SDG commentary: collaboration services for sustainable development goal (SDG) partnerships

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this commentary is to complete the synthesis of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into Seven Commentaries on Service Research Themes developed by ServCollab and the *Journal of Services Marketing*. As an approach to achieving SDG #17, ServCollab's collaborative logic and design perspective for collaboration services for sustainable development partnerships are presented.

Design/methodology/approach – Collaboration is ServCollab's Service Research Theme #7, which reframes the UN SDG meta goal #17 of Partnerships. In prior ServCollab research, four possible human interactions were identified: conflict, competition, cooperation and collaboration. Only the shared purpose of collaboration enables elevating the human experience.

Findings – The authors found no published service research that studied SDG #17, which means there are huge opportunities for service research on the role of collaboration in service systems. The alignment between the UN SDGs and ServCollab's goals is explored. A research agenda for service research and SDG goals was proposed for collaborative communications, collaborative technologies and collaborative projects.

Practical implications – Practical ideas are offered for serving humanity through collaboration. Collaborations are the only practical solutions to humanity's myriad sustainable development problems.

Social implications – When the United Nations developed its first 16 SDGs, they knew that accomplishing these goals required complex collaborations. That is why SDG #17 is Partnerships. ServCollab's serving humanity logic applies collaboration to all social settings (large or small) where working together can sustain and regenerate the service ecosystem of Planet Earth.

Originality/value – This commentary describes a unique approach to building collaborative capacity for conducting service research projects for sustaining and regenerating the service ecosystem of Planet Earth.

Keywords Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Collaborative economy, Service thinking

Paper type Conceptual paper

> "At this time, all of humanity depends on all of humanity. In a globalized, digitized, hyperconnected world, we have become one system, just as the earth is one system. Humanity's common needs want to be synchronized, harmonized, and recognized. Regeneration creates abundance, not scarcity. It expands what is possible. It enlarges the human prospect." Hawken (2021, p. 243).

Introduction

This commentary completes the Seven Commentaries on Service Research Themes developed by ServCollab and the *Journal of Services Marketing*. The United Nations established Goal #17 as the meta goal of Partnerships with the description to "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development."

ServCollab regards the UN Partnership Goal (#17) as the essential goal for succeeding with the other 16 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations focused the decision lens of national governments on the partnerships it advocates. Partnerships are formal collaborations. ServCollab focuses more broadly on service system collaborations across the full spectrum of humanity. Collaboration has been studied across numerous disciplines. After careful review, we think this definition of collaboration by Mattessich and Monsey (1992, p. 7) is quite effective at defining formal collaborations: "Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals." Such collaborations can occur at every service system level of human society and with any type of service organization (i.e. government agencies, nongovernmental organizations [NGO], for-profit

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organizations, nonprofit organizations, academic disciplines and academic institutions). It is important to note that informal collaborations among groups of people are the foundations of human service systems. They existed before formal organizations were invented, and they are still often the first step to forming formal organizations. Collaborations can occur between humans and nature, too Fisk *et al.* (2020). Such collaborations among humans and between humans and nature are the only wise path to overcoming the severity and urgency of these problems. Each of these possible collaborations is needed to accomplish the United Nations SDGs and to elevate the human experience. Figure 1 contains the seven research themes for these *Journal of Services Marketing* commentaries.

This commentary reframes the partnership logic of SDG #17 to ServCollab's collaboration logic. The first section discusses the need for the UN's meta goal #17 of Partnerships. The second section briefly discusses the lack of service research on the partnership collaborations of SDG #17. In the third section, the alignment of the United Nations SDGs and ServCollab's goals is discussed. Finally, a research agenda for service research that designs for transformative sustainable development and regenerative collaborations is proposed.

Sustainable development goal overview

Systems of human exploitation dominate the historical record of humanity's last 5,000 years. That exploitation includes slavery and colonialism. The legacy of those systems of exploitation is still embedded in the hierarchical structures of modern service systems and in the physiology of those humans who benefitted or suffered from those systems.

Unfortunately, systems of exploiting the natural resources of Planet Earth have dominated recent centuries of human activity, too. For example, land was exploited by clear-cutting forests, plowing meadows and strip-mining mountains. Similarly, water was exploited by damming rivers, diverting water from its natural flow to canals and releasing chemical pollutants into rivers, streams and the ocean. Exploitation of other life forms has caused the extinction of many species, monocultures of domesticated wheat, corn, cows, pigs and chicken and the spread of pathogens from exploited species. After centuries of exploiting humans and nature, humanity has reached an existential crisis. This crisis is particularly well

Figure 1 ServCollab's Service Research Themes and UN SDGs

Source: Source: Russell-Bennett *et al.* (2024)

portrayed by Raworth (2018) in her Doughnut Economics model, which portrays shortfalls in human social foundations and overshoots in the ecological ceiling.

In 2015, the United Nations responded to this existential crisis by proposing 17 SDGs for 2030. Each of the first 16 sustainable development goals focused on a specific problem area, and the Partnerships Goal (#17) is the meta goal for accomplishing the other 16 SDGs. The United Nations certainly understands that forming collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders and different types or relevant partners like government agencies, NGOs, for-profit organizations, nonprofit organizations and academic institutions is difficult. Maintaining such partnerships requires significant persistence, too. Centuries of prior exploitation and conflict among numerous nations make trust and collaboration among nations very difficult. Indeed, after the creation of the UN SDGs, the UN has had many setbacks in its efforts to form the essential government partnerships necessary to set aside their national interests and commit to establishing mutually beneficial partnerships.

Service research and sustainable development goals

We have not found published service research that directly studies SDG #17. However, collaboration is a concept deeply embedded in S-D logic (Lusch and Vargo, 2014). This is especially because S-D logic declared that all economies are service economies (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and that service provision occurs in both monetary exchanges and social exchanges (Lusch and Vargo, 2014). Notably, S-D logic was broadened from its early formulation to discuss collaboration in service ecosystems (Vargo and Lusch, 2011).

This leaves a tremendous range of possible applications of S-D logic-based research to the meta goal collaborative challenges of SDG #17. While it is outside the focus of this commentary, we note that other research fields are studying SDG partnerships (Andreucci *et al.*, 2021; Fu *et al.*, 2020; Nonet *et al.*, 2022).

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and ServCollab's goals

The United Nation's SDGs align closely with ServCollab's goals. The foundational ServCollab article contained this statement: "Human life depends on Planet Earth, so the service research field needs to respond by encouraging projects that balance serving human needs now with serving the needs of future generations by protecting the fragile service ecosystem of Planet Earth." (Fisk *et al.*, 2020, p. 628). Recent ServCollab articles are in alignment, too. In particular, Fisk and Alkire (2021, p. 195) proposed the concept of service ecosystem health "as the interdependent state of private, public, and planetary well-being necessary for sustaining life." Tsiotsou *et al.* (2023) connected human rights to the UN SDGs from an ecosystems transformative service research (TSR) approach. And Alkire *et al.* (2023, p. 582) proposed "Service Thinking as a just, mutualistic, and human-centered mindset for creating and regenerating service systems that meet the needs of people and the living planet. Hence, for ServCollab, achieving the UN SDGs will sustain and regenerate life on Planet Earth.

Service is the universal force in human society

ServCollab is building a serving humanity logic that enables elevating the human experience (Fisk *et al.*, 2020). Because service interactions are central to the human experiences of our social species, ServCollab has focused its serving humanity logic on transforming human knowledge and wisdom about the profound role of service interactions. Fisk *et al.* (2020) described four categories of human interaction: conflict, competition, cooperation and collaboration. The nature and frequency of these four forms of interactions are the essential determinants of human progress. We expand on those four forms of interaction in Figure 2 by portraying them as a hierarchy from conflict to competition to cooperation to collaboration. We further elaborate by overlaying two biological concepts on the figure: parasitism next to conflict and mutualism next to collaboration. Conflict and competition are characterized by the oppositional logic of winners and losers, while cooperation and collaboration are characterized by the mutualistic logic of benefits for everyone. Finally, we further distinguish collaboration from the other three interactions by showing that collaboration is the only interaction characterized by shared purpose.

Exploitation can occur to varying degrees in conflict, competition and cooperation. Since conflict and competition are interactions focused on achieving advantage over others, this advantage-seeking behavior is why enforcing the rules of war or rules of competition is so difficult. The worst form of human exploitation is the subjugation of slavery after conflict, but many lesser forms of exploitation occur during competition and cooperation. The persistent power imbalances that long-term exploitation creates are also why imagining and creating nonexploitative service systems is so difficult for the exploiters and the exploited. Exploitation is extremely unlikely in collaboration because collaborations are based on shared purpose, agency and trust. When exploitation does occur, it breaks or interrupts the collaboration.

The roles that people play in each of the four forms of service interactions provide the essential context of their human experience. Across much of human history, there have been many exploitative roles of dominance and submission that occurred in patriarchy, monarchy, slavery, colonialism and even much of business history. These exploitative roles accompanied power hierarchies (official or perceived) and often included privileges or restrictions based on status (e.g. master or slave, father or mother, soldier or merchant or owner or laborer). While the English word "service" evolved from the Latin word *servus*, which meant a slave, the meaning and practice of service has steadily evolved from its exploitative past toward a collaborative future. Hence, in modern times, human service systems are evolving to collaboration. This is very consistent with the evolution to mutualism in natural systems (Foster and Wenseleers, 2006; Hale *et al.*, 2020) and with research on the emergence of service ecosystems (Sangiorgi *et al.*, 2017; Taillard *et al.*, 2016; Vargo *et al.*, 2022).

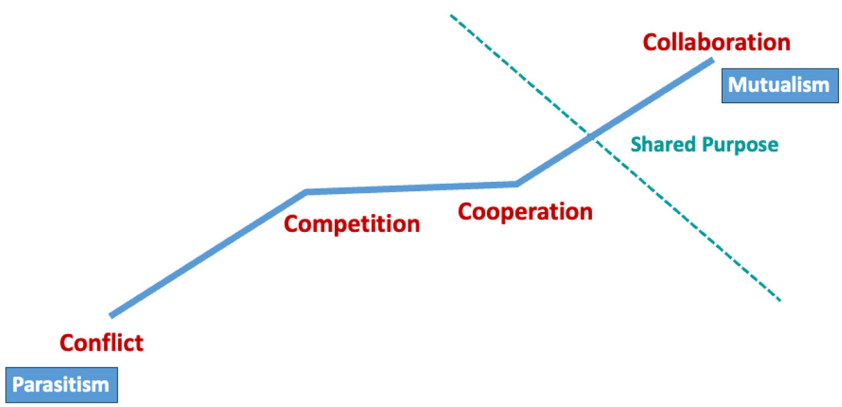
Collaboration elevates the human experience

ServCollab believes that collaborations are the highest forms of human interaction. This is because only the shared purpose of collaboration can make it possible to elevate the human experience. Specifically, ServCollab advocates a higher form of collaboration – transformative collaboration (Fisk *et al.*, 2019). "Transformative collaboration occurs when all participants are able to make contributions at their full human potential." (p. 198).

Based on S-D logic (Lusch and Vargo, 2014), cocreation has become a common theme in modern service research. Cocreation works best when actors interact in collaborative processes. Patrício *et al.* (2021, p. 75) argue that "Interactions and collaboration are central to the concept of service. Indeed, interactions are the lifeblood of human service systems, and they are at their best when participants are engaging willingly and enthusiastically with each other." The service research field should recognize that collaboration is the most desirable service practice in any service system.

Fundamentally, modern service research should inspire the imaginations of all who seek to accomplish the UN SDGs. Based on modern service research, we know we are living in service systems (Maglio *et al.*, 2009). We also know that humanity and life on Earth are not being well served now by the flawed service systems at the heart of the UN SDGs. This is why ServCollab seeks to facilitate designing collaborative service systems that serve humanity. Further, ServCollab believes that wisdom emerges from collaborative practices.

Figure 2 Hierarchy of human interactions



Source: Authors' own work. Adapted from concepts in Fisk *et al.* (2020)

Ideally, collaborative practices will enable emergent wisdom that regenerates and elevates the human experience.

Figure 3 portrays the relationship between this Collaboration Theme and the other six commentaries on Service Research Themes. Collaboration is shown in the center of the figure with the six themes shown in a circle surrounding collaboration. This figure unifies all seven service research themes and shows that collaboration is essential in each of the other themes and that collaboration is essential among the six themes.

Service design for collaboration

Lynn Shostack introduced service design (Shostack, 1982), to the service research field and her service blueprinting method became widely practiced. More recent service design research has introduced multilevel service design (Patrício *et al.*, 2011) and service ecosystem design (Vink *et al.*, 2021). Accomplishing the collaboration that the United Nations and ServCollab seek will require service design for collaboration. This is because collaboration itself is a design process. A recent book by Norman (2023) titled "Design for a Better World: Meaningful, Sustainable, Humanity Centered" provides an excellent foundation. Norman is well-known for helping popularize human-centered design, but in focusing globally on a better world, he broadened his thinking to propose five Principles of Humanity-Centered Design:

1. "Solve the core, root issues, not just the problem as presented (which is often the symptom, not the cause);
2. Focus on the entire ecosystem of people, all living things and the physical environment;
3. Take a long-term, systems point of view, realizing that most complications result from the interdependencies of the multiple parts and that many of the most damaging impacts on society and the ecosystem reveal themselves only years or even decades later;
4. Continually test and refine the proposed designs to ensure they truly meet the concerns of the people and ecosystem for whom they are intended; and
5. Design with the community and as much as possible support designs by the community. Professional designers should serve as enablers, facilitators and resources, aiding community members to meet their concerns." (Norman, 2023, Chapter 22).

Figure 3 Role of collaboration in the service research themes

Source: Authors' own work

These five design principles provide essential scaffolding for designing solutions to the UN SDGs. As Norman (2023, p. 54) argued "Our designs must serve humanity, which also requires that the designs serve the ecosystem."

Everyone can be a collaborative designer

The nations represented by the United Nations are the primary focus of the UN SDGs at the macro level. Recent design authors make the point that everyone is a designer (e.g. Kozma, 2023; Norman, 2023). ServCollab seeks to apply the "everyone is a designer" idea to the meso and micro levels of human service systems. The sustainability problems identified by the United Nations require the people of Earth to work together to redesign their local service systems to bring them into harmony with Earth's natural resources.

Fisk and Alkire (2021) proposed a service design thought experiment: "The Goldilocks Civilization thought experiment reimagines human service ecosystems to expand their ability to support individual human life, human societies, and the biodiversity of planet Earth. (p. 199)." Then they discussed guiding the thought experiment based on a book by Atkins *et al.* (2019), which adapted Elinor Ostrom's Nobel prize-winning work on common-pool resources. Based on Ostrom's core design principles they created what they call Core Design Principles 2.0, which consist of eight sequential principles of group problem solving:

1. shared identity and purpose;
2. equitable distribution of contributions and benefits;
3. fair and inclusive decision making;
4. monitoring agreed behaviors;
5. graduated responding to helpful and unhelpful behavior;
6. fast and fair conflict resolution;
7. authority to self-govern (according to principles 1–6); and
8. collaborative relations with other groups (using principles 1–7).

There are numerous examples of opportunities for collaboratively designing with communities like Norman (2023) recommends. LabGov is "the LABoratory for the GOVernance of the City as a Commons" (http://labgov.city). LabGov is a multicity initiative inspired by Ostrom's design principles to practice collaborative forms of urban governance. In Greece, a group called Save Your Hood (https://saveyourhood.gr/en/) works to clean up communities across Greece. A similar group is Retake Roma (https://retake.org/roma/), which works to clean up neighborhoods in Rome. In a recent book titled "Livable Proximity: Ideas for the City that Cares", Manzini (2022) describes numerous examples of sustainable communities that are "15-minute cities." Among the many advantages of such communities is that they are better at caring for each other's needs because of their physical proximity to each other.

There are numerous other sources of design tools for collaboration. *The Collaboratory* (Muff, 2017) provides a collection of chapters that describe how to design and operate "collaboratories." *Impact Networks* (Ehrlichman, 2021) provides

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extensive details and online toolkits for forming and managing collaborative impact networks.

Research agenda for service research and sustainable development goals

Collaborating on the massive breadth of the UN SDGs requires the broadest and deepest levels of human innovation. To accomplish this level of collaboration, we propose a research agenda inspired by the serving humanity logic that ServCollab is advocating and building. In its activities, ServCollab seeks to model the best practices of collaboration. Hence, we organize this research agenda around three major collaboration research areas: communications, technology and projects.

Collaborative communications

Collaboration among any group of people always begins with communications. ServCollab's ability to achieve its goals depends on how effectively its members/participants (ServCollabers) can communicate and coordinate their activities. Coordination is challenging because ServCollabers' decision-making, communication and planning tactics must be dynamically adapted (Serfaty *et al.*, 1993). ServCollab develops communication structures (website, social media and online and offline activities) and information-sharing procedures (e.g. emails, posts, announcements, projects) to identify criteria, comprehend context and stimulate cooperation (Horcea-Milcu *et al.*, 2022).

Establishing and building common ground is the most critical component for ServCollab. Common ground fosters effective communication by providing a joint knowledge base from which information regarding objectives, plans and viewpoints may be communicated (Clark, 1996). Common ground is developed in groups with open communication channels via dialog engagement using a grounding process. During the grounding process, interacting and providing feedback influences organizational performance (Clark and Krych, 2004). The degree to which common ground may be established and maintained effectively is affected by the specific medium of contact, such as face-to-face (e.g. at conferences or workshops) and/or remote communication (e.g. emails, webinars and online meetings). While face-to-face communication is the most preferable approach to achieving collaboration and success in scientific research, modern scientific collaborations require remote communication, too.

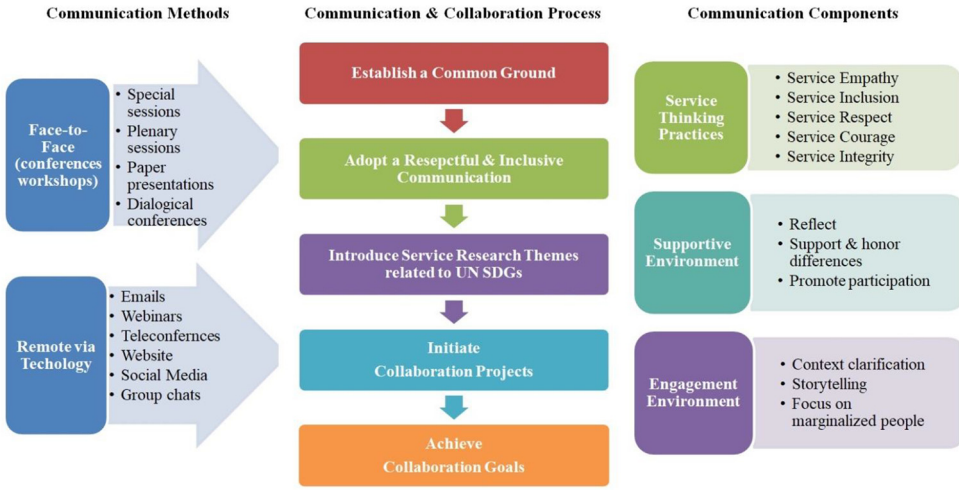
ServCollab takes a diversity, equity and inclusion approach to communicating and collaborating with ServCollabers, other researchers and organizations. Promoting diverse worldviews and mutual understanding facilitates respectful and inclusive communication within ServCollab. Moreover, we adopt the five service thinking practices such as Service Empathy, Service Inclusion, Service Respect, Service Courage and Service Integrity (Alkire *et al.*, 2023). An essential component of inclusive communication is service empathy, meaning understanding others' perspectives and listening to them with an open mind. *Service empathy practices* are "behaviors by service ecosystem entities, taking the perspective of another entity in providing a fair service for all that uplifts the well-being of humans and the living planet" (Alkire *et al.*, 2023, p. 588). Empathy entails being aware of the emotions, ideas and experiences of others as well as being inclusive when making decisions and recognizing others' contributions to organizational goals. *Service inclusion practices* involve "behaviors by service ecosystem entities providing other entities with fair access, treatment and opportunity to exit a service that uplifts the well-being of humans and the living planet." (Alkire *et al.*, 2023, p. 588). ServCollab carefully tries to *use sensitive and inclusive language* by avoiding words or concepts that may inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes or discriminate. ServCollab's inclusive communication goal is to create a *supportive and inclusive environment* and *to engage everyone*. Hence, ServCollab uses communication to reflect, support and honor differences and promote participation. To communicate effectively, ServCollab clarifies the research context, uses storytelling and brings forward the voices of marginalized groups (e.g. refugees). *Service respect practices* refer to "behaviors by service ecosystem entities treating everyone with dignity in provisioning a responsive fair service for all that uplifts the well-being of humans and the living planet" (Alkire *et al.*, 2023, p. 589). Respectful communications increase resilience, improve group communication, spur innovative ideas (Carmeli *et al.*, 2015) and enhance human life experiences while improving well-being (LaGree *et al.*, 2023). *Service courage practices* involve "behaviors by service ecosystem entities persevering past barriers and making brave service decisions that uplift the well-being of humans and the living planet" (Alkire *et al.*, 2023, p. 590). Finally, *service integrity practices* have been defined as "behaviors by service ecosystem entities consistently acting in alignment with Service Thinking principles that uplift the well-being of humans and the living planet" (Alkire *et al.*, 2023, p. 591) (Figure 4).

As a virtual organization, ServCollab's meetings with various teams (e.g. Board of Directors, Operations Officers, Advisory Board Members and other officers) are primarily conducted online. Other online meetings occur with ServCollabers to encourage good communications, recruit new researchers, increase participation in research projects and boost productivity.

In addition to collaborating with researchers, ServCollab seeks to collaborate with other service organizations (e.g. businesses, nonprofits, international organizations, research institutions and communities) to tackle regional and/or global problems and promote sustainable development. We use the term "collaborative sustainability," to mean "the inter-organizational or multi-organizational activities to achieve the sustainable development goals through creative collaboration initiatives," to highlight the need for collaborative efforts to accomplish the UN SDGs. ServCollab plans to expand its network of collaborators to promote awareness on critical societal issues.

Tsiotsou and Diehl (2022) integrated media and communication theories such as agenda-setting and framing with TSR. Agenda-setting describes how corporate, media and customer/public agendas originate and interact to establish expectations for transforming service experiences. The framing theory focuses on the fundamental service aspects that should be communicated to various stakeholders, such as customers, employees, shareholders and the media. The 17 SDGs are components of the agenda set by the UN to secure a sustainable future. Thus, identifying the attributes of the UN SDGs that must be communicated to attract service scholars' interest and gain their research commitment is essential.

Figure 4 ServCollab communication and collaboration process in achieving UN SDGs



Source: Authors' own work

Two research questions identify areas of inquiry for collaborative communications regarding the UN SDGs:

RQ1a. Which stewardship strategies are effective in developing collaborative communications to facilitate and secure service scholars' commitment to achieving UN SDGs?

RQ1b. What UN SDG attributes should be communicated to secure service researchers' commitment to SDGs' research?

Collaboration with technologies

When addressing the United Nations SDGs, the direct and indirect effects of collaboration technology are pervasive. Interest in collaboration via technology was a topic in the early days of computer networking (Wulf, 1993) and the internet (Edelson *et al.*, 1996). Modern technology can enable transformative collaboration and help develop and design sustainable, ethical and humanity-focused technologies to address these SDG's (Fisk *et al.*, 2019). ServCollab believes that technology should safeguard the future of humanity and promote its well-becoming.

Digital technologies such as video conferencing and connectivity tools (e.g. email and chat) can enable individuals to collaborate over long distances and geographic locations. However, emerging artificial intelligence (AI) technologies can have both positive and negative impacts on global sustainability goals (Vinuesa *et al.*, 2020). This leads to a research question regarding finding a balance between designing and developing humanity-focused technology and possible side effects on society and the planet via collaboration between different stakeholders:

RQ2a: What key characteristics enable transformative collaboration between different stakeholders responsible for developing (including designing and implementing) technologies that have a significant impact on society, sustainability, well-being and climate?

Moreover, emerging technologies leveraging AI and big data have made it clear that collaboration between humans and computers adds a new dimension to collaboration. Such human and computer collaborations work interactively, as is the case with conversational agents (such as ChatGPT) that not only respond to customers but also collect input and react accordingly (Sidaoui *et al.*, 2020). Such technologies can be used to improve financial literacy (Yue *et al.*, 2023) or well-being (Biswas, 2023). As a result, developing a better understanding of how to facilitate collaboration between humans and technology presents an important research question:

RQ2b: What mechanisms enable collaboration between humans and AI-infused communication technology services to improve literacy, well-being, transparency and similar concepts related to the United Nations SDGs?

From a technology perspective, the positive or negative effects of any technology only appear when applied in a specific context. For example, a machine-learning algorithm that conducts criminal risk assessment can lead to false accusations, especially if paired with biased data (Hao, 2019). Similarly, generative AI can be used to generate false news, deep fakes or simply committing plagiarism and fraud. Furthermore, collaboration issues pertaining to setting the rules, policies and regulations surrounding these applications pose a challenge. Not only do different nations and cultures have different views and opinions about such applications, but more advanced and resource-intensive technology solutions, such as ChatGPT, require significant monetary and hardware resources to maintain and operate. This means that the design and implementation of such technologies remain in the hands of just a few technology corporations that possess or can outsource the hardware capabilities, know-how, resources and legal leverage, among others (e.g. OpenAI and Microsoft in the example of ChatGPT). As a result, transformative collaboration with AI is hindered because the evolution of these technologies is controlled by a small number of large companies:

RQ2c: How can transformative collaboration across different internal and external stakeholders be achieved to ensure humanity-centric technology outcomes in situations where resource intensive and disruptive technologies are developed and controlled by large technology organizations? E.g., Would approaches such as open

governance and nonproprietary open collaboration help achieve transformative collaboration? (Millard, 2018).

Lastly, finding ways to leverage recent AI advances in connecting transdisciplinary knowledge to the United Nations SDG's deserves research:

RQ2d: How could recent advances in AI technology (e.g., generative and conversational AI) improve transformative and transdisciplinary collaboration across the ServCollab Service Research Themes and the United Nations SDG's?

Collaborative research projects

ServCollab believes that the first step toward achieving the UN SDGs is building collaborative research projects involving multiple stakeholders from different levels of service ecosystems that share the common goal of serving humanity. Evidence suggests that scientific collaborations that cross organizational and geographical barriers are more effective. So, collaborations among scientists across disciplinary, organizational, cultural and geographical borders are critical for addressing research and society's increasingly complex problems (Hall *et al.*, 2018; Horcea-Milcu *et al.*, 2022). Fortunately, the direction of social science research has been toward large-scale collaborations (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2023).

A successful approach for organizing collaborative research projects has been dialogical conferences like the Transformative Consumer Research Dialogical Conference (www.acrwebsite.org/web/tcr/). While various service scholars have participated in such dialogical events, the effectiveness of dialogical events for enabling meaningful, practical and scalable ideas and solutions needs to be studied. Dialogical conferences could offer academics, practitioners, policymakers and other stakeholders an opportunity to share their expertise, experience and perspectives and then generate potential solutions for the UN SDGs.

The most challenging collaborative research area is organizing, managing and implementing large-scale collaborative citizen science research projects. The first task for organizing large-scale collaborative citizen science research projects is assuring the inclusion of the full spectrum of human diversity. TSR research established a service inclusion logic for improving human well-being (Fisk *et al.*, 2018). With 8 billion humans on Planet Earth, the full spectrum of humanity encompasses a wide range of possibilities. These possibilities include age, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, income and health, but they also include mindset, cognitive thinking style, background, experience and geographic location. For citizen science, a research approach that provides inclusive opportunity for engagement and participation from the general public (Gura, 2013), needs to be studied to democratize research processes. This should include making research collaborations as inclusive as possible, with virtually no entry barriers for anyone that wants to be involved in such projects. The pros and cons of collaborative citizen science projects should be studied carefully to ensure that the advantages of including everyone's input and perspective outweigh the potential pitfalls of collaboration between "amateurs and experts" (Gura, 2013).

Investigating how to manage collaborative research projects deserves research, especially when such projects involve participants from different walks of life and backgrounds. What would be the best approach to managing those teams to ensure everyone participates and that their voices are heard in every stage of the project? Would the traditional mentor–mentee model still be effective? What about adopting a player–coach model where a project leader is also a direct contributor to every phase of the project? How can the potential power dynamics and conflicts among participants be prevented, addressed or resolved to ensure productive projects that achieve their intended goals? And how can agility be infused in such collaborative projects to make sure that the project scope and approach can be modified and adjusted for changing circumstances or project complexities?

Finally, research into how such collaborative projects can be implemented to create the intended outcomes for serving humanity is desirable. For example, what should be the ideal project design and process for such projects? How can the Core Design Principles 2.0 (Atkins *et al.*, 2019), which are based on Ostrom's design principles (as explained above), be used to design and implement collaborative projects? Various methods and approaches to create fair and inclusive decision-making, effective monitoring practice or just conflict resolution processes could be studied to better create and implement plans for those collaborative projects. Similarly, another interesting topic for future research is asking how can Norman's (2023) five principles of humanity-centered design be operationalized and adopted within projects by service scholars. For example, studying alternate methods to build effective, trust-based relationships with various communities could provide valuable insights for participants in collaborative projects. Service researchers suggest using community action research (Fisk *et al.*, 2016). Given the range of vulnerabilities experienced by different communities around the world, engaging those communities in research projects that would offer cocreated solutions to their problems is now more critical than before. Therefore, studying how Norman's humanity-centered design can be adopted in service research would help implement these projects.

Four potential research questions about collaborative research projects can be summarized:

RQ3a: How can various approaches to collaborations like citizen science or dialogical/thought leadership events help service scholars design collaborative projects to address UN SDGs?

RQ3b. Are transdisciplinary and multicultural research groups more effective in tackling societal problems and achieving SDGs than single disciplines and monocultural groups?

RQ3c: What is the wisest approach to managing collaborative SDG projects to ensure that the entire process is participatory, agile and effective, and it achieves its intended outcomes?

RQ3d: What are the different types of collaborators/partners, i.e., government vs nongovernment, for-profit vs. nonprofit partners, academic vs. practitioner, that should be included in collaborative SDG research projects?

Conclusion

After centuries of exploiting humans and exploiting nature, the human species has stumbled into an inevitable crisis. These centuries of exploitation have steadily weakened the very fabric of human society and severely damaged the fragile service ecosystem of Planet Earth. This commentary presented ServCollab's collaborative logic and a design approach for serving humanity. It also offered a collaboration research agenda to accelerate collaborative communications, collaborative technologies and collaborative research projects.

ServCollab collaborated with the editors of the *Journal of Services Marketing* to develop these seven ServCollab service research themes. The authors of each commentary collaborated with each other to write their commentary. These collaborative efforts were performed to inspire service researchers to engage in research that serves humanity by collaboratively designing (or redesigning) service systems for humanity and for all life to thrive. ServCollab urges researchers from any discipline to engage with the profound problems facing humanity and collaborate together on research that serves humanity.

As a social species, the need for humanity to work together is embedded in human nature. And the need to work together has never been greater. The hope for achieving the UN SDGs rests on the ability of humanity to rise above provincial interests and to achieve the collaborative wisdom necessary to work together on the shared problems of humanity and Planet Earth. A quote from the indigenous scholar Kimmerer (2013) provides an excellent coda to this collaboration commentary – "All flourishing is mutual."

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