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Advancing Public Service Logic: moving towards an ecosystemic framework for value creation in the public service context

Jakob Trischler [ID][a], Maria Røhnebæk [ID][b], Bo Edvardsson[a] and Bård Tronvoll[c]

[a]CTF Service Research Center, Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden; [b]Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Lillehammer, Norway; [c]Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences and CTF Service Research Center, Karlstad University, Karlstad, Sweden

ABSTRACT
This paper argues that the theoretical foundation for studying the ecosystemic nature of value creation is lacking within the public service logic (PSL). To address this limitation, the paper uses a theory synthesis to clarify service-related key concepts and develop four premises that position PSL as an ecosystemic framework. These premises 1) position PSL as a mid-range theoretical framework, 2) propose the service ecosystem as an analytical framework, 3) define service (not services) as the basis for PSL, and 4) acknowledge the mediating role of the public service organization in value co-creation. Research directions guide the future development of PSL.

1. Introduction

There is a strong interest in the public administration and management (PAM) literature on the theoretical developments in service research and how these can help address the challenges public managers and policymakers face. One emerging stream of research in this regard is the public service logic (PSL).[1] By directly linking to service research – especially the service logic (SL; Grönroos 2006, 2011) and service-dominant logic (SDL; Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2008) – PSL seeks 'to situate value creation as the fundamental building block of public services delivery' (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021, 642). Yet we note that during its development, PSL shifted between and combined concepts from SL and SDL in a piecemeal fashion, with limited reflection on their theoretical origins, compatibility, and implications. Not only does this create a blurred narrative around SL and SDL within PAM research, but it also creates confusion around PSL's own positioning and contribution.

This paper aims to advance PSL to capture the ecosystemic nature of value creation in the public service context. PSL is currently positioned as a SL-informed framework and situates value creation on the service use(r) side (Osborne 2018). As we argue in

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the present paper, this positioning is incompatible with how value is co-created in and beyond interactions with the public service organization (PSO). To address this limitation, we advance PSL as a service logic that adopts an ecosystemic rather than use(r)-centred analytical lens to study value creation phenomena in the public service context. Preceding this repositioning is a critical analysis of PSL, as well as a comprehensive review and clarification of SL and SDL in terms of their theoretical underpinnings, key concepts, and fundamental premises.

Our paper takes the form of a theory synthesis, which is a conceptual paper type that 'seeks to achieve conceptual integration across multiple theories or literature streams' (Jaakkola 2020, 21). Articles of this type help explore the conceptual underpinnings of an emerging theory, especially when conceptualizations and related knowledge are fragmented across diverse domains or disciplines (Jaakkola 2020; MacInnis 2011). Jaakkola (2020) distinguishes theory synthesis from three other conceptual paper types, namely theory adaptation, typology, and model. We use a theory synthesis due to the need to clarify the fragmented use of service-related key concepts within PAM research. In addition, a theory synthesis is suggested as a suitable approach for developing premises, which are 'statements *identifying and defining concepts* as the core elements of a theoretical perspective or the delineation of a phenomenon' (Ulaga et al. 2021, 389, emphasis in original).

We contribute to the PAM literature in two ways: First, we advance PSL conceptually by developing a set of premises that articulate a theoretical foundation for PSL. Specifically, we propose that PSL 1) should be positioned as a mid-range theoretical framework, 2) adopt the service ecosystem as an analytical framework for studying value co-creation, 3) define service (not services) as its fundamental basis, and 4) acknowledge the mediating role of the PSO in dealing with competing demands and tensions between individual and collective interests/needs. These premises set a theoretical basis for PSL as a service-informed logic and guide the future development of PSL as a lens to study the ecosystemic nature of value creation in the public service context. Second, we contribute with a comprehensive overview of service-related concepts, including a discussion of how these might be applied to the public service context. This overview, we argue, not only provides a service concept 'toolbox' for PAM researchers to draw upon but also fosters cross-disciplinary work between PAM and conventional service research.

2. A review of service-related key concepts and premises on value creation

The starting point of a theory synthesis is to define a theoretical lens that guides the summary and integration of knowledge (Jaakkola 2020). The present paper takes a 'service lens' as the starting point since this lens is inherent to both SL and SDL, and subsequently also fundamental to PSL. 'Service' refers to a perspective on value creation and should not be confused with 'services' (Edvardsson, Gustafsson, and Roos 2005). Specifically, 'services' is used to describe a specific product category that (as opposed to tangible goods) requires a different design, production, and delivery approach. In contrast, 'Service' (not services), as used by SDL and SL describes the process of doing something beneficial for and in conjunction with some actors (Vargo and Lusch 2008). During this process, value is not seen as produced by one actor and delivered to another (as is inherent to the services perspective), but is co-created *during*

use and 'uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary' (Vargo and Lusch 2016, 8). Thus, from a service lens, value is understood as something co-created and determined by the service user (or any other actor) during use, while the specific use situation is shaped by the social context (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber 2011). We further clarify the distinction between services and service below, where we review the service research developments more generally before diving deeper into SL and SDL, respectively, to identify and define the service-related key concepts that are fundamental to the *service* lens.

2.1 From an interactional towards a systemic perspective on value creation in service research

The first influential work that shaped our current understanding of *service* was the attempt to 'break free' from conventional product marketing practices (Shostack 1977), also referred to as transaction marketing (Coviello, Brodie, and Munro 1997), marketing management (Webster 1992), manufacturing logic (Normann 2001), or goods-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004). These conventional marketing practices were guided by the value-in-exchange model asserting that value is designed into products and services, produced (or manufactured), and then exchanged in the marketplace through discrete transactions. Marketing, thereby, acted as a function focusing on bridging production and consumption through optimizing output and value exchange (Kotler 1980). By taking a value-in-exchange and output-centred view, service researchers started to classify services as a specific product category that are intangible in nature, their production and consumption co-occur, they are heterogeneous in every transaction, and, unlike goods, they cannot be stored (Sasser, Olson, and Wyckoff 1978).

The increasing attention on firm–customer interactions led to a transition of marketing research from short-term economic transactions to customer relationships (Grönroos 1994; Morgan and Hunt 1994). With this transition arose the debate of whether the focus should still be on exchanged value or perceived value (Peter and Olson 1993; Ravald and Grönroos 1996; Zeithaml 1988). Zeithaml (1988, 14) defines perceived value ' . . . as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on a perception of what is received and what is given'. Similarly, Peter and Olson (1993) position the concept of perceived value in relation to what value the customer receives when purchasing a product or service. The concept of perceived value was the starting point for shifting value creation away from something created within a firm's process and delivered to customers towards something created and individually determined by the customer when using products or services (Normann and Ramirez 1993; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004). This shift directly informs the concept of value-in-use (Grönroos 2006; Vargo and Lusch 2004), which is central to both SDL and SL; in fact, it evolved to the central concept of SL asserting that value is 'the customer's creation of value-in-use' (Grönroos and Voima 2013, 137).

By positioning value creation in the customer's sphere, much research focused on interactions to better understand how firms as value facilitators may support customers to create value in their context (e.g. Berry, Wall, and Carbone 2006; Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan 2008; Grönroos 2006). A notable exception to this dyadic lens is the work of the Industrial Marketing Purchasing (IMP) group. By recognizing that firms are dependent on the network in which they operate, IMP research has a long

tradition of studying business networks and the interdependency, relationships, and interactions between firms (Hakansson and Snehota 1995). Thereby, the IMP standpoint is that from a business-to-business (B2B) perspective, both the firm and the customer are identical for the purpose of analysis because both seek to cope with their own problems and needs while also inevitably involved in the problem-coping of counterparts, either simultaneously or sequentially (Ford 2011). Put simply, customers were not treated as a 'dead end' of the value creation process but as actors who operate in complex networks. This network and actor-to-actor approach initially introduced by IMP research set the basis for SDL's extension towards adopting an ecosystemic approach to value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2011).

2.2 Service logic

We now turn our focus on the two logics of service, which can be found to be integrated into the development of PSL. First, we review service logic (SL), which has evolved from Nordic and French schools' service and relationship marketing discourses (see Grönroos 2006 for a comprehensive historical survey). According to Grönroos (2006, 319), within 'the research tradition of the Nordic School of service marketing and management, it was established early on that the only aspect of services that clearly distinguishes them from physical goods is their *process* nature' (emphasis in original). Grönroos thereby refers to the open process nature where customers participate in the 'emergence' of services, while physical goods are produced in closed production processes. Since mainstream marketing models did not provide 'any means of entering the consumption process' [. . . the] 'most important contribution to marketing by service marketing research is that the black box of consumption in goods-based marketing models was penetrated and explored' (Grönroos 2006, 319).

SL has placed much emphasis on the 'black box of consumption' specifically with the question of 'what a service should do for the customer' (Grönroos 2006, 323). Accordingly, Grönroos (2006, 324) defines services as 'processes where a set of company resources interacts with the customers so that value is created or emerges in the customers' processes'. This definition highlights that value creation is not about producing and delivering value but about understanding customers' needs and experiences. Based on this understanding, it develops service offerings that support customers in their value creation activities (Grönroos, 2011). Value creation, in turn, is defined as the 'customer's creation of value-in-use', thus 'the extent to which a customer feels better off (positive value) or worse off (negative value) through experiences somehow related to consumption' (Grönroos and Voima 2013, 136–7). In other words, value is created and evaluated by the customer when using products or services facilitated by a firm.

SL additionally distinguishes three value creation spheres (i.e. customer-, provider-, and joint-sphere) and the roles the firm and the customer can take during the value creation process. The customer acts as the value creator, while the provider takes the role of a value facilitator (Grönroos and Voima 2013). Despite being depicted sequentially, Grönroos and Voima (2013) stress that the three spheres do not have to follow in an organized manner. Instead, they explain the value creation process and what actions a service provider and a customer may independently or jointly engage in during this process. Importantly, from an SL perspective, it is only within the joint sphere where value co-creation can occur through interactions (Grönroos 2008; Grönroos and

Voima 2013): Through interactions, the customer invites the provider into the creation of value; i.e. the provider has the opportunity to influence the customer's creation of value-in-use. From a provider's perspective, the customer can participate in the provider's production process as a co-producer or co-designer. Accordingly, value co-creation *cannot* take place unless interactions between the firm and the customer occur.

2.3 Service-dominant logic

A different development can be observed in the service-dominant logic (SDL). SDL was originally introduced by Vargo and Lusch (2004) as an opposing worldview to the so-called goods-dominant logic (GDL) and related value-in-exchange model, which has long dominated the economics and business fields. In GDL, value is seen as embedded in units of output and exchanged in products and services. By contrast, SDL proposes that service, defined as ' . . . the application of specialized competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself' (Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2), is the fundamental basis of exchange. The term 'service' thus denotes using one's resources for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself rather than units of output as implied in the plural term 'services' (Vargo and Lusch 2008).

SDL can be described as a 'continuing narrative of value co-creation through resource integration and service exchange' (Vargo and Lusch 2017, 47). SDL defines service (i.e. the application of competences) as the fundamental basis of exchange (Axiom 1) and argues that all social and economic actors are resource integrators (Axiom 3; Vargo and Lusch 2016). Accordingly, SDL's standpoint is that 'value is not completely individually, or even dyadically created, but rather it is created through the integration of resources, provided by many sources, including a full range of market-, private- and public-facing resources and actors' (Vargo and Lusch 2016, 9). In fact, value is seen as being *always* co-created by multiple actors, including the beneficiary (Axiom 2), and it is the latter (i.e. the beneficiary) who uniquely and phenomenologically determines what value is (Axiom 4; Vargo and Lusch 2016).

Since its introduction in 2004, SDL has been refined and developed further. The last significant update occurred in 2016 when Vargo and Lusch (2016) consolidated the 11 foundational SDL premises into five axioms (see Axiom 1–4 above) and introduced the service ecosystem lens as the unit of analysis for value co-creation in context, engaging multiple actors. The service ecosystem is 'a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange' (Vargo and Lusch 2016, 10–11). SDL links to institutions (i.e. humanly devised rules, norms, and beliefs) and their arrangements into institutional logic (Scott 2013) to emphasize that '[v]alue cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements' (Axiom 5; Vargo and Lusch 2016, 8). SDL uses the service ecosystem to take a multi-level perspective (i.e. 'micro', 'meso', and 'macro' levels) for analytical purposes: 'while adopting an ontological understanding of a "flat", one-level world, S-D logic also maintains an epistemological, multi-level perspective for analytical purposes' (Akaka, Koskela-Huotari, and Vargo 2021, 383). This multi-level perspective allows the investigator to alternately zoom in and zoom out to understand a phenomenon in question at any level (aggregation) of interest (Chandler and Vargo 2011).

2.4 Service concepts and their use in SL and SDL

Having reviewed the developments of service research in general, and SL and SDL in particular, we can now define service concepts that are fundamental to both logics. Doing so clarifies the key concepts and their use in SL and SDL. In addition, this clarification sets the basis for analysing how service concepts have been used to inform the development of PSL, which is the focus of section 3.

Table 1 provides a detailed lexicon of key concepts evolving from the service research literature, specifically SL and SDL. As shown in Table 1, both logics agree on a number of points, including that a service provider cannot deliver value and that value is determined by the user (i.e. beneficiary). Instead of assuming value being embedded in goods or services and then exchanged during the point of sale, SL and SDL define value as something that is created during use. As such, both logics reject the value-in-exchange model and put forward that a distinction between physical goods and intangible services is not needed or is even misleading. Yet, a main difference between both logics is the discussion around value *co*-creation. While SDL argues that value is *always* co-created, SL has a different position and asserts that direct interactions are needed for co-creation to happen. In addition, SDL uses an actor-to-actor and systemic lens to explain value creation, while SL is positioned on a dyadic and process level of value creation.

It also becomes clear that SL and SDL are not conflicting but, in many ways, complementary logics that may inform public management in different ways: With its focus on value creation spheres, SL zooms in on the micro level and explores how value creation comes about in the user's sphere with or without interactions with the service provider. SDL, on the other hand, is a meta-theoretical framework that emphasizes that value creation does not happen in isolation, but is characterized by a complex ecosystem of multiple actors with complementing resources co-creating value for themselves and others. Importantly, however, both SL and SDL are frameworks initially developed to understand value creation in a private sector context. Arguably as a meta-theoretical framework, SDL may be generic enough to (also) aid understandings of value creation in the public service context especially following its recent work on service ecosystems and acknowledging the role of institutional arrangements (referring to norms, rules, traditions and beliefs) as both enabling and constraining value co-creation activities. Still, given its meta-theoretical positioning, SDL does not provide concrete analytical tools for analysing value creation phenomena in specific contexts, such as PAM. For this end, there is a need for a mid-range theoretical framework that guides the analysis of value creation unfolding in a political context rather than the economic marketplace (Stoker 2006), as well as informs the management of value creation as set in public governance structures (Ostrom 2015).

3 The adoption of service concepts by PSL – a critical analysis

Drawing on both PAM and diverse service research strands, PSL has evolved as a distinct body of work over the past decade (Hodgkinson et al. 2017; Osborne 2020). However, PSL's evolution has not taken a steady path, switching between SL and SDL without a thorough examination of the implications for its theoretical foundations. Indeed, although earlier developments referred to Public Service Dominant Logic (PSDL; Osborne et al. 2015; Osborne, Radnor, and Nasi 2013), this

Table 1. The key concepts underpinning SL and SDL.

Key concept	SL Understanding	SDL Understanding	Commonalities (C) and Differences (D) SL/SDL
Service A perspective on value creation (Grönroos 2011; Vargo and Lusch 2004)	Service is support for an individual's or organization's everyday processes in a way that facilitates (or contributes to) this individual's or organization's value creation (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014; Grönroos 2011).	The application of resources for the benefit of the focal actor or others. The process of doing something beneficial for and in conjunction with some entity (Vargo and Lusch 2008).	C: Both SL and SDL use 'service', going beyond the services/products as more universal than goods. Service refers to a perspective on value creation, emphasizing outcomes rather that output for engaged actors. D: SL defines service as an interactive or mediating factor of value creation between the firm and its customers (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014), while SDL sees service as the fundamental basis of exchange, emphasizing service-for-service exchange among multiple actors (Vargo and Lusch 2016).
Value and value creation Value is the outcome of the integration and use of resource for the benefit of engaged actors. Value creation is context and process dependent (Ranjan and Read 2016).	Value emerges through the physical or mental use of resources, and from possession of them (Grönroos and Voima 2013). Co-creation denotes the joint process whereby firms and customers together in interactions, create value. The customer creates value, the firm facilitates value.	Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary (Vargo and Lusch 2011). Value creation 'always involves a unique combination of resources' (Vargo and Lusch 2008, 8). SDL puts forward the multi-actor and systemic nature of value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2016).	C: Although using different concepts, value-in-context (SDL) and value-in-use (SL), their approaches to the basic nature of value and value creation are not contradictory. Yet value-in-context used by SDL is much broader positioned and requires a systemic view, while value-in-use takes a narrower view focusing on the individual. D: SDL emphasize that value is always and uniquely co-created by actors, individualistic, context specific, experiential and phenomenological in nature (Vargo and Lusch 2016). SL conceptualizes value creation by using the firm's, the customer's and the joint sphere.

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Key concept	SL Understanding	SDL Understanding	Commonalities (C) and Differences (D) SL/SDL
Value co-creation and co-production Co-creation is the process by which mutual value is expanded together (Ramaswamy 2011). Co-production 'consists of direct or indirect "coworking with customers" or participation in the product/service design process' (Ranjan and Read 2016, 3).	Value co-creation occurs only when two or more parties influence each other or interact (Grönroos and Voima 2013). The customer can 'act as a co-producer (co-designer, co-developer) in the firm's production process, such that the customer is a resource in the firm's production process' (Grönroos and Voima 2013, 140).	Value is understood as 'always co-created, often by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary' (Vargo and Lusch 2016, 8). Co-production 'is optional and can vary from none at all to extensive co-production activities' (Vargo and Lusch 2008, 8).	C: Both SL and SDL use value co-creation while only SL is still using and emphasizing value co-production as a key term in the conceptualization of value creation. D: SL and SDL have different ontological approaches to value co-creation. SDL takes a meta-theoretical approach to value co-creation addressing it as a systemic phenomenon spanning across different levels of aggregation (micro-meso-macro). SL focuses on value co-creation as interactions at a micro level of aggregation. SDL has developed a more detailed conceptualization of value co-creation and this includes e.g. that one customer's interaction with resources e.g. a brush and paint when painting a house, is value co-creation. At the same time, SL only refers to value co-creation when two or more actors are engaged in value creation.

Table 1. (Continued).

Key concept	SL Understanding	SDL Understanding	Commonalities (C) and Differences (D) SL/SDL
Actor Actors are agents or resource integrators whose actions and perceptions are guided by institutional arrangements (Tronvoll 2017). Actors drive value creation processes by enacting a role in carrying out purposeful activities.	SL emphasizes two main categories of actors with different roles; firms and customers, and includes other actors using terms such as partners or suppliers. Actors contribute with, or provide access to, resources and extract value-in-use (Grönroos 2011).	Value creation is driven by actors and all actors contribute, thus demanding an actor-to-actor orientation that views all actors as resource-integrators, rather than having pre-designated roles of firms as 'producers' and customers or as 'consumers' at the end of a linear process (Vargo and Lusch 2011, 2016).	C: Both SL and SDL emphasize that actors contribute with complementing resources of importance for value creation processes and outcomes. D: SDL uses an actor-to-actor and systemic lens to explain value creation (Brodie et al. 2019) – emphasizing that all actors do the same, they integrate resources, while SL is positioned on a dyadic and (micro-) process level of value creation focusing on the roles of firms and customers as the main categories of actors (Grönroos 2011).
Interaction 'Mutual or reciprocal action where two or more parties have an effect upon one another' (Grönroos 2011, 244).	Interactions are situations in which the parties are involved in each other's practices (Grönroos 2011). Interaction is essential to SL and makes value creation a dialogical process (Grönroos 2019).	Interaction is not used as a key concept in SDL. Instead concepts or terms like e.g. deeds, activities or reciprocal actions capture the empirical phenomena without using the label interaction (Vargo and Lusch 2016).	C: Interaction is embedded in activities during value creation processes. Actors interact with one another as well as with the context when resources are integrated and value is created. A key aspect of interaction is communication. D: SL emphasizes interactions among actors in value creation. Interactions are viewed as an opportunity for the firm to facilitate the customer's creation of value-in-use (Grönroos 2011). In SDL, interaction is understood as embedded in actors' activities when integrating resources and carrying out value co-creation deeds and processes (Vargo and Lusch 2016).

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Key concept	SL Understanding	SDL Understanding	Commonalities (C) and Differences (D) SL/SDL
Resources and resource integration Resources have potential value and value is created when resources are integrated and used (Grönroos and Voima 2013; Vargo and Lusch 2016).	The firm is a facilitator of resources with potential value and customers can create value by integrating and using resources on their own, or integrate resources and co-create value with firms (Grönroos and Voima 2013).	In the application of specialized competences (knowledge and skills), it is used to benefit another entity or the entity itself when actors integrate resources. Resources do not have intrinsic value, rather, they need to be applied to become valuable, and turned into a specific benefit (Vargo and Lusch 2008).	C: Resources have only potential value and value is always actor driven. D: SDL distinguishes between operant and operand resources where the operant resources include actors' competence to operate on other resources (both operand and operant) in their efforts to co-create value. SL views resources in the customer's sphere as anything that can be used to co-produce value or jointly integrated and used in co-creating value. Firms are facilitators by providing resources and support customers' integration and use (Grönroos and Voima 2013).
Context Context refers to the environment in which resources are integrated and value is created. Value is also assessed by actors on the basis of value-in-context, including the social context (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber 2011).	The customer creates value by means of physical, mental, or possessive activities, practices, and experiences in multiple individual and social contexts (Grönroos 2011; Grönroos and Voima 2013).	Context 'frames exchange of service, and the potentiality of resources from the unique perspective of each actor, and from the unique omniscient perspective of the entire service ecosystem' (Chandler and Vargo 2011, 45).	C: Both SL and SDL refer to the environment in which customers, firms and other actors integrate resources and create value. The context provides access to resources and can either enable or inhibit value creation. Context contains both resources and other factors (e.g. values, social norms and habits) – some can be controlled by actors and some not. D: The main difference is that SDL emphasizes that value is context dependent and refers to value-in-context while SL refers to value-in-use or use value. Context has in SDL close connections to the service ecosystem while in SL the focus is on spheres (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014).

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Key concept	SL Understanding	SDL Understanding	Commonalities (C) and Differences (D) SL/SDL
Institutional arrangements Assemblages of enduring rules, norms, and meanings that guide value creation and the evaluations of the resulting value outcomes by relevant actors (Edvardsson et al. 2014).	SL does not explicitly use institutions or institutional arrangements, but uses other concepts such as norms, established ways of interacting, traditions, and the three spheres with different ways (or logics) for value creation (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014).	Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements (Axiom 5; Vargo and Lusch 2016, 8). Institutional arrangements orchestrate actors' resource integration processes.	C: Both SL and SDL draw on accepted and guiding rules, shaping value creation processes and outcomes (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014). D: SDL considers that institutions enable or constrain value co-creation activities but provide the rules for actors' resource integration and value co-creation efforts. SL does not refer to institutional theory but instead draws on practices, shaping interactions and relationships between firms, customers, and other actors. The interdependencies between ecosystem levels are not included in SL.
Service ecosystem/network Is the unit of analysis for understanding value co-creation between multiple actors. Service ecosystem refers to systems of systems with interdependencies and are often built around the concepts actors (firms, customers), resources and roles of the value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2016; Grönroos and Gummerus 2014).	SL makes a more general reference to systems, networks and sometime to service ecosystems (Grönroos and Gummerus 2014), but the service ecosystem is not explicitly used in SL to conceptualize value creation.	The service ecosystem is 'a relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange' (Vargo and Lusch 2016, 10–11)	C: SL is referring to service systems but not emphasized while service ecosystems is a key concept in SDL. D: The main difference is that SDL has developed a conceptualization on service ecosystem grounded in the concepts, actors, resources and institutional arrangements to understand value co-creation processes and outcomes (Vargo and Lusch 2016). This conceptualization includes three analytical levels of aggregation of the ecosystem (i.e. micro-, meso-, and macro-level).

was later shortened to Public Service Logic (PSL; Osborne 2018), marking a shift towards the SL (Grönroos 2019). More recently, though, and in response to studies calling for an ecosystemic approach to public management (e.g. Petrescu 2019; Trischler and Charles 2019), PSL has adopted the service ecosystem concept from SDL to capture the multi-actor and multi-level nature of value creation (Strokosch and Osborne 2020; Osborne et al. 2022). It indicates that PSL shifts back and forth between the different service logics and related concepts, yet without explicitly discussing the differences and complementarities between the SL and SDL and their theoretical legacies. This creates conceptual confusion and hampers a shared research dialogue in terms of how key concepts from SL and SDL may inform the public management field.

Our above synthesis, together with Table 1, clarifies what SL and SDL are in terms of their differences, interconnectedness, and central concepts. This provides a starting point for critically analysing PSL, especially in regard to how both service logics have informed the development and positioning of PSL. This analysis is presented in the current section. Based on the analysis, we develop four premises that provide a more explicit theoretical foundation of PSL.

3.1 The service concepts fundamental to PSL

We start our analysis with an overview of the key concepts that underpin PSL. This overview is provided in Table 2.

We identify three research discourses that PSL seeks to contribute to PAM research through the adoption of service concepts:

(1) the co-concepts to explain the value creation process between PSOs and service users;
(2) the link and distinction between public *vs* private value created through public service provision; and
(3) the public service ecosystem to acknowledge the multi-actor and – level nature of value creation.

We elaborate on these discourses to provide insights into central evolvements, discussions, and the status of PSL. Doing so sets the basis for moving PSL forward and fosters future discussions about the contributions and potential limitations of adopting concepts from service research to the development of PAM.

3.2 The co-concepts

In its early developments, PSL analysed how and when public service users participate in service production as 'co-producers' (Osborne and Strokosch 2013; Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch 2016). Thereby, PSL contrasted the conceptualization of co-production in PAM with the one used in service research (Osborne and Strokosch 2013): while the PAM literature defines co-production as optional and desirable (e.g. Bovaird and Loeffler 2012; Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017; Sicilia et al. 2016), PSL draws on service research to emphasize the inseparability of production and consumption by arguing that 'you cannot have (public) service delivery without co-production'

Table 2. The service-informed concepts underpinning PSL.

Concept	Source in service research	Definition	Usage in PSL
Value co-creation	SL and the joint process where firms and customers together in interactions create value (Grönroos and Voima 2013). Implicitly also SDL's 2nd Axiom stating that value is always co-created (Vargo and Lusch 2016).	'The co-creation of value occurs within the production processes of public service delivery, as service users, citizens, and service providers interact in co-design and co-production. However, service users also create value in their own right through their consumption and use of a public service. Service providers are not a part of this latter consumption/usage element of the value creation equation' (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021, 649).	The term value co-creation is seldom used in PSL since other co-concepts (co-design, co-production, co-experience, co-construction) are used to explain how value is created. Osborne, Nasi, and Powell (2021, 644) build on SL when asserting that 'value may be created through the use/consumption of a public service, either be at the nexus of interaction with the PSO (value co-creation) or by the service user themselves, through resource integration with their needs (value creation)'. However, according to SDL resource integration for the purpose of value creation is a form of value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch 2016).
Value creation	SL and the position that value is the customer's creation of value-in-use (Grönroos and Voima 2013).	Value creation is 'is an interactive cluster of production and use/consumption processes' (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021, 648).	According to Osborne, Nasi, and Powell (2021, 644) both public service production and consumption processes are part of value creation, yet 'public policies and services have no intrinsic value until they are used, and then that value is created/co-created within a user's life'. The same authors also assert that 'service providers are not a part of [. . .the] consumption/usage element of the value creation equation' (p.649).

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Concept	Source in service research	Definition	Usage in PSL
Co-production	Initial premises of the SDL (Vargo and Lusch 2004), then SL (Grönroos 2011).	Co-production is an explicit process that refers to the 'involvement of public service users in any of the design, management, delivery and/or evaluation of public services' (Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch 2016, 640).	While co-production is a central PAM concept, PSL has drawn much of its inspiration from the service research literature (see e.g. Osborne and Strokosch 2013; Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch 2016). First co-production was seen as 'unavoidable' during service delivery (Osborne and Strokosch 2013), however, this position has been changed to an explicit process that encompasses 'the creation of value through the conscious and chosen engagement of citizens in the management/delivery of public services' (Osborne 2020, 92).
Co-experience	SL (Grönroos and Voima 2013) and the value-in-use concept.	Co-experience is an implicit 'process through which the experience of a public service creates/destroys value for a service user, in the context of their whole-life experience' (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021, 649).	Co-experience is an implicit process of value creation that users cannot choose whether or not to engage in (Osborne 2020). Co-experience captures two features: 1) the way the experience of a public service encounter enhances or limits the outcomes of the service; and 2) the influence of a public service on the well-being and personality of a service user (Osborne 2020, 94).
Co-construction	SL (Grönroos and Voima 2013) and the value-in-context concept.	Co-construction is an 'implicit process of consumption [. . .] where a citizen integrates their own needs, expectations, and life experiences with the service experience to create value in the context of their life as value-in-context' (Osborne 2020, 94).	Consists of a constellation of four processes: an individual's values and life experiences; the impact of the service on their social and economic needs; their past experience of the service; and the whole impact of the service on the individual (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021).
Co-design	Service design and user involvement research (Trischler, Dietrich, and Rundle-Thiele 2019).	Co-design is an explicit process that refers to 'the involvement of citizens and service users in the co-design of public services on the basis of their prior experiences, and with evidence from the service field that this can be a major source of service performance and improvement' (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 649).	Co-design is an explicit process because it requires the conscious involvement of service users and public service staff (Osborne 2020). Co-design is positioned as a 'production process of value creation for public services' (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell, 648).

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Concept	Source in service research	Definition	Usage in PSL
Public service ecosystem	A key concept of SDL where it serves as the unit of analysis for value co-creation activities among actors, integrating resources and exchanging services within dynamic networks, which are facilitated by institutional arrangements (Vargo and Lusch 2016).	The public ecosystem is 'a unifying framework to bring together the institutional, service, and individual levels of public service delivery' (Osborne et al. 2022, 641).	Rather than an analytical framework for understanding value co-creation processes and outcomes which is the purpose of the service ecosystem in SDL, PSL scholars use the public service ecosystem to understand 'the dimensions of value and value creation within the public service ecosystem at each level, and the interactions and inter-relationships across these levels' (Osborne et al. 2022, 634). PSL is positioned on the micro level and 'concerns the creation of value in the lives of public service end-users (and other key stakeholders)' (Osborne et al. 2022, 640).

(Osborne and Strokosch 2013, 36). It regarded co-production as being at the 'heart of public service delivery' (Osborne and Strokosch 2013, 36), during which public service users are active and (in)voluntary contributors (Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch 2016). With '(in)voluntary contribution', Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch (2016) make the argument that while public service users have no choice in co-producing public service delivery, they can choose to co-produce in other instances, such as co-design or co-innovation.

The main motivation for integrating service research into early PSL work was the criticism that PAM theories follow a logic that is based on the manufacturing of goods rather than the delivery of services (see Osborne and Strokosch 2013; Osborne, Radnor, and Nasi 2013). Hence, the initial focus of PSL was not on understanding value creation per se, but to 'explore public services *as services*' (e.g. Osborne 2020). Both SL and SDL served as a central basis for this exploration. However, what is problematic is that especially SDL does not deal with the differences between products and services (or services as such), but is about *service* (i.e. the application of competences) as the fundamental basis of exchange and a perspective on value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2008). This misconception has led to confusion in the development of PSL. For instance, defining co-production as an inalienable component of public services contradicts developments in SDL, where 'co-production is optional and can vary from none at all to extensive co-production activities', while value co-creation is not optional because value creation '*always* involves a *unique combination* of resources' (Vargo and Lusch 2008, 8, emphasis in original).

In its later developments, PSL has moved beyond co-production and started to focus more explicitly on value creation (e.g. Osborne 2018; Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021). For example, Osborne (2018, 229) reflects that for 'too long the assumption has been that it is the PSO that creates value through its performance' leading to discussions on 'how can public services "add in" the citizen and/or service user'. PSL reverses this question by asking 'how public services, and PSOs, might be designed to facilitate the value co-creation by service users, not vice versa' (Osborne 2018, 229). While this standpoint aligns with both SDL and SL, the precise understanding of value co-creation has been adopted from SL because it argues that interactions must occur between the service user and provider within the joint sphere, while value can only be created by the public service user. Accordingly, PSL defines value co-creation as 'an interactive and dynamic relationship where value is created at the nexus of interaction' between the service user and the PSO (Osborne 2018, 225). In contrast, and as described above, SDL sees value as always co-created because the referent beneficiary (e.g. the service user) is seen as having a key role as a resource integrator and evaluator in value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2008, Vargo and Lusch 2016). To illustrate, a service user or any other actor co-creates value when using resources from different sources in combination with their own resources, implying that value co-creation takes place even when there is no direct interaction with a service provider.

With the attempt to draw a distinction (or link) between value co-creation and co-production, PSL scholars developed different conceptual frameworks. In a first attempt, Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch (2016, 644–5) conceptualized co-production by arguing that 'co-production is intrinsic to the process of public service delivery and is linked directly to the co-creation of value both for service users and for society'. By recognizing that 'co-production is only one process through which value can be created by public services' Osborne, Nasi, and Powell (2021, 648) developed an

updated framework that distinguishes between production processes (i.e. co-design and co-production) and use/consumption processes (i.e. co-experience and co-construction). The latter two co-concepts are positioned in the service user's sphere (Grönroos and Voima 2013) and align with the service concepts of value-in-use and value-in-context, respectively. Co-experience refers to users' integral and active role in value co-creation during the subjective use, experience, and evaluation of the service, which impacts both their satisfaction with the service and the outcomes for them (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021). Co-construction, in turn, is defined as the constellation of four processes within the user's sphere: their values and life experiences; the impact of the service on their social and economic needs; their past experience of the service and those experiences shared by their social network; and the whole life impact of the service on the individual (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021).

While PSL's frameworks draw on the SL conception of the user's sphere, the above definition of co-construction suggests that value is not created but co-created because it assumes that public service users are dependent on resources to be integrated into their value creation process. In other words, the public service user does not create value in isolation and is not the sole value creator but co-creates value through the integration of resources from many different sources (Trischler and Charles 2019). This assumption mirrors SDL's position but opposes SL's since SL stresses the need to differentiate between value creation (in different spheres) and value co-creation (only occurring in the joint sphere), thus emphasizes the need for interactions between the service provider and user. This shifting between incommensurable key premises from SL and SDL creates confusion of how the key concepts co-production, value creation, and value co-creation are used in PSL, which subsequently hampers an informed application in PAM research and practice.

3.3 Public vs private value

As discussed in the previous section, the concept of value and how it is (co-)created/destroyed in a public service context has become the central concern of PSL's recent development (e.g. Cui and Osborne 2022; Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021). A main criticism that PSL faces for connecting service research with public management is the risk of neglecting the 'publicness' of public service (e.g. Alford 2016; Sønderskov and Rønning 2021). This is because the adoption of theories and concepts from conventional service research implies a focus on private value, which is assessed and evaluated by individuals in an economic marketplace. However, PSOs are not expected to generate value for individuals or service users only but also to generate value for the public; that is, the collective citizenry (Alford 2016). In response to the above criticism and the aim to develop a more nuanced perspective on value creation than SL and SDL, PSL scholars have started integrating public value theory (e.g. Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021).

The public value concept originates from Moore (1995), and is defined as 'what the citizenry determines is valuable' (Moore 1995), or simply 'what the public values' (Talbot 2009). Public value is represented in a manifestation of collectively expressed and politically arbitrated preferences, which are determined through democratic processes and emerge as societal outcomes (Bozeman 2007). Moore originally introduced 'public value' and the 'creation of public value' as a management concept, as well as an operational tool for public managers (see

also Moore 2013). For example, Moore (1995, 10) proposes that public managers – whether politicians or officials – act as the 'creators of public value' through 'initiating and reshaping public sector enterprises in ways that increase their value to the public in both the short and the long run'. Hence, public managers are given the central role in creating public value.

Drawing on the concepts of value-in-use and value-in-context from SL and SDL, PSL situates value creation on the service use(r) side (Osborne 2018). Both SL and SDL view value as 'uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary' (Vargo and Lusch 2016, 8), reflecting a value subjectivist position and assumes that value cannot exist independently of human beings (Meynhardt 2009). This position assumes that value exists through *valuing*, thus value is assessed and agreed upon by valuing subjects. Value subjectivism can be contrasted to value objectivism, where value is perceived as characteristics of objects or entities existing prior to subjects' experience or recognition of value. Value subjectivism does not mean that value is merely measured or evaluated based on the preferences of individuals, but that value (only) exists through the perceptions and assessments of humans. Humans may, however, take both individual or collective perspectives into account when assessing value, and they determine value in *social contexts* (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber 2011), implying that the assessments are shaped by collective perceptions and social norms. Thus, SL and SDL do not necessarily advance an understanding of value and value creation merely oriented towards individual value. However, SL and SDL advocate an understanding of value as *experiential*, while value in a public and thus political context is understood as something which can be defined intellectually and through collective deliberations (Alford 2016; Hartley et al. 2015). These underlying different perceptions of value explain why PAM studies highlight the risk of neglecting the collective aspects of value creation when adopting a service logic (e.g. Alford 2016; Engen et al. 2021; Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021; Sønderskov and Rønning 2021).

Another question that arises through the adoption of SL or SDL to the public service context is the understanding of the beneficiary's nature, and whether the beneficiary merely refers to individuals or whether it can also refer to collectives of individuals (i.e. groups, communities or the public). While differences and potential tensions between private and public value are often highlighted in the literature, creation of private value can be seen as interlinked with (or embedded in) the creation of public value. Indeed, public value outcomes are argued to encompass 'higher order' outcomes or benefits even when focused on the individual (e.g. national security, poverty reduction, or public health; O'Flynn 2007). O'Flynn (2007) illustrates her argument through a simple example: Garbage collection services may have specific benefits for individuals (through the collection of rubbish), but also encompass higher order benefits for the citizenry (e.g. public health is protected).

Hence, unpacking and disentangeling the different perceptions of value in service research and the PAM literature is pertinent for the further development of PSL. In a first attempt, Osborne, Nasi, and Powell (2021, 646) distinguish 'between five elements of value for public services'. These elements are (1) short-term satisfaction and user well-being, (2) medium/long-term service performance outcomes, (3) whole-life experience of service users, (4) capacity building in the community, and (5) societal value (Osborne, Nasi, and Powell 2021). Still the framework itself lacks a theoretical foundation that allows for both value dimensions to co-exist and be explained. What further limits the framework is that it emphasizes the public service user as the 'value

creator' while positioning the PSO as the 'value facilitator', rather than being open to the opportunity of both actors taking on different roles in the co-creation of value.

3.4 The public service ecosystem

PSL has been critiqued for its strong focus on public service delivery and, thus, the dyadic relationship between the service user and the PSO (e.g. Petrescu 2019; Trischler and Charles 2019). One main criticism was that in public service contexts, value is not created by one PSO in a linear process of exchange but is '(a) cocreated through the integration of resources provided by multiple actors and (b) is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements' (Trischler and Charles 2019, 29). Trischler and Charles and others (e.g. Petrescu 2019; Rossi and Tuurnas 2021) draw on the service ecosystem concept as the 'unit of analysis for value cocreation' (Vargo and Lusch 2017, 47) by using multiple analytical levels of aggregation (i.e. micro, meso, macro) to reveal structural details that are not apparent from a dyadic or micro-level perspective (Chandler and Vargo 2011). The discussion around the service ecosystem concept resulted in the introduction of the 'public service ecosystem' (PSE; Petrescu 2019, 1746–7), which 'shows the multi-stakeholder aspect of public service systems, the interchanging and multiple roles that network members play, as well as the impact that various social norms and values can have in the creation of public value'.

Some PSL-related work first followed Petrescu's conceptualization of PSE (e.g. Strokosch and Osborne 2020), but it has been recently proposed as 'an integrating framework' for different PAM theories as well as an 'unified framework for value creation and public service delivery' (Osborne et al. 2022). Specifically, PSE as an 'integrative framework' draws on four PAM research strands (Public Value; Collaborative Governance; Public Service Logic; Behavioural Public Administration). These research strands, according to Osborne et al. (2022), help understand value creation at different levels. PSL is positioned on the 'micro-level', which 'concerns value creation as a direct result of the use of a public service', and acknowledges that 'service users and other stakeholders integrate resources created in the production process (i.e. public services) with their own needs, experiences, and expectations in order to create value in their lives' (Osborne et al. 2022, 640). Given its integrative approach, the PSE seems to act as a framework that assembles different theories/ theoretical perspectives to investigate value creation on separate ecosystem levels (i.e. macro, meso, micro, and sub-micro). On the micro-level, PSL is suggested as the lens to be applied to investigate value creation during the public service delivery process and, especially, to understand value-in-use (see Table 1 in Osborne et al. 2022, 638). We critique this approach and argue that linking selected theories to different empirical levels of the PSE has an important limitation: it limits the application of theories to the investigation of assigned value creation phenomena on a specific ecosystem level.

In contrast to the PSE, the service ecosystem used in SDL offers a framework that can be applied to analyse value co-creation phenomena across three levels of aggregation (see e.g. Vargo and Lusch 2017). These levels are not fixed but are used in an analytical sense to examine a phenomenon at various levels of aggregation. The point *is not* to be able to assign phenomena to different levels (this will always be somewhat arbitrary), but to stress that a phenomenon studied at one level can only be adequately understood by accounting for the influence of other levels as well (Akaka, Koskela-

Huotari, and Vargo 2021, 383, emphasis added). To illustrate its application, Trischler and Westman Trischler (2022) use the service ecosystem to analyse how the integration of digital technology affects value co-creation in the public service context. By zooming into e.g. the service user's lifeworld as well as zooming out to e.g. the institutional level, the authors gain a more holistic understanding, not only of user experiences but also of institutional arrangements that affect and are affected by the ongoing push towards e.g. digitalization. The service ecosystem, as such, is not only understood on a macro-level of aggregation nor on another level but is a framework that allows the investigator 'to alternately zoom in and zoom out in order to understand phenomena at any level (aggregation) of interest' (Vargo and Lusch 2017, 50). Importantly, as an analytical framework, the levels of interest change based on what the unit of analysis is (e.g. the legal system of a country, a community, a PSO, or an individual user's experience).

4. Repositioning the public service logic

So far, this paper has synthesized the service concepts fundamental to SL and SDL to provide an extensive service concept 'toolbox' (see Table 1) for PAM researchers to draw upon. In addition, we critically analysed PSL and highlighted inconsistencies, especially regarding its positioning and adoption of concepts from SL and SDL. Since its introduction, PSL has done important groundwork in bridging PAM with service research. We argue that it is now time to deepen the cross-disciplinary work by establishing a more robust positioning for PSL to build upon. Accordingly, we use this concluding section to develop four premises, which we argue, set a suitable theoretical foundation for PSL. Table 3 provides an overview of these premises, together with implications for public management practice and research questions guiding the future development of PSL.

Premise 1: *PSL is a mid-range theoretical framework explaining the unique instances of value creation in the public service context.*

Osborne et al. (2022, 640) position PSL as a theoretical lens for understanding 'the creation of value in the lives of public service end-users (and other key stakeholders)'. In addition, Osborne et al. (2022) use the PSE as a framework to position PSL on a fixed system level of analysis. Doing so, we argue, limits PSL's applicability and explanatory power when it comes to understanding value creation in the public service context. This is because even when one takes a narrow use- or user-centred view as PSL does, it is not possible to fully understand the phenomenon without capturing the complex interplay between the multiple actors, system levels, and institutional mechanisms that unpin value co-creation (e.g. Trischler and Charles 2019).

As stated in *Premise 1*, we propose that PSL should be repositioned in a way that acts as a theoretical framework for explaining the unique instances of value creation in the public service context. To achieve this positioning, PSL should draw on SDL's meta-theoretical framework to provide a midrange-theoretical framework. In other words, while SDL provides a generic and rather abstract framework for value creation, PSL should act as a framework that is tailored to the specificities of the public service

Table 3. Overview research questions and practical implications linked to the premises.

Research questions linked to Premise 1	Implications for public management practice
Premise 1: PSL is a mid-range theoretical framework explaining the unique instances of value creation in the public service context.	
Which (PAM) theories can complement and inform PSL's development towards a mid-range theoretical framework for understanding value creation in the public service context? How can the different strands of public value theory help to position PSL as a distinct logic from SL/SDL?	A clearer positioning of PSL among other PAM theories will provide clarity on the uniqueness of value creation in the public service context, and as such, provide a stronger analytical basis for public managers dealing with the complexity and dynamism that characterizes much of the value creation in the public service context.

Research questions linked to Premise 2	Implications for public management practice
Premise 2: The nature of value co-creation in public service contexts requires an ecosystemic framework as an analytical lens.	
How can service ecosystem be applied as an analytical lens to capture and connect the interdependencies of value co-creation across the different levels (micro, meso, macro)? Which methodological challenges arise in the application of service ecosystem as an analytical lens in public service contexts?	By adopting the service ecosystem as an analytical tool, PSOs can more fully understand the mechanisms behind value co-creation phenomena in the public service context since it allows them to oscillate (i.e. zoom in and out) on different levels of aggregation.

Research questions linked to Premise 3	Implications for public management practice
Premise 3: Service describes instances of value co-creation that occurs through the application of competence for the benefit of individuals and collectives, and constitutes the fundamental base for PSL.	
What are possible consequences of adopting a service logic to the public service context and PSOs specifically (e.g. neglecting intra-organizational processes, challenging professional competencies, or undermining the 'publicness' of public service)? (How) can public value theory be used in combination with the value perspectives forwarded by the service logics? Can these theories be combined to gain a better understanding of value creation in the public service context? How can we understand the nature of 'beneficiary' in a public service context – can beneficiary refer to individuals and collectives of individuals (i.e. groups, communities or the public)?	PSOs that perceive and engage service users as value co-creators will be (better) positioned to change their organizational focus from internal processes and performance as outputs (organizational activities), to a focus on outcomes (effects/value for citizens and society). It provides guidance for PSOs adopting a service logic by exposing the implications of taking 'value-in-use' or 'value-in-social context' focus to their service provision efforts.

Research questions linked to Premise 4	Implications for public management practice
Premise 4: Value co-creation in the public service context is mediated by politically governed PSOs dealing with competing demands as well as tensions between individual and collective interests/needs.	
What are the PSO's different mediating roles within and beyond that of a 'facilitator of value creation', and what are the implications of different forms of mediation? How and to what extent are (and should) public service users (be) able to take on roles as value co-creators? What are the (unintended) consequences of emphasizing the service users' active role as value co-creators in light of critical aspects such as responsibilization and (administrative) burdens? How can the complexity and tensions underpinning value creation in the public service context be captured?	Emphasizing that the PSO is not only a facilitator but a mediator in value co-creation is important because it helps PSOs, policy makers, and public service users to understand the complexity behind competing demands and the tensions between individual and collective interests/needs. It also highlights the importance of public service professionals in taking on specific roles to support those who lack the capacities and opportunities for value co-creation.

context. To path the way for this repositioning, future research should focus on mid-range theoretical work around PSL; that is, develop and position PSL as an independent framework that can be informed by different theories, such as e.g. social, practice, complexity, ecological, and structuration theories, among others.[1] Doing so will contribute to further develop and position PSL as a distinct logic from SL and SDL.

Premise 2: *The nature of value co-creation in public service contexts requires an ecosystemic framework as an analytical lens.*

The key focus of PSL is to understand how PSOs can 'facilitate the co-creation of value by service users, not vice versa' (Osborne 2018, 229). With this focus, SL instead of SDL has been suggested as the theoretical basis for PSL (Osborne 2018). However, there is an increasing awareness that value co-creation in the public service context is not a dyadic but a systemic phenomenon (e.g. Petrescu 2019; Trischler and Charles 2019); a standpoint that finds agreement among PSL scholars (e.g. Strokosch and Osborne 2020). Still, as a SL-informed framework, PSL inherently takes a use(r)-centred view, assuming that while the PSO facilities value, the public service user always creates value. PSL thus lacks the analytical tools to understand the system structure and institutional mechanisms that are in play and affect value co-creation among different actors in the public service context. Our observation is in line with meta-governance as a practice of coordinating governance networks and inter-organizational collaborations (Gjaltema, Biesbroek, and Termeer 2020), as well as meta co-production depicting the complexity involved in creating community or societal outcomes, which in turn, are 'the result of several processes, services, goods, and behaviours that are provided by different actors in a specific context' (Sancino 2016, 411).

We agree that adding the meta-level as an empirical area of investigation helps generate a more holistic understanding of value co-creation. However, by adopting the service ecosystem, we propose an analytical instead of an empirical framework to investigate value creation phenomena on all levels of aggregation (i.e. micro, meso, and macro). Specifically, we propose in *Premise 2* that PSL should adopt an ecosystemic *analytical lens* (instead of its current use(r)-centred analytical lens) to investigate value co-creation phenomena in the public service context. The service ecosystem provides such a framework since it sees the meso level nested between the micro and macro levels and oscillates (i.e. zooms in and out) on different analytical levels of aggregation (Chandler and Vargo 2011). Doing so, we argue, is essential because a public service user is embedded in relations and interactions with a wide range of actors. Their norms and rules and the individual's ability to use what is provided or offered all influence value co-creation.

What makes the service ecosystem unique as an analytical framework is that its levels are *not* fixed and thus not restricted to a specific value co-creation phenomenon. The levels can be changed depending on the phenomenon of interest. To illustrate, value co-creation linked to education can be investigated by starting the meso level analysis from the perspective of an individual student, a classroom, a school, or even a country's education policy. Depending on what the analytical question is (e.g. how do students with neurodevelopmental disorders experience in-class education), the starting point on the meso level could then be a class (e.g. the students' and teacher's behaviour, teaching style, specific interactions). In addition, in order to get a complete

picture of the phenomenon in question, one must also zoom in to investigate micro-level phenomena (e.g. individual students' experiences, emotions, frustrations, needs) and zoom out to investigate macro-level phenomena (e.g. a school's management style, resources, teaching policies etc.). Together this zooming in and out provides a comprehensive understanding of the systemic and institutional mechanisms that affect and are affected by the specific value co-creation phenomenon. We call for future research to apply the service ecosystem as an analytical lens to different contexts with a specific focus on identifying methods that can be used to capture and connect the interdependencies of value co-creation across different ecosystem levels.

Premise 3: *Service describes instances of value co-creation that occurs through the application of competences for the benefit of individuals and collectives, and constitutes the fundamental base for PSL.*

An implication of adopting the service logic by SL and SDL is that PSL is essentially about *service*, not *services* per se. Service, as we introduced in section 2, is not about a specific unit of output that is created by a PSO and delivered to public service users, but a perspective on value creation through the application of competences. Specifically, service are instances of value co-creation where 'actors apply their competences, and other resources for others' benefit, and receive a similar kind of service (others' applied resources) in return' (Akaka, Koskela-Huotari, and Vargo 2021, 380). These exchanges can occur directly in person or indirectly through, e.g. a good that acts as a vehicle for service provision. In addition, service exchange may not only occur through economic currencies (e.g. money), but also through social relations (e.g. family, friends) and public access (i.e. by being a member of a nation or political community).

We argue that PSL *cannot* function as a framework to understand 'public services as services' as suggested by PSL scholars (e.g. Osborne 2020), nor can it provide a framework for 'the delivery of public services' (e.g. Osborne et al. 2022). Instead, and as we state in *Premise 3*, service is the fundamental basis for PSL and should, therefore, act as PSL's focus and boundary of application. *Premise 3* should not present a direct application of service as defined by SDL or SL, but needs critical examination and adjustment to acknowledge the uniqueness of value creation in the public service context. As we discussed in section 3.3, SL and SDL conceptualize value as experiential, which suggests that both service logics understand the creation and assessment of value from the perspective of individuals. Still when assessing value, individuals embed both the 'personally determined' value and the broader social value (including whatever public value is dominant in the particular society) – hence the concept value-in-social-context (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber 2011).

From a public value perspective, value is not determined by individuals but constitutes a 'set of values expressing the perceived relationship quality between an individual and a social entity (group, community, nation)' (Meynhardt 2009, 215). In addition, the public service context possesses specific characteristics, where value creation is a politically mediated expression of collectively determined preferences (Alford 2016). Therefore, PSL should be developed as a mid-range theoretical framework to account for these unique characteristics. Such mid-range theoretical work should include deeper explorations of how and whether the experiential understanding

of value underpinning SL and SDL can be combined with other conceptualizations of value, such as public value theory. Doing so will require more fundamental discussions of the public value concept itself, which remains highly elusive and debated. It is still unclear whether to approach 'public value' as a heuristic device, a paradigm, a theoretical framework, or a model. Unpacking the public value discourses and their interconnections with PSL, and ultimately also SL and SDL, is therefore a key priority for future research.

Premise 4: *Value co-creation in the public service context is mediated by politically governed PSOs dealing with competing demands as well as tensions between individual and collective interests/needs.*

Premise 4 deepens the question of how public service users create value and emphasizes that PSOs – and the competences of professionals working in PSOs – play a pivotal role in deriving outcomes that service users and citizens see as valuable. Rather than perceiving PSOs as merely facilitating value creation (e.g. Osborne 2018), we argue that PSOs *mediate* value co-creation. By mediation we refer to the different kinds of intervening roles that PSOs take when dealing with competing demands, as well as balancing between collective and individual interests/needs. For instance, restricting an individual's freedom may be seen as undermining value creation from the perspective of the individual while seen as valuable for the public when the result is enhanced safety. Such conflicts come clearly to the fore in contexts such as policing, correctional services, and child protection. Moreover, PSOs operate in contexts characterized by institutional complexity, implying that they adhere to competing institutional demands and the layering of different governance regimes (e.g. Fossestøl et al. 2015, Røhnebæk and Breit 2022). These studies suggest that even though different governance regimes or paradigms, such as New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance (NPG), can be linked to different time periods, they are seen to largely overlap and co-exist. PSOs are thus navigating complex landscapes which affect priorities and strategies for value creation (Fossestøl et al. 2015). Adding to that, PSOs are politically governed, so their strategies and priorities are shaped by shifting political leadership and, thus, by the decisions and priorities set by politicians.

Finally, *Premise 4* highlights the need for future research to critically analyse the applicability of PSL's co-concepts (i.e. co-production, co-design, co-experience, and co-construction) *vs.* SL- and SDL-related concepts. For example, even when individuals express strong and relevant needs, a PSO cannot directly act on these but has to carefully balance these needs with collective demands/interests. The adoption of different co-concepts (e.g. co-design) to the public service context, thus poses important questions around representativeness, equality, democracy, power shifts, and legitimacy, among others (Steen, Brandsen, and Verschuere 2018; Trischler and Kaluza 2021). Further, the current PSL narrative assuming public service users as 'active' can have unintended consequences. For example, studies problematize how co-production can lead to overburden and stress among vulnerable user groups (e.g. Anderson et al. 2016; Larsson and Skjølsvik 2021; Thomsen, Baekgaard, and Thy Jensen 2020). Public service users may face constraints, lack the capacity, and/or

capabilities to co-produce or co-create value, which implies that PSOs have to act in other roles than 'just' value facilitators. In fact, with their specialized knowledge and skills, public service professionals (e.g. teachers, social workers, doctors, and nurses) often take on various mediating roles which are more active and intervening than those of facilitators (e.g. Bast, Taivalsaari Røhnebæk, and Engen 2021; Skarli 2021). These specificities and complexity that characterize much of the value creation in the public service context need to be carefully analysed and adjusted as part of the future development of PSL.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we provided a theory synthesis of service-related concepts and analysed their application to PSL. We found that PSL is currently positioned to understand public service provisioning and value creation from a use(r) centred perspective. This position, we argued, is too narrow to fully understand value creation in the public service context. To address this problem, we developed four premises that position PSL as a mid-range theoretical framework that is capable of adopting the service ecosystem as an analytical lens to study public service and related value co-creation instances at all levels of aggregation. The premises are linked to future research directions (Table 3) to guide PSL's development from a service perspective. We hope that our paper spurs and guides the ongoing efforts to link PSL with service research for the development of new frameworks that are suitable for tackling the dynamism and complexity that characterizes much of the public service context.

Notes

1. There are multiple examples that demonstrate how empirical evidence can be used to inform the theoretical development of SDL on the mid-range level (e.g., Brodie, Saren, and Pels 2011, Peters et al. 2014).

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ORCID

Jakob Trischler 🔟 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2887-2463
Maria Røhnebæk 🔟 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2268-213X

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