INTERACTION OF RESOURCES, NETWORKS AND TECHNOLOGY TO CREATE SOCIAL VALUE

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Abstract

Technologies, networks and resources are business model elements that act as core structures underpinning activities and yield economic outcome. South African context was used to explore how these elements create and retain social value for diverse groups of people and to determine how this influence the development of new products and services. A cross-sectional qualitative design method was used; cases were selected from registered network of social entrepreneurs as members of the African Social Entrepreneur Network. The data was analysed using NVIVO 10 where effects were identified and emerging patterns and themes were categorise to determine relationships. Key findings highlighted the use of partnerships for networking to complement each other's resources, while technologies are considered a major resource. The findings suggest that partnerships and collaboration are used as the platforms for connection and communication between businesses, and technologies. These are converted to strengthen the existing resources in a way that benefits stakeholders, the social business and its partners.

Keywords: Business Model Elements, Social Value Creation, Resources, Networks, Technology. South Africa

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1 Introduction

In today's businesses; technology, networks and resources have become core business model elements. Utilisation of these elements creates structured activities that yield economic outcome for business entrepreneurs, and social outcome for social entrepreneurs. There has been an increasing documentation and development of social entrepreneurship as a concept, its characteristic, activities, and the focus on social mission. This has been done at global level, targeting developing country and also in South Africa through websites, academic development and journal articles.

Business model elements regards resources as the internal company's capabilities, structure and revenue stream; networks are seen as all the current and potential relationships that could expand value chains and thereby add value; whilst technology encompasses product innovation activities and exposure to new information (Ormiston & Seymour 2011, Smith & Steven 2010, Gulati 1999). The interpretation of these elements and their value can vary greatly depending on whose viewpoint is considered; for instance, the concept of value is interpreted differently by customers, suppliers, shareholders and other stakeholders.

The lack of documentation on the effects of the relationships, interactions and related activities between the business model elements limits the interpretation and understanding of how these activities create value. This was seen as a gap in the literature and created an opportunity for determining empirical evidence that could contribute to the existing body of knowledge and potentially have significant implications for business practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore how business model elements interact with each other to create social value, determine what the effects of this interaction between elements and interpret the effects to give meaning using the South African context.

2 Literature review

Literature acknowledges business model complexities when dealing with markets, value chain for competitive advantage and stimulating business strategies. These as models are not only used to meet economic outcome, but also social outcome for sustainable development (Seelos & Mair 2005; Mukherjee, Reed and Reed 2010). These models are applied to maximise competitive advantage, capitalise on social and economic outcomes, and use markets and resources to identify gaps, thus their relevancy within the social value context becomes pivotal for this article.

Social value creation process is where business models are used to respond effectively to social issues through innovation and the creation of new concepts that have social impact (Thanke&Zadek 1997; Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern 2006). However economic value creation process sees business models as profit maximising tools for shareholders (Baron 2005, Srivastava & Agrawal 2010,Burgelman & Sayles 1986, Pinchot 1985). Through this value creators are seen as leaders with the ability to focus not only on profit but should include on social objectives. This becomes essential especially when the global business community needs to balance economic issues with social issues making business leaders to move beyond purely philanthropic nor purely commercial, instead become social-profit oriented (Yunus *et al.* 2010, Clark *et al.* 2006). This can be achieved when a profit-maximising firm pursues revenues and incentives includes attaining tax advantages, in support of a social cause (opposed or supported by the shareholder), and seeing the advantages of providing social good over pursuing personal goals.

Literature further acknowledges that business model is *not* a value proposition, a revenue model, or a network of relationships by itself; it is all of these elements together (Zott *et al.* 2011). However value creation can refer to social or economic forms if used in the context of poverty, through economic and social strategic objectives (Seelo & Mair 2005). Business model complexities need to be well managed whether they are explorative, exploitative or combination to ensure they not only incorporate social space but include ecological, cultural and social changes regardless of the processes and location (Smith, Binns & Tushman, 2010). To help gain competitive advantage business models are used as strategies to explain firm performance, identify sources of competitive advantage, and to achieve a competitive edge (Zott *et al.* 2011, Afuah & Tucci 2001, Markides & Charitou 2004). Recognition of the mutual relationship between social value creation and economic value creation is acknowledged as business model are used as a strategy to respond to market failures, to address the social needs of customers, and also to determine their competitive advantage.

Ormiston and Seymour (2011) identified networks, resources and technologies as the elements that create value-adding activities. The selection is based on the role and success at which each element has been documented to be effective in meeting social goals especially in the developing and underdeveloped markets. They view networks as being able to accelerate information sharing at different levels, whereas technology enhances innovation and production, even in situations where there is limitation in resources. This has not compromised the effectiveness of outputs and impact when the focus is on meeting social goals. Networks enhance accessibility, make huge impact, help identify opportunities, mobilize resources and has direct impact on social relations (Natsheh, Gbadegeshin, Rimpiläinen , Imamovic-Tokalic & Zambrano, 2013) It is through networks that people channel the flow of information around services, products and customers, an activity that strengthens customer and suppliers relations (Shafer *et al.* 2005, Ormiston & Seymour 2011, Osternwalder *et al.* 2005). Through this, network, become social structures that help facilitate the flow of information and shape strategic alliances (Gulati 1999, Ormiston & Seymour 2011). However, networks that create social values go beyond customers and suppliers to include other interested parties, through partnerships, volunteerism, stakeholders, donors and competitors (Weill, Malone, D'Urso, Herman and Woerner 2005, Ormiston & Seymour 2011:132). Due to their accessibility networks, can be mobilised to enhance the social mission.

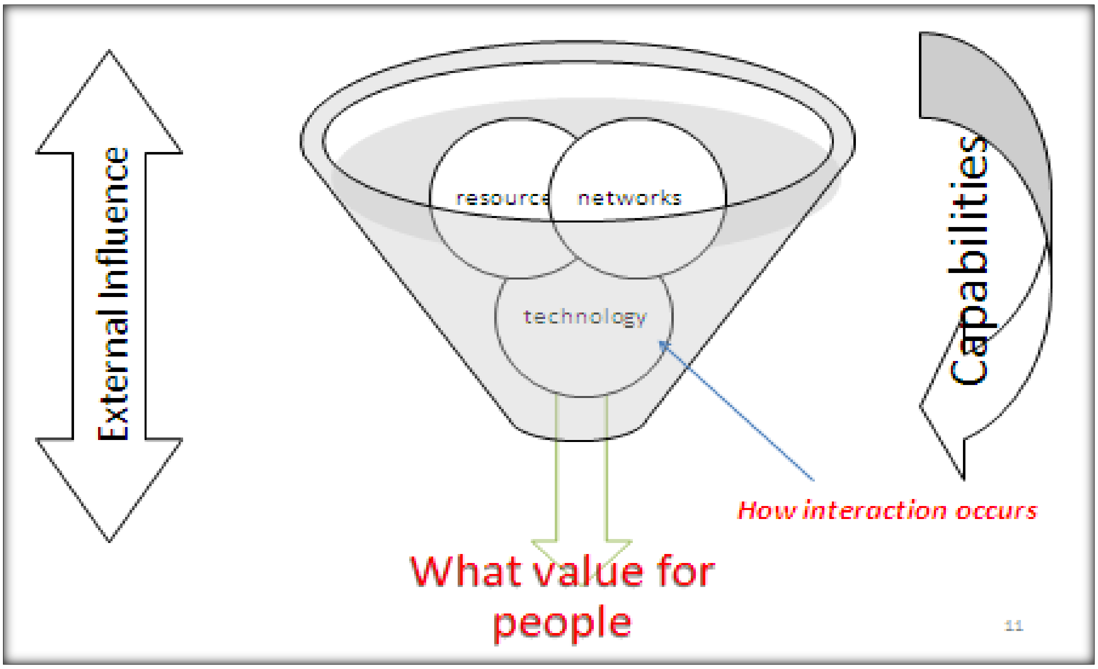
Resources are tangible and intangible components which enhance capabilities, revenue streams and human capital for business entities. How a firm mobilises its resources to achieve social value depends on its embedded strengths and geographical realities. Geographical constraints can be mitigated with the reduction of physical distances and increased interaction (Koponen 2012, Smith & Stevens 2010). Thus a firm's ability to meet business obligation depends on assets and capabilities, meaning internal capacity, human resources and financial resources. These can be within or be complemented through external processes such as external investors that firms use to formulate and implement in the business (Lui, Jackson, Shinkle,& Ozdemir 2013, Barney, 1991). Technology can be seen as a resource that complement, supplement and enhance the firms resource deficiencies to meet social goals. It can also increase accessibility by sharing simplified yet detailed information, The ability to reduced risks and limitations linked to geographic and vulnerability is essential (Waters 2013). Social value gets created when technology is creatively used to address social gaps. Social value creators thrive in risky and unresponsive environments, a creative application of technology can be used to address both structural and institutional social gaps. These gaps include insufficient resources, weak structures, and inactive customers or low levels of customer involvement. The role of technology cannot be ignored, as it can significantly add to the quality of delivered outputs (services and products) and create unique value. Because technology tends to greatly influence businesses' ability to meet customers' needs, it is essential to strengthen the business entity's internal technical capabilities to produce and supply products and services, without ignoring the contributing external dynamics.

Literature identifies *what* resources, technology and networks do. It suggests that networks increase information flows around services, products and customers, and mobilise a firm's own resources using technology creatively to address social gaps (Ormiston & Seymour 2011; Shafer, Smith and Linder 2005; Osternwalder *et al.* 2005; Gulati 1999; Weill, Malone, D'Urso, Herman and Woerner 2005). Secondly the literature considers *how* resources, networks and technology enhance innovative approaches to the delivery of products and services (Mair & Martí 2006, Peredo & McLean 2006, Lepoutre, Justo, Terjesen and Bosma 2011). Finally the literature looks at the '*why'*, which highlights the essential focus areas for information flow, interaction and communications (Porter & Millar 1985, Wernerfelt 1984, Barney 1991, Hervieux & Turcotte 2010, Dyer & Singh 1998, Lavie 2006, Spear 2006).

3 Conceptual framework

The literature has failed to help describe which of these business model elements interact, the type of interaction (intra or inter), and identifying the interaction process (multi or singular) to create value both economic and social. Based on literature it can be purported that value creating activities occur through networks, using external inputs, and internal resource capabilities (Shafer *et al.* 2005, Ormiston & Seymour 2011). Literature helped identify resources, networks and technology as core business model elements that interact to support social value creation and enhance innovative approaches to the delivery of products and services (Mair & Martí 2006; Peredo & McLean 2006; Lepoutre, Justo, Terjesen and Bosma 2011). It further gives an indication of what resources, technology and networks do how they enhance innovative approaches for the delivery of outputs (products and services) and why they influence information flow, interaction and communications strengthened the process.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



A conceptual framework was proposed which highlight how the external factors influence people and business model elements. It suggests that the influence is not one-directional; rather there is an inter-dependence relationship between factors and elements that drive the creation of social value. These external influences affect the flow of information between elements. Dual dimensional external factors act as interdependent drivers that affect the outcome based on the relationship between the external, internal resources and capabilities and the role of networks as activities yields social value. At the same time, the presence of internal business entity capabilities can be strengthened (or weakened) by the interactions between resources, technology and networks. The effects of the external influences and the strength of internal capabilities together determine the level of social value created for people. Although the conceptual framework as indicated in Figure 1 above indicates these assumption it still does not answer the question of how the interaction occur nor what is the value for the people. The following propositions guided the study:

- ***Proposition 1***: The interactions between business models elements determines the level of social value created.

- ***Proposition 2:*** The effects of the interactions between business model elements are framed by the unique, contextual issues of a country.

4 Design and methods

A qualitative research approach was used, making subjectivism the ontology, with an interpretivist epistemological philosophy. During the analysis of the content, the study tried to interpret the respondent's answers as accurately as possible, where anything was unclear, follow-ups question were used to provide greater clarity. It is acknowledged that 'reality' is socially constructed in a subjective manner. This reality changes according to the external environment and subjective interpretations.

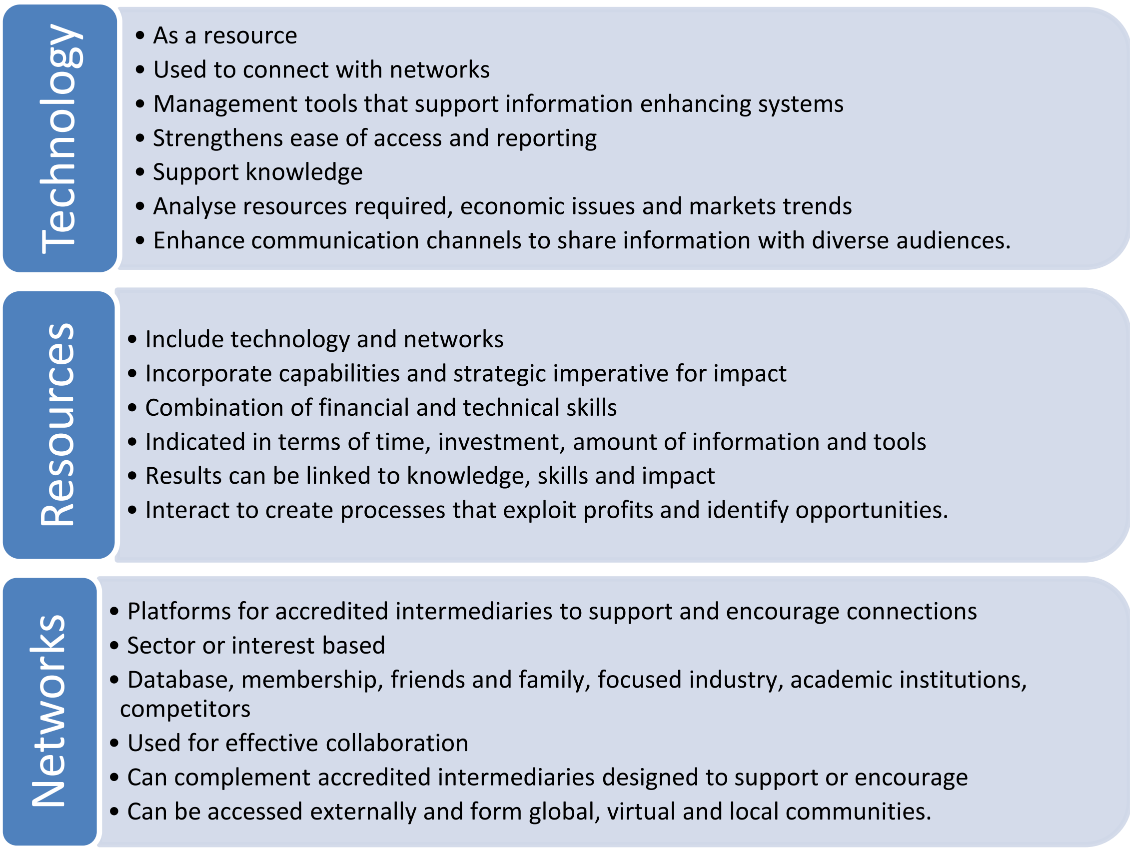
A multi-case studies used to investigate phenomena where cases were studied in their natural environment to ensure those environments was well understood by the researcher. Both theoretical and literal replication was purposefully done during the selection of cases. For theoretical replication, the researcher used predicted variation by focusing on diverse sectors, while literal replication predicted similar results. As an exploratory research the study, provided new insights into existing phenomena. This was achieved by asking open-ended questions to assess responses and derive new insights from them. Data was collected using multiple sources, which included interviews, documented articles, reports and website content. These were triangulated to ensure that the data collected from these diverse sources gave both discrete and integrated results and explored the dimensions of both single-case and multi-case strategy.

From a database of 537 registered social entrepreneurs, as members of the African Social Entrepreneur Network (ASEN) only 12 cases could be identified as the population. The selected cases purely focused on social value. Stringent selection criteria was applied, which limited the group to those individuals or organisations with more than five years' experience participating in the social entrepreneurship environment; solely responding to social, economic and environmental needs; and using innovative approaches, with evidence of resource capability, adaptable technology trends and strong established networks. Seven were interviewed before saturation was reached where five were active social value creators and two were experts in the social economy and green economy sectors. Their contribution was to strengthen not only the double bottom line focus but the triple bottom line for sustainable outcomes. Through the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) with specific reference to qualitative research software (QSR) and NVivo 10 data was analysed.

5 Findings

An analysis of the language constructs revealed how the main concepts have been constructed using certain wording, as shown in Figure 2 below. However these words as research variables were made subjectively and independently and interchangeable used with concepts such as 'support' and 'partners'. Categories related to 'support' came out prominently: to indicate a) support ***to*** b***)***support ***and*** c)***financial*** support d)support ***of*** and e)support organizations.

Figure2. Word constructs



The word 'partner', was used to distinguish perceptions, types and activities, to derive meaning based on partnerships, their contribution to value creation and the role they play. These have been grouped in table 1 below. Relationships strengthen partnerships that contribute towards the impact, and also enhance sustainability making the entry and exit strategy of each partner a key determinant that adds value.

Table 1. How partnerships are viewed

How partners are viewed	Type of partners	What partners do
Willingness to participate (positive)	Competitor (business/private sector/ enterprises)	Bring in resources that are not present
Help to focus on different areas (positive)	Complementary (suppliers, buyers, etc.)	Strengthen impact and working relations
Create an additional challenge (negative)	Government	Help with accountability
Enhance reputation (both positive and negative)	Non-governmental organisations/ companies	Bring diverse solutions to a problem
Contribute to knowledge management (positive)	Investors/ donors/ funders	Combine resources and technologies
Respond only by invitation (both positive and negative)	Communities	Strengthen capabilities
Complementary players with diverse identified needs (positive)	Special needs groups/ vulnerable groups	

5.1 How the interaction occurs

Different approaches are used where resources, technologies and networks are mainly utilised for effectiveness. Weaknesses in internal capability, resource deficiencies and other structural barriers or limitation influence how the interaction occurs.

Capitalising on resources of suppliers and competitors

Platforms are created to secure hubs which helped foster partnership and collaboration with others especially when there might have limited opportunities in the industry to strengthen social value. However, a focus was more on creating platforms and space for interaction that leads to partnerships development and collaboration. The diversity of players in this platform does not only strengthen the company's niche market but they complement and compete with each other. This links people with new opportunities (e.g. employment, social entrepreneurs -SE), strengthen existing opportunities and resources that built linkages for human capital and technology. Although these were competitors, buyers and sellers each collaborating partner's contributed and brought unique elements that strengthen the social value added. When faced with limited internal capability or insufficient resources collaboration with suppliers and competitors as existing networks was preferred instead of outsourcing. This ensures that each brings supplementary and or complementary resources and technologies.

Partners provide required resources

Partnership and collaboration strengthen social value during product development, marketing and sales. Thus the feedback received from stakeholder as customers, suppliers or buyers strengthen the communication through these networks to add social value. Tapping into partner becomes a resource that help filters the social value added for the communities. Strategic positioning of partners is crucial based on the role and contribution they make. It is also acknowledged that some partners bring resources (e.g. investors). The combination of partner's resources to add social value meant partnerships leads to strengthen networks and provide required resources.

Combined resources and technologies from partners

Working without the support of partners was not possible especially when each collaborating partner brings their own resources and technology as part of the contribution to add social value. All resources and technologies used are initially identified at an early stage through project management process. Specification of resources and technologies is done prior to implementation. Partner gets invited based on the strategic position based on their technical expertise. Collaboration becomes a strategic process, which could mean bringing your own technology as a resource. Tapping into each partner resources and technologies help add value for the communities. It is also acknowledged that some partners bring resources that are not related to their specialist skills. For instance a financial institution that brings only human resource to participate as labourer for a construction of an infrastructure. Partners, resources and technologies are thrown in a pool for effective utilisation of skills and expertise as part of the networks. These can be complementary, experts, ensure that input and feedback gets shared with stakeholders.

Creating platforms and space for interaction

Social value creators focus on creating platforms and space where partnership and collaboration of social businesses, investors, businesses, and social enterprises could develop and be strengthening to achieve social value. They create space that provides a network to support a journey and relationships that bridge the needs gap with requirement opportunities. They focus more on platforms and space for interaction that leads to partnerships development and collaboration. Through these linkages and combination of resources a social enterprises (SE) is linked with an investors. Meaning investors bring financial resources to this platform, while SE are bringing both human capital and their technology. Each collaborating partner brings own resources and/or technology as part of the contribution to add social value. Technological resources are matched with technologies to ensure that developing relationships are mutual beneficially where they can move beyond the initial state based on trust, commitment and stewardship.

6 Discussion of emerging themes

Themes were categorised into inhibitors and enhancers, based on the core function and the role played by the entities. Although most fell into either category, there was an overlap where inhibitors created missed opportunities while enhancers were solution determinants, the 'power of many' and connectors. Both competitive elements and collaborative elements were seen as either inhibitors or enhancers, depending on context. These were grouped into a) needs and solutions b) connectors, c) policy, d) collaboration and competition and e) missed opportunities.

There were three key enhancers that play a supportive role during the creation of social value identified

1. Roles and their contributions (Collaborative versus competitive roles)

Strength of many depends on the degree to which partners' roles is either competitive or collaborative which can create gaps and/ or opportunities. Meaning minimal collaboration and too much fragmentation can indicate a gap in higher level structures, however adding to fragmentation is a situation of competition, where collaboration is viewed only as 'what value does it have for me?' For instance an absence of merger and acquisition fails to indicate where a good cause could be strengthened by permanently joining for a common purpose. A critical question to ask looks at 'the combination of all resources, networks and technologies from two or more firms better than a combination of some or other of these elements?' The purpose of role players for social value should not be intrinsic but extrinsic, as competition detracts from the common cause and can lead to missed opportunities.

2. The 'connector' as a social value creator

The social value creators perceived themselves as connectors as they connect needs with specific solutions, interlink skills, resources and technologies. Further they also connect stakeholders with solutions, where stakeholders are those with the need. Therefore needs-focused stakeholders (beneficiaries) are connected with solution-focused stakeholders (social value creators). This is achieved through multiple stakeholder engagement and bridging identified gaps for social outcome.

3. The 'enhancer' versus the 'inhibitor'

Enhancers help with the creation and expansion of social value, whereas inhibitors limit opportunities for the creation of social value. Policies are seen as supportive resources, yet they can also create limitations and confusion due to unclear policy definitions. Policy, finance and access to resources can be seen as both an enhancer and an inhibitor. Thus it is essential that institutions such as government take lead through clear policies, financial support and non financial resources for support and directions to those who do novice and need to understand the sector.

4. Contribution of resources, networks and technologies to social value

Interaction focused on partnerships and collaboration to strengthen social value creation. It is through these collaborations that each partner brings in their own resources and technology to contribute to the creation of social value. Resources and technologies required are identified and specified at an early stage, prior to implementation. Partnership invitations are then based on a partner's strategic position and technical expertise. Strategic collaboration means each partner brings in their own technology and resources, yet technology-focused companies regard technology as their domain. Making each collaborating partner contribution of own resources and/or technology to add social value although some partners contribute resources that are not related to their specialist skills. The core aspect is that technologies and resources are matched to develop relationships that are mutually beneficial, and based on trust, commitment and stewardship. Feedback received from stakeholders such as customers, suppliers or buyers strengthens the flow of information through these networks for a targeted product, marketing and sales that meets the social needs required. Tapping into partners' expertise becomes a resource that helps to strengthen the addition of social value for communities, based on positioning and strategic gaps for market penetration.

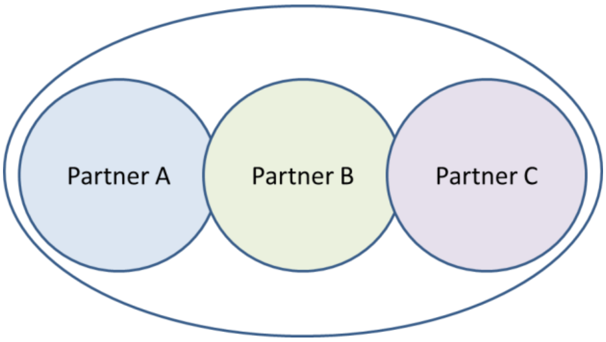
5. The interaction process

How interaction occurs depends on the roles each partner plays outside the collaboration. This is not necessarily a determinant of their contribution and role to be played within the partnership; instead, collaborating partners can complement, support and strengthen other for a specific outcome, while still competing outside that partnership in other areas. The 'binding glue' that enhances the creation of social value for people through a partnership is the common pursuit of a joint purposive outcome. The interaction process occurs in three steps which are the collaboration space, the collaboration approach and the interaction.

5.1. collaboration space

Partners come together and placed in the same basket. These partners have been invited to collaborate for the achievement of a specific social outcome.

Figure 3. Collaboration Space



Networks are used as information sharing platforms to source and invite potential partners into the collaboration space. The diversity of partners is acknowledged, where collaboration with intent achieve a social outcome occurs in a pre created collaboration space which has been created prior to the interactions. Figure 3 above suggest that different partners are brought together to fulfil a specific purpose. Partners' roles are to complement, support and/or strengthen the specific outcome. Thus participation is an added value for a joint purposive social outcome, which strengthens the networking space created during a collaborative process.

5.2 collaboration approach

The diversity of partners means contribution on an equal and complementary level where, joint combinations of resources and technologies are brought together by partners to enhance the social value creation process. Simple or complex interactions occur, depending on the number of elements contributed by partners

Figure 4. The Approach

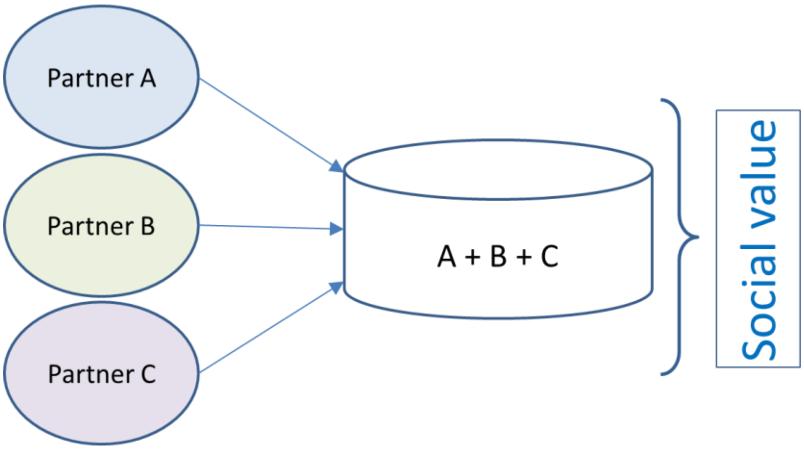
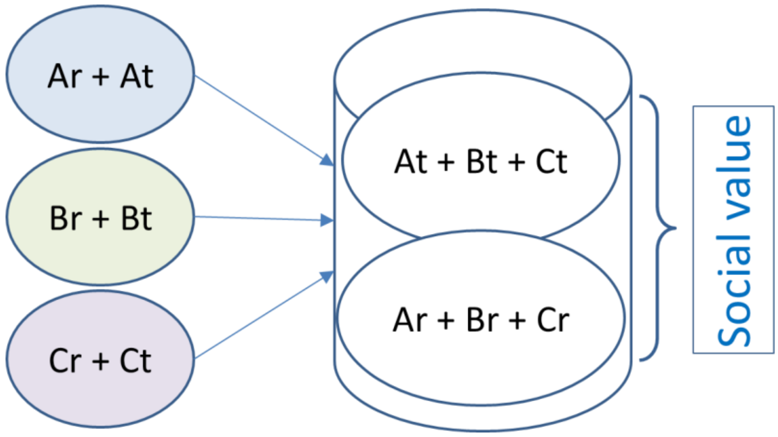


Figure 4 above suggests that partnerships enhance collaboration, which mitigates and helps to overcome individual weaknesses. Networks become the means to bring partners together. Each partner fulfils a specific need and performs a specific role. Although each partner makes their own contribution to social value creation, their combined contributions, through their interactions, strengthen the final outcome.

5.3 interaction process

The resources that each partner brings to the partnership, and how those resources combine and interact in new ways to create social value can be represented as follows; r = resources, t=technology. However Partners A, B, and C contribute their own resources and technologies, depicted as (Ar + At), (Br + Bt) and (Cr + Ct).

Figure 5. The interaction

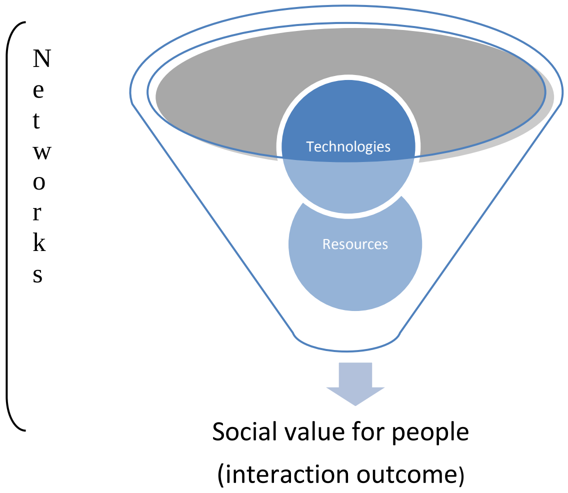


These elements are then combined and strengthened through their interactions, forming improved capabilities. Combined elements are stronger than single ones, and create new and unique resource structures. Through this interaction between business elements, different and uniquely powerful resource structures are created and filtered to yield social value. For technologies to create social value for people, they have to be converted to functional resources that can be absorbed into processes that add value for people. The interaction process occurs between resources and technologies. Each partners' resources (r) and technologies (t) are merged together into 'wholes' that are 'greater than the parts'. The final outcome is the conversion of individual technologies and resources to form new unique capabilities that strengthen and filter value to people.

6. How resources technology and networks creates social value

The new combined technologies and resources created through the partnership platform merge into a new unique resource structure that is filtered into the social value creation process, leading to an improved outcome

Figure 6. The interaction that create social value outcome



Through this interaction between technologies and resources converts technologies into resources, thereby creating a new unique and powerful resource that strengthens the creation of social value. Technology gets converted into a resource. By combining resources and technology, with the help of networks, new resource structures and capabilities are created. Resources can be linked to the specialities brought by human capital. This requires the identification core competencies and skills. Resources and technologies combine to create more complex resources, with networks as the intermediary platforms. Technologies become the additional tools that complement and support core competencies and skills. It could be argued that resources bring together both human capital and technology through collaborative partnerships to add social value. When technologies are converted into resources, they filter through to people as added social value. Partnerships strengthen and support connections with a lasting impact. Purposive collaborations enhance interactions, which drive, yield and strengthen value creation and maximise social outcomes and solutions.

7 Conclusions

It can be concluded that partners are brought together through networks. Making networks platforms for diverse partners to connect and bring together resources and technologies. Competitors, collaborators, suppliers or sellers as experts can become essential partners. Thus the use of such expertise helps complement and or supplement the social outcome.

It can further be concluded that the three interaction steps at which collaboration occurs the space, the approach and the interaction can be in a simple or complex form. Interaction occurs during the converging of technologies to resources that strengthens the creation of social value. These technological resources not only strengthen existing resources to serve a specific purposes but enhance communication networks to strengthen feedback from stakeholders during the research, development and design of final products.

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