacitly) for collective approaches to problem solving.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the development of a distinct and stable partnership identity increases the authoritative text's potential for collective agency and overall value. XSP members' assessments of whether the name aligns with the mission of their XSP (as they understand it) can indicate the utility of naming in supporting the stability and distinctiveness of the XSP. Related signs could also be the distinctiveness of the terms external constituents associate with the name of the XSP, and how a name is reflexively invoked in distributed conversations to rule in or out given ideas, persons, organizations, or actions. Another indication would be whether members tell a relatively coherent story (exhibiting a reasonable level of homogeneity across members) about the problem the XSP addresses and the XSP's objectives in relation to that problem, and how members' conception of the XSP's past and future positions it in relation to others in the problem domain. This could demonstrate that an XSP has developed a narrative that aids in its construction of stability and distinctiveness. With the understanding that creating a distinct and stable identity increases an authoritative text's potential for collective agency and its capacity to create value, below we posit the two mechanisms that underlie this relationship.

> *Proposition 3a: A process of naming that aligns with an XSP's mission increases the distinctiveness and stability of its identity, thereby increasing the potential of an XSP's authoritative text for collective agency and capacity to create value.*

> *Proposition 3b: A coherent narrative increases the distinctiveness and stability of an XSP's identity, thereby increasing the potential of an XSP's authoritative text for collective agency and capacity to create value.*

Communication Practices to Assess XSP Value

In addition to communication practices that shape the trajectory of an authoritative text and increase XSP value, we present two additional communication practices that can be investigated to assess the overall value produced by an XSP. As explained above, we conceptualize XSP value as the capacity to act—to demonstrate collective agency within a problem domain. More specifically, this entails the ability to attract capital and marshal consent, both from XSP members and external constituents.

External intertextual influence. Recall that Figure 1 illustrates the process of intertextuality that shapes the emergence of an authoritative text, which can recursively influence successive *internal* deliberations among XSP members. Additionally, Figure 1 indicates that the trajectory of the authoritative text can also have *external* effects on subsequent intertextual efforts. These external textual practices, illustrated in Figure 2, can be examined for their intertextual influence in order to assess the value of an XSP. By "influence" we mean that constituents will appropriate or reproduce elements of an XSP's authoritative text in some meaningful fashion.

By conceiving of all texts as bearing the imprint of other texts and having the capacity to become part of subsequent texts (Allen, 2000), the texts produced by an XSP can be said to generate social impact and, in turn, to display the value of the XSP's organizing to external audiences. Perhaps because grasping local organizing is difficult enough, this sort of indirect interorganizational and intersector influence—a diffusion of textual elements—has been studied very little in XSP research. Yet there is precedent for our reasoning about external intertextual influence. Lawrence et al. (2002), drawing on institutional theory, argued that collaborative endeavors can alter practices, rules, and technologies across fields when organizations are highly involved and embedded with one another. Taylor (2004), in an analysis of global health governance, noted that innovations in health in developing cultures benefit from the patchwork-style proliferation of XSPs devoted to international governance through "issue linkages," in which health appears alongside other economic, moral, legal, and military topics (i.e., a form of diffusion). Thus, a focus on the external

intertextual practices of XSP operations is key in assessing XSP value.

Considering intertextual influence requires that we look beyond the microlevel interaction of XSP organizing, focusing on the paths texts follow across time and location. What might we observe these texts *doing* along those paths? In other words, how might a representative support a claim of XSP value by considering external intertextual influence? A given XSP's texts could be said to contribute to the public perception of a crisis that demands action, as when statements and studies combine to make subsequent action (even if not taken by the XSP itself) necessary. An XSP's report, perhaps alongside other reports and studies, can provide a foundation on which other organizations or groups (either cross-sector or single-sector) develop texts.

Additionally, many scholars have pointed to the social pressures influencing organizations, especially corporations, to become involved in XSPs, and these statements are frequently tinged with skepticism about the firms' motivations (see Kuhn & Deetz, 2008). It is entirely possible, however, that firms' participation in XSPs—even through the vehicle of an individual representative—might advance well beyond the reputational resources frequently associated with membership, additionally influencing the firms to embrace an "extended" version of citizenship (Crane & Matten, 2005). When organizations from any of the sectors proclaim (and perhaps boast of) their participation in XSPs in annual statements, press releases, executive interviews, and recruiting materials, their texts may draw on the XSP's authoritative text; if these proclamations then shape *those organizations'* own authoritative texts, one could trace the ways in which XSP participation alters the very trajectory of partner organizations.

Figure 2 indicates that XSP value can be assessed by examining the relationship between external intertextual influence and the trajectory of an authoritative text, and it highlights two ways in which XSP value production can be associated with external intertextual influence. One indicator is *how the XSP's authoritative text shapes public perception of an issue*. Pointing to the products of an XSP's work as making a contribution to the writing of a subsequent regulation or the creation of a potent statement on an issue could be ample evidence of value, particularly if the subsequent groups or texts cite the

XSP's texts in their own (Allen, 2000). A second indicator of XSP value production is *how a given XSP's authoritative text influences the authoritative texts of member organizations and other external constituents*, affecting their trajectory well outside the XSP's work. Examining changes in the texts of affiliated members would provide additional evidence that the XSP's authoritative text is, over time, exerting external influence on related constituents and likely generating value. That is, constituents will appropriate or reproduce elements of an XSP's authoritative text in meaningful ways.

> *Proposition 4a: An XSP will be more likely to be assessed as valuable to the extent its authoritative text influences public perceptions of relevant issues.*

> *Proposition 4b: An XSP will be more likely to be assessed as valuable to the extent its authoritative text influences the authoritative texts of member organizations and other external constituents.*

Accounts of capital transformation. Finally, XSP members must also demonstrate the value of the XSP to their home organizations and other external constituents. In CCO thinking, assessing value is not about making an objective determination of organizational success but, rather, revolves around how the organization secures the legitimate right to continue to appropriate the capital of the individuals and collectives associated with it. In other words, value is an assessment of payoff, which translates into a license to deploy, develop, and accumulate capital from individuals (committing time and effort), firms (committing funds), governments (committing reputations and legal authority), and civil society organizations (committing knowledge and passion). A reasonable way to understand how forms of capital are assessed is by examining the accounts that XSP participants and member organizations employ in justifying their XSP-oriented efforts and the way in which elements of an XSP's authoritative text are appropriated or reproduced in these accounts (if at all).

Specifically, we would expect to see XSP members pointing to a transformation of committed capital into another form as accounts

given to other XSP members, home organizations, and other external constituents. Accounts are justifications for conduct, understandable to oneself and others, which render action meaningful and intelligible (Scott & Lyman, 1968). They reveal the discourses acting on—and sanctioning—particular identities while also exposing rules for appropriate activity (Harré & Secord, 1972; Tompkins & Cheney, 1983). For instance, a commercial firm's representative could explain that the economic capital the company committed to an XSP produced symbolic capital in the form of a positive reputation, or a member of an NGO might remark that the sharing of knowledge related to the XSP's activity produced social and cultural capital in the form of contacts and shared problem frames the NGO might draw on in subsequent projects (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Brown & Ashman, 1996).

Examining accounts, then, can offer insight into the valuation of particular forms of capital and can provide evidence of an XSP's capacity to transform capital (i.e., exhibit collective agency). Of course, the complexity of communicative practice means that the researcher must dig deeper to grasp the significance of accounting. For instance, Jarzabkowski, Sillince, and Shaw (2010) suggest that organizational speakers can work from several different rhetorical positions in crafting strategically ambiguous statements that can accommodate several conflicting interests at the same time. Thus, accepting accounts at face value provides a capacity to understand the preferred discursive resources in a setting, but examining the connections between proffered accounts and attributions of value requires additional investigation.

This accounting can also move beyond reporting to the home organization to address other relevant parties. For instance, companies accused of abusing sweatshop labor in the 1990s, such as Nike and The Gap, were able to display virtue to stakeholders and critics via their participation in XSPs devoted to reforming factory working conditions in Southeast Asia (DeTienne & Lewis, 2005; Knight & Greenberg, 2002). The companies' participation in these XSPs (whether authentic or contrived) attracted social, cultural, and symbolic capital: the firms created networks of actors interested in ethical production techniques, gained knowledge of the context and markets, and were able to reclaim a modicum of moral legitimacy. In other words, XSPs

can generate forms of capital that may become encoded in members' accounts and, in turn, deployed in interaction with a variety of others to support claims of value generation.

One approach is to examine members' accounts over time (even after a given XSP discontinues operations), which would be informative for its ability to track changes and determine how important organizational "turning points" influence accounting practices. On this issue Innes and Booher (1999) argued that we should look beyond simple first-order effects, such as the creation of forms of capital or the (potentially novel) action strategies created by partnerships, to also consider second- and third-order effects. Second-order effects could include the emergence of new partnerships, learning that extends into the community, and changes in practices and perceptions. Third-order effects could be new norms, discourses, and institutions, as well as reductions in destructive conflict. Along these lines, Lewis, Scott, and D'Urso (2010) found that the formation of "unintended networks" was a valuable outcome of social service collaboration in Austin, Texas, for the relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina. After the hurricane struck and Austin became a hub for displaced residents, social service providers were able to draw on already existing networks and alliances to assist the hundreds of people who needed public assistance, even though these networks and alliances were formed years in advance, with no thought of hurricane relief when they were created.

Figure 2 shows that the value of an XSP can be investigated for accounts of capital transformation, and it highlights two ways in which XSP value production can be assessed. One indicator is the content or form of accounts offered when an actor is called to *justify an XSP's existence to members, home organizations, or external constituents*. Whether the accounts are extracted from interviews, observed in XSP discussions, or reported on by a manager from the home organization, the researcher's task is to ascertain patterns across accounts, as well as across (or within) sectors. A second indicator of XSP value production is to examine members' accounts over time for evidence of *how people account for higher-order effects*. Such an analysis can then include how (or whether) these accounts become manifest in subsequent conversations, how they influence conversational

partners, what the patterning of their development is, and what the consequences are of their use for reauthoring the authoritative text and trajectory of the XSP and (perhaps most important) for attracting capital and marshaling the consent of relevant parties.

> *Proposition 5a: An XSP will be more likely to be assessed as valuable to the extent its authoritative text influences justifications for its existence to members, home organizations, or external constituents.*

> *Proposition 5b: An XSP will be more likely to be assessed as valuable to the extent its authoritative text influences accounts of higher-order effects.*

To summarize, we conceptualize XSP value in terms of the trajectory of an emerging authoritative text and its capacity for collective agency. In particular, XSP value increases through communication practices encouraging meaningful participation, managing centripetal and centrifugal forces, and creating distinct and stable identities. This value can be assessed through the communication practices of external intertextual influence and accounts of capital transformation. As illustrated in Figure 2, these communication practices help us understand how value can be both increased and assessed in XSPs.

DISCUSSION

Our purpose in this article is to advance research on and theorizing about XSPs by offering a framework for understanding the production and assessment of XSP value based on an alternative conception of organizational constitution rooted in communication theory. Our central argument is that the overall value of XSPs is their ability to act—to substantially influence the people and issues within their problem domain. This comes from the constitution of organizational forms that display collective agency—the capacity to influence a host of relevant outcomes beyond what individual organizations could do on their own. The ability of an XSP to constitute itself as a collective agent is not merely an issue of structural arrangements or antecedent conditions, however; it emerges through certain communication processes. We

argue that to better understand the value of XSPs, we need to investigate their communicative constitution and the ways in which communication processes facilitate the emergence of an authoritative text, the trajectory of which has the capacity to act upon and on behalf of its members.

Our work makes two primary contributions to the literature. First, we offer a framework to explain XSP constitution in terms of communication processes. As illustrated in Figure 1, this framework depicts the existence of XSPs as a coorientation process of text-conversation dialectics that produces (and reproduces) an authoritative text, which represents the collective agency and trajectory of an XSP and influences capital attraction and the marshaling of consent. We acknowledge the foreignness of our vocabulary to some management readers but suggest that this reconceptualization is warranted for several reasons: to address the complexity of social problems on which XSPs work, to extend thinking on other forms of interorganizational collaboration (e.g., Hardy et al., 2005), and to move beyond simplistic notions that gloss over the "how" questions essential to enhancing understanding and the possibility of intervention. For example, in their review of the cross-sector partnership literature, Selsky and Parker (2005) call for more research into how partnerships change the institutional fields in which they are embedded, as well as for more research to capture partnership practices in more complex models. Our study responds to these calls by offering a more nuanced way of understanding the processual nature of XSPs and the communication practices that shape the trajectory of XSPs within a given problem domain.

Second, we offer three communication practices that can increase the value potential of XSPs and two communication practices that can assess overall XSP value. Though not exhaustive, these communication practices provide a foundation to inform future research and shape our understanding of XSP value. Figure 2 shows that communication practices of increasing meaningful participation, managing centripetal and centrifugal forces, and creating distinct and stable identities can enhance the potential for an XSP's trajectory to develop collective agency and its capacity for value. Additionally, Figure 2 shows how communication practices can assess

the overall value of XSPs, as evident in external intertextual influences and accounts of capital transformation. The figure also describes indicators to examine these communication practices. Whereas we offer theoretical propositions in the second part of the article, we believe that both sections—and their accompanying figures—should be seen as distinct contributions that improve our understanding of XSPs.

We acknowledge that the communication perspective we adopt focuses primarily on meaning constitution, compared to broader understandings of communication (e.g., Luhmann, 1992, 1995). We ground our communicative framework within CCO theorizing to enhance our understanding of XSP value for two reasons. First, CCO theorizing helps explain how organizational forms can develop collective agency and act at a distance over space and time. This is a key problem for XSPs, which lack many features of "normal" organizations, such as a physical location and formal authority relations. XSPs need to be "present" (Cooren, 2006) across organizational and sector boundaries in ways that transcend the localized interactions of XSP members. A framework rooted in communicative constitution explains the collective agency of a macro actor (through an authoritative text) that can extend its agency over space and time to mobilize resources from a distance.

Second, our communication perspective does not privilege the ontological primacy of the individual but, rather, shows that the key unit of analysis is coorientation. From their inception XSPs (and their members) are situated within broader relational contexts. The issue, then, is how these patterns of relations stabilize and reflexively impose themselves back on subsequent deliberations. Without invoking the key ideas from CCO theorizing, it becomes difficult to explain collective agency beyond individual actors, the existence of organizational forms apart from communication, and the entitivity that emerges from localize interactions. Accordingly, our work has important implications for XSP theory, research, and practice. We elaborate on these below.

Implications for Theory and Research

A first implication for theory and research has to do with understanding what constitutes value in XSPs. Traditionally, research has focused on the structural configurations of XSPs or outcomes for the individual organizations involved (Provan et al., 2007). Our framework argues that understanding the value of what XSPs *do* requires us to understand what XSPs *are*; it also suggests that researchers should direct their attention to the communicative constitution of XSPs and the communication practices that facilitate the emergence of distinct organizational forms with collective agency (not only whether XSPs merely exist or what the organizational-level outcomes are for the members involved). A communication perspective also places needed emphasis on processes of meaning construction and interpretation. Rather than accepting the organizational forms of XSPs as given, future research should examine the ongoing text-conversation dialectics among XSP members and the trajectory of a developing authoritative text.

Our work also has implications for research evaluating XSPs and other forms of community-based networks. As we mentioned above, Provan and his colleagues have been some of the strongest voices in the literature advocating partnership or network-level value assessment. Their research develops effectiveness criteria for partnerships and networks, especially in terms of service provision for clients and overall impact on social issues (e.g., Provan & Milward, 1995, 2001). Most of their effectiveness criteria are outcome based or assess the structural configurations of partnerships. Yet they are relatively silent on the issue of process, saying little about the communication processes that foster these outcomes or shape structural configurations. Thus, our work supplements this literature by calling attention to the specific communication processes that constitute XSPs and the communication practices that can be enhanced to improve the overall value of XSPs.

Moreover, we advance the literature on approaches to XSPs that are not based on the primacy of economic assumptions. For example, we complement the work of Hardy et al. (2005), who advance a discursive model of collaboration. Their model focuses more on the enactment of collaboration through conversations, whereas we are more concerned with ontological existence of partnerships as textual coorientation systems. They also pay more attention to collective identity, or a collaboration's sense of itself, whereas we focus on collective agency and a

partnership's capacity to act influentially within its problem domain.

Additionally, our work complements structurationist approaches to XSPs and other interorganizational forms (e.g., Sydow, 2004). Within some strains of CCO thinking, Giddens' (1984) version of structuration has been an important theoretical inspiration (see Ashcraft et al., 2009; Conrad, 1993; McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), but there have been important debates regarding both the explanatory power of communication (versus structure) and the capacity to theorize collective agency from a structurationist perspective (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; Taylor, 2009). Rather than enter this debate, we rely more heavily on the Montreal School's vision of CCO, because the formative power of communicative processes and the social power of the collective are central to our understanding of XSP operation and value construction. Specifically, we show how XSPs can exhibit a collective form of agency through the emergence of an authoritative text (constructed though intertextuality and distanciation) that transcends localized text-conversation dialectics of individual human agents.

Furthermore, our work supplements institutional approaches to XSPs and other interorganizational forms (e.g., Lawrence et al., 2002). One of institutional theory's "biggest voids" (Suddaby, 2011: 183) is the absence of a mechanism to explain institutional reproduction. A communication approach to organizational constitution shows that such a mechanism may involve distanciated textual representations that emerge from cooriented text-conversation dialectics. That is, institutional reproduction involves social practices of both individuals and organizations, and a communication perspective shows how text, narratives, and other institutional messages (Lammers, 2011) create causal relationships between communication practices and institutional processes.

We also advance literature that investigates the communicative constitution of organizing. The CCO literature is overwhelmingly devoted to single organizations (and even single episodes within organizations). Our work extends CCO thinking into the domain of interorganizational relationships and demonstrates the utility of CCO thinking for alternative organizational forms, such as XSPs. Furthermore, previous CCO literature has been predominantly de-

scriptive, focusing primarily on what organizations are but offering few normative prescriptions for assessing their communicative constitution. Thus, we offer an important contribution to CCO theorizing by articulating specific propositions about XSP value based on communication practice.

Finally, our figures and propositions lend themselves to empirical testing. In each section above we provide examples from previous literature and practical clarifications that orient the reader toward a more concrete understanding of how our theoretical arguments could be empirically tested and applied. For our five propositions, we offer specific indicators of communication practice that can be examined to test each proposition; these are listed in the boxes of Figure 2. We encourage future research to consider the empirical and practical implications of our propositions, as well as their potential limitations.

Implications for Practice

Given the empirical potential of our framework, it naturally has practical implications for XSPs as social systems, especially regarding meeting facilitation, communication with home organizations, and funding support. First, a communicative perspective encourages XSP meeting facilitators to find ways to encourage meaningful participation and to include a diverse range of participants' interests in deliberation. This will involve more time and effort but may also do a better job of encouraging the kinds of interactions needed to constitute a valuable partnership. Additionally, meeting facilitators could develop processes for maintaining openness in discussions and resisting impulses for premature closure. The fatigue of ongoing deliberation can make it tempting to call for premature agreements or a hasty consensus, but it is important for those who facilitate XSP discussions to sustain a degree of openness so that innovation and creativity can be fostered.

Second, XSP practitioners could examine the ways in which they communicate with members of their home organizations about XSP activities. What does this process look like? Who is involved in the conversation? XSP constitution and legitimacy are directly related to the ways in which XSP activities are represented to home organizations, especially in terms of accounts of

capital transformation and the higher-order effects that develop over time. Attention could also be paid to how elements of XSP authoritative texts are incorporated into home organizations (and vice versa).

Finally, our work has implications for how funders make decisions about supporting organized efforts to address complex social issues. Traditionally, funding agencies (both public and private) have been more likely to support the efforts of individual nonprofit organizations, helping them to build capacity and develop best-practice models for other organizations to follow (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Although there is a growing trend in the civil society sector to encourage partnerships and other forms of collaboration, there has not always been a corresponding level of support for the infrastructure needed to coordinate these efforts. That is, funding agencies generally have been more likely to support isolated interventions/programs with tangible outcomes that are evident in the short term but reluctant to provide long-term administrative and overhead expenses needed to support the lengthy and uncertain processes necessary for coordinating large-scale collaborative efforts. The communication processes and practices we describe in our framework benefit from (if not require) facilitators, support staff, and other resources that enable quality interactions and the productive management of information. Without long-term support from funding agencies or member organizations for these critical (though unglamorous) functions, it is difficult for XSPs to sustain, over time, the necessary momentum needed to produce valuable outcomes.

Conclusion

How should we understand cross-sector organizing in order to "capture the messiness of partnership practice" (Selsky & Parker, 2005: 866) and provide more theoretical precision? We suggest that a communicative theory of organizing is a promising alternative because it grounds the constitution of XSPs within communicative processes and helps explain how to increase and assess XSP value through communication practice. XSPs that address complex social issues are vitally important sites of organizing; therefore, we need organizational theories capable of explaining these important organizational forms and helping them achieve their goals. Ac-

cordingly, we demonstrate that communication has the capacity to constitute and sustain complex organizational forms like XSPs that display value through their collective agency—their ability to have a meaningful impact on the people, organizations, and issues involved in a given problem domain.

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