Collaborative capabilities of cause-based social entrepreneurship alliance of firms

Lamin B. Ceesay
Faculty of Economics, Graduate School of Economics and Management, University of Verona, Verona, Italy
Cecilia Rossignoli
Graduate School of Economics and Management, University of Verona, Verona, Italy, and
Raj V. Mahto
Department of Finance and Innovation, Anderson School of Management, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA

Received 13 August 2021
Revised 22 October 2021
Accepted 14 November 2021

Abstract

Purpose – This study examines the collaborative value practices of cause-based social entrepreneurship alliances. We investigate key drivers of value creation in such alliances.
Design/methodology/approach – The study utilizes a longitudinal case study design approach involving four northern Italian businesses for investigating the cause-based social alliances.
Findings – The study findings suggest that cause-based alliance differ from other business relationships due to social mission of the alliance and orientation of partners to a specific social cause. However, over time involved firm may pursue commercial interests.
Research limitations/implications – The study utilizes a qualitative case study approach to examine the issues. This may have implications on generalizability of study findings. Further, the sample is limited to small firms, which limit its relevance for large firms.
Practical implications – Managers can utilize the study findings to guide the organizing process of a successful cause-based alliance and can implement it with positive outcomes for their firm.
Originality/value – This is one of the first study on the emerging phenomenon of cause-based social alliance. It contributes to the literature on social entrepreneurship. It informs and guides practitioners about motivations and drivers of such alliances.

Keywords Social problem, Cause-related alliance, Social entrepreneurship, Coronavirus, COVID-19, Collaborative value framework, SMEs, Case study

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The increasing importance of social entrepreneurship (SE) in society has attracted attention of scholars and practitioners recently (Urban, 2020; Douglas and Prentice, 2019; Griffiths *et al.*, 2013; Mair and Noboa, 2006, pp. 22–33; Shaw and Carter, 2007). Scholars define SE as a bridging organization utilizing innovative co-creation logic for addressing societal problems unresolved by markets, governments and traditional philanthropic initiatives (Rossignoli *et al.*, 2018). The primary motives of corporations engaging in SE: the economic profit and innovation (Faminow *et al.*, 2009; Weerawardena and Sullivan Mort, 2006). SE literature suggests that a firm's desire to address specific social-purpose causes posing challenges to society drive their prosocial

Funding: This research received no external funding.
Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
The authors appreciate the help and guidance of the editor and the two anonymous reviewers in publication of the article.

Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development

1462-6004
DOI 10.1108/JSBED-08-2021-0311

motivation (Urban, 2020; Douglas and Prentice, 2019; Mair and Noboa, 2006). Hossain (2019) propose critical aspects that characterize SE: social mission over financial mission, innovative solution to social problems, self-sustaining social business model and social impact assessment. Recent research shows a global surge in cause-based social entrepreneurial spending by corporations from $55.3 billion in 2014 to $62.7 billion in 2017 (Yoo *et al.*, 2018, p. 1). This includes several areas of corporate sustainability efforts such as humane entrepreneurship development (Parente *et al.*, 2018), corporate philanthropy/donation (Brondoni, 2003), cause-related marketing and cause-based branding (Lafferty, 2009), etc.

In literature review, we found a paucity of research on cause-based SE alliance. However, there is a plethora of research on other forms of the cause-based social alliance, such as those involving a cross-sector alliance between business and non-profits and/or government (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, b; Austin, 2000a; Berger *et al.*, 2004) and cause-related marketing (Lafferty and Goldsmith, 2005; Tsao and Chen, 2011). We address this gap in the literature by focusing on cause-based alliance of firms seeking to address challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for both business and society. Unlike past pandemics, COVID-19 pandemic challenged society, including businesses, due to measures such as the lockdowns in countries around the world (Arshad Ali *et al.*, 2020), physical "social distancing" (Nicola *et al.*, 2020) and the mandatory use of face masks. For businesses, the disruption of normal operations resulted in massive layoff of employees (Liguori and Pittz, 2020). The pandemic caused unprecedented disruption in global supply chains leading to a massive shortage of essential medical equipment needed to fight the virus (Ranney *et al.*, 2020; Spinelli and Pellino, 2020).

The unfolding challenges of the COVID-19 crisis transcended individual firms and sectors to handle effectively. Consequently, several forms of alliance emerged rapidly across the world, involving businesses, private individuals, non-profits and governments (Cojoianu *et al.*, 2020; Nicola *et al.*, 2020), that focused on research and vaccines development to those seeking to tackle shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline healthcare workers (Ranney *et al.*, 2020). For instance, Lowe's and DuPont collaborated for the production and supply of PPEs [1]. In Germany, Northern Data AG and Innoplexus AG partnership in April 2020 focused on using "high-performance computing to perform epidemiological simulations" for accelerating COVID-19 drug discovery and development (Cojoianu *et al.*, 2020, p. 9). In Israel, Johnson and Johnson and a local health center collaborated for accelerating the vaccine development and trials. Cojoianu *et al.* (2020) suggest three categories of these inter-organizational alliances during the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) Core healthcare; (2) Management and operational and (3) Social needs. These are special forms of "social purpose alliances" (Mair and Noboa, 2006, pp. 22–33) allowing firms to invest in social causes that maximizes commercial interests (Austin *et al.*, 2006; Harvey *et al.*, 2011), such as improving corporate legitimacy and public image (Lafferty, 2009), attracting consumer sympathy and acceptance (Yen and Yang, 2018), promoting investor recognition and patronage, and accessing government stimulus benefits. Our focus, however, is on the inter-firm relationships, driven by the social mission (referred here as a *cause-based alliance*) and in line with their commercial interests to tackle the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, we conceptualize cause-based SE alliance as a form of SE, comprising independent firms, that collaborate resources and expertise to address a specific causes or portfolio of causes.

Consequently, this study examines the collaborative value practices for cause-based SE alliances. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that examines the business contribution to COVID-19 crisis response from the perspective of cause-based SE alliance. The study advances our understanding of inter-firm cause-based alliance in the fragmented SE literature (Faminow *et al.*, 2009; Sarkar *et al.*, 2001). In fact, different forms of cause-based partnerships appeared in the extant literature include those involving businesses and non-profits and/or governments (e.g. Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, b), causing a relative paucity of cause-related alliance literature and a coherent theoretical framework. Thus, there is urgent need

to examine this form of inter-firm collaboration. Specifically, we argue, drawing on collaborative value construct (CVC) (Austin, 2000a, b; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, b), that cause-based inter-firm alliance are different from other forms of inter-organizational relationships. These collaborative capabilities of firms for social value generation are relevant to literatures on resource-based views, institutional theory and cause-based SE alliances.

In the study, we investigate the emerging alliance of businesses in Northern Italy for production of PPE during the pandemic, to support the government efforts on the crisis. We utilize an exploratory case study approach to understand the collaborative value processes of businesses involved in the cause-based alliance.

Our findings suggest that cause-based alliance differ from other business relationships due to social mission of the alliance and orientation of partners to a specific social cause (Lafferty, 2009; Lafferty *et al.*, 2004; Wymer and Samu, 2003). Also, the choice, availability and the fit of alliance partners to the cause are fundamental drivers of cause-based alliance formation. Study findings inform firms on maximizing social wealth creation and enhancing corporate image, sales and competitive advantage.

The paper provides insights into the COVID-19 pandemic to describe the research problem next. In rest of the paper, we present study findings, identify dimensions of cause-based alliance collaborative value creation processes and discuss the implication and conclusion. We conclude by offering limitations and future research.

2. COVID-19 crisis overview

World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic (WHO, 2020a, b, c) in February 2020. The pandemic caused more than 500 thousand deaths within few months (see Table 1) and had unprecedented negative effects on the global economy. In the period, Europe recorded more than two million confirmed cases with over a hundred thousand deaths [2]. In Europe, Italy alone had over two hundred thousand cases with over 32 thousand coronavirus-related deaths [3]. The pandemic induced disruption in the global supply chain along with exponentially spreading infections exacerbated the shortage of PPE (Nicola *et al.*, 2020), particularly for Italian frontline healthcare workers (Lazzerini and Putoto, 2020; Ranney *et al.*, 2020).

3. Literature review

3.1 Theories explaining inter-organizational relationships

In the paper, we utilize Transaction Cost Economic Theory (TCT) (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1975), Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003) and New Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell (1983)) for developing our arguments. TCT views firms and markets as the two alternative governance structures, each with a different transactions cost.

Globally	12,964 809 cases (196,775)	570,288 deaths (3,634)
Africa	492,660 cases (15,085)	8,430 deaths (177)
Americas	6,780,428 cases (110,549)	288,430 deaths (1,853)
Eastern Mediterranean	1,302,297 cases (15,646)	31,751 deaths (523)
Europe	2,946,104 cases (20,691)	203,957 deaths (373)
South-East Asia	1,196,651 cases (33,095)	29,900 deaths (642)
Western Pacific	245,928 cases (1,709)	7,807 deaths (66)

Note(s): Data from WHO situation reports, 2020
Source(s): WHO (2020d)

Table 1.
Global deaths and new infections counts

TCT built on Commons (1934) and Coase (1937) gained relevance in the 1980s, thanks to the original work of Williamson. Williamson (1975, 1979, 1981, 1985) also used Coase's (1937) market costs of use (i.e. the market exchange and the firm's internal transactions). Williamson (1975) identified factors that make the market an inefficient mechanism for governing the transactions, thus making the hierarchy cheaper to use. Indeed, bounded rationality, information asymmetries and opportunistic behavior potential contributes to a market behaving irrationally. As a result, these costs are called *"market use costs"* and cover the expenses inherent in searching and getting information for the best supplier/partner/customer, the cost of establishing a contract, and the costs of monitoring and enforcing the contract. In some instances, these costs can escalate to such an extent that it is more economical to switch to other forms of transaction governance (Milgrom and Roberts, 1992; Williamson, 1975). When the operations are performed in compliance with a mutual agreement, the transaction takes on the form of a contract (explicit or implicit, complete or incomplete) that regulates its execution. The alternative to the market is the internal organization (very often hierarchical). In conditions of uncertainty, targeted investments and a high rate of transactions, the internal organization replaces the market. Employee relations are regulated according to the hierarchical principle, the employment contract and through mechanisms of organizational influence.

Neo-institutionalism also addresses inter-organizational relationship. The theory assumes that the institutional environment greatly influences organizations, even greater than that stemming from rational interests and individual- or group-based interactions. According to neo-institutional theory, actors internalize norms through socialization processes and are more likely to be creatures of institutional rules than their creators. Most institutional norms have been created by forces in the past and may have binding power whether or not present actors support them. These studies highlight that organizational legitimacy is a necessary pre-condition to interact in a certain institutional environment (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001; Jepperson, 2002; Hasse and Kruecken, 2005). According to the theory, once the institutionalization process has occurred, people will strongly resist change once rules, beliefs and customs have been internalized. The theory suggests that it is necessary to consider *that* organizations are strongly influenced by their regional and national institutional environments when they interact. Consequently, their attitude to building long-term business relations and the type and strength of these relations reflect the beliefs and rules of their institutional environment. For this reason, there are regions or nations where certain types of networks (e.g. project networks) are much more widespread than elsewhere (Lane and Bachmann, 1996; Ebers, 1997).

Organizations interact and build alliances to enhance their legitimacy. For example, a supplier will accept low profits to retain reputable customer's loyalty, which will increase its prestige. Inter-organizational relations are built conforming with the broader institutional environment; each actor complies with rules and cultural expectations spontaneously, even at the cost of production inefficiencies. Finally, in the well-established inter-organizational network, based on stable, long-term business relations, the following phenomena are likely to develop: conformism, conservatism, uniformity, path dependency (Ricciardi and Rossignoli, 2015a, b).

In Resource Dependence, Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) assigned a key role to the environment and the social context of a firm. Decisions inside the organization reflect the pressures of the external environment (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). Moreover, the organizations are "*embedded*" in networks of interdependencies and social relations. The external relations generate resources that the organization uses for survival. The dependencies are often reciprocal and sometimes indirect. If firms could generate all needed resources for survival, there would be no need to forge "relations" with the external environment and, therefore, other organizations. But the firms need to interact with other

organizations to procure an ongoing and abundant flow of resources to satisfy its stakeholders. The availability of the resources depends on the complexity, dynamism and munificence of the environment.

Organizations interact with environment to access needed resources. Although the Resource Dependence theory describes long-term, collaborative inter-organizational relations based on joint venture alliances or long-term outsourcing agreements, genuine cooperation is rare if the relations are shaped by power. Larger and stronger enterprises, for example, can impose their conditions on smaller and weaker partner organizations. The higher power asymmetry may result in bullying (Ricciardi, 2014).

However, the theory predicts that stable relationship, higher efficiency and reliable risk management under favorable conditions (Lambert and Cooper, 2000). But, organizations could act opportunistically when alternative opportunities exist.

3.2 The concept of cause-based venture

Scholars describe cause-based ventures in terms of partnerships involving businesses, non-profits, governments and individuals that focus on value creation for the society (Liu *et al.*, 2018; Mair and Noboa, 2006; Samu and Wymer, 2001; Wymer and Samu, 2003). Parker and Selsky (2004, p. 458) describe the cause-based partnership as a form of collaboration "between business and non-profits that address social meta problems such as environmental sustainability and social-justice challenges". Berger *et al.*, 2004 described it as a social alliance between firms involving sharing of resources, knowledge and capabilities that span the boundaries of for-profit to non-profit sectors. The authors argue that social alliance is characterized by at least one non-profit partner, and in addition to improving social welfare, social alliance include non-economic objectives.

Organizations engage in cause-based ventures in various forms, including investment (Deb and Amawate, 2019; Huertas-García *et al.*, 2017; Lafferty and Edmondson, 2014) and corporate sponsorship or philanthropic activities (Brondoni, 2003; Menon and Kahn, 2001). In marketing literature, cause-based marketing reinforces consumers and the public to develop a positive association between the company and the cause. It appeals to consumer moral emotions (empathy) and cognition (moral identity) (Lafferty, 2009; Yen and Yang, 2018) helping to improve the overall quality of life. Lafferty *et al.* (2004) suggested that American consumers tend to prefer companies engaged in sincere and credible social causes. The cause-based alliance is a source of corporate philanthropy or cash-in donation (Samu and Wymer, 2001) for non-profits. It increases awareness of non-profit cause (Wymer and Samu, 2003) while allowing them to address social development mandate.

Despite the significant role of cause-based SE, a plethora of research is devoted to cross-sector business-non-profit alliance and marketing domain. Thus, it is a significant gap in our understanding of inter-firm alliance research domain (Faminow *et al.*, 2009). This study addresses the gap in the literature.

3.3 Conceptualization of cause-based social entrepreneurship (SE) alliance

The cause-based venture is a form of SE (Faminow *et al.*, 2009; Mair and Noboa, 2006, pp. 23–33; Sarkar *et al.*, 2001) focused on innovative social value-creating activities to advance societal issues while simultaneously pursuing commercial interests (Austin *et al.*, 2006). Recently, Ratten (2020) describe how SE integrates social change into business activity. Besides social motives, SE alliance promotes new ideas through networking, opportunity identification and risk management for certain social problems (Faminow *et al.*, 2009).

More specifically, SE offers cause-based alliance an alternative solution for a variety of complex social problems that transcend single firms. The entrepreneurial aspect of a cause-based alliance introduces new and innovative technology to deliver innovative social value

(Faminow *et al.*, 2009). Shaw and Carter (2007) suggest that opportunity recognition involving the entrepreneurial search for unmet social needs, and the local embeddedness of the alliance promote the cooperation of local stakeholders to ensure local credibility and goodwill, and increased social value creation.

The different competitive intends and idiosyncrasy between firms make cause-based SE alliance a challenging and less popular strategy. However, Parker and Selsky (2004) suggest that compatibility between the partner organizations' tasks, processes and cultures are critical for successful cause-based partnership performance. Berger *et al.*, 2004 suggested nine strategic alignments for success of cause-based social alliance: mission, resource, management style and workforce fit; target market fit, product/cause fit, cultural fit, cycle fit, and evaluation fit. Further, Wymer and Samu (2003) argued that creating a partnership fit reduces partners' risks associated with the possibility of corporate/brand reputation damage, reduced funding and possible withdrawal of corporate support (non-profit organizations), and loss of sales or market share. It reduces conflict and misunderstanding, thus maximizing economic objectives and generating social wealth. The exchange of technological innovation and access to external resources and networks becomes easier in such conditions (Barringer and Harrison, 2000).

Sarkar *et al.* (2001) discussed alliance proactive behavior as a key driver of SE alliance formation, presenting firms the opportunities to create value through learning new skills and leveraging the complementary resources of their partners (Das and Teng, 2002). That means external resource constellation and strategic alliance relationships with capable partners, improve a firm's competitiveness, particularly for small-sized enterprises. Thus, selecting the right cause-based partner may enable firms to develop knowledge of each other's motives, expectation and context (Wymer and Samu, 2003). However, firms experience three difficulties for selecting partners: trust-building, conflict resolution and coordination in a social exchange relationship. Das and Teng (2002), Rossignoli *et al.* (2018) suggested that a common ICT-enabled routine is important for minimizing conflict and enhancing trust and sharing behavior in a business relationship.

3.4 Collaborative value creation in an inter-firm alliance

Researchers have recognized the importance of collaborative value processes involving multiple stakeholders in various disciplines (e.g. Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b).

Bititci *et al.* (2004) define a collaborative value process as "a distinct mode of organization in which firms work together in equity, commitment and trust in exchanging information, sharing activities and resources and complementing one another's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose by sharing risks, responsibilities and rewards (p. 263)." Inter-firm alliance enables value creation through resource combination, knowledge sharing, speed to market and access to foreign markets (Barringer and Harrison, 2000). Interaction between partner organizations enable an exchange of complementary ideas and knowledge (Hlupic and Qureshi, 2003). Value creation in such a relationship is a consequence of "partners' mutuality" (Holm *et al.*, 1999), enabling the actors to develop stronger connections through frequent interaction, a show of mutual commitment and mutual dependence to value co-creation. However, not many studies have focused on value creation in SE alliance projects, which is the focus of this study.

Various collaborative value creation frameworks explain how firms collaborate in various value-generating processes. For instance, Biskjaer *et al.* (2019) highlighted four collaborative value creation processes in building design process involving multiple shareholders. The model comprises value negotiation, value formulation and value manifestation. Wagner *et al.* (2010) listed two value processes of industrial customer-supplier projects: value creation and value appropriation. It recognizes industrial customers as co-value creators through market

information sharing and customer expectations. Value appropriations foster reward-sharing, enabling actors' fair contribution to value creation behavior and reducing opportunism in an alliance. Leveraging the CVC, we argue that the cause-based SE alliance have commonalities and differences with other types of collaborations.

Similar to other value co-creation frameworks, each stage of the collaborative value process entails a complex interconnected process interlinked with other value processes (Corsaro, 2019). Thus, all actors are required to perform a set of tasks and are responsible for generating desired social and commercial outcome for the SE alliance.

4. Research focus

In this study, we explain how collaborative value creation occurred in a cause-driven SE alliance involving Italian businesses. A cause-based SE alliance seeks to address a problem of the society (in our case, the COVID-19 pandemic) while pursuing commercial interests. Study participants include CEO, entrepreneurs, *t* directors, and the chief consultant. We assess respondents' perception of the cause-based SE alliance process during the first three and nine months of the project, respectively. The first research question (RQ)assesses the collaborative value practices of cause-based SE alliances, while the second RQ addresses emerging challenges confronting the quality of ongoing collaborative value creation processes.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research approach

This study uses a structured interview approach (Rowley, 2000; Rashid *et al.*, 2019) to address RQs (Saunders *et al.*, 2009). The qualitative case study method is a common method in management and organizational research (e.g. Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Rossignoli *et al.*, 2018) for gaining insights into the "what", "how" and "why" in a specific research context (Yin, 2013). Our longitudinal case study was employed between the first three months of the alliance formation, and the first nine months of the operation. The objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of some intricate social phenomena impacting the project (Rashid *et al.*, 2019).

Since inter-firm cause-based alliance is an emerging theme in reviews literature (Austin *et al.*, 2006; Douglas and Prentice, 2019; Hockerts, 2006), a case study approach is a suitable research method for this study. The approach provides an empirical inquiry into a contemporary phenomenon whose understanding and context is fragmented in the literature. Also, the internal value-generating processes between firms with diverse motives, and even institutional logic, make the case study approach a suitable method to elucidate these value processes. These backgrounds have the potential to provide a solid theoretical lens in the domain of CVC for new knowledge generation and theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989). This approach of theory testing and the search for new theory (theory building) advance the tradition of "analytical generalization" of theory (Yin, 2013, pp. 325–326).

The unit of analysis in this research is the "supply chain" or "the alliance" that characterizes firms involved in the production and supplies of PEE during the COVID-19 crisis. Employing qualitative interviews enabled us to capture alliance-level characteristics, and the subjective experiences and perception of the participants.

5.2 Research sample and setting

The four sampled multinational SMEs headquartered in northern Italy formed a new alliance. As the study is about cause-driven alliance, rather than economic, only those firms that decided to form such alliance were included. This allowed for homogeneity of the sampled

firms (Dworkin, 2012; Trotter, 2012). Research suggests that sample is appropriate for single longitudinal case study. The sample is adequate to provide a more informative, in-depth insight into the research phenomenon than a large sample (Boddy, 2016; Trotter, 2012). Such small sample size "permits the deep, case-oriented analysis, thus providing the *raison-d'etre* of qualitative inquiry" (Boddy, 2016, p. 429). Since our focus is not concerned with making generalization to a larger population of interest, but rather more inductive, allows the data generated to analyze the relationships, and the "live experiences" of research participants (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1,319).

PPEs are specialized equipment used for protection by emergency and healthcare workers during emergencies like diseases outbreaks [4]. PPEs protect workers against physical, chemical and biological hazards. Because the route of exposure from these hazards includes inhalation, dermal contact, ingestion or contact through mucous membranes [5], thus depending on the crisis, PPE comes in the form of respirators, eye protection goggles, gloves, overalls, boots, etc. Specifically, during the coronavirus crisis, these devices mitigate various risks for patients and workers. The specialized nature of PPE equipment makes it difficult and expensive to production at a short notice [6].

Cause-based SE emerged rapidly across the world to improve the supplies of PPE. This study examines the alliance of Italian companies in the northern region. We changed names and identity of participating businesses to maintain their anonymity in the study. In the study, we refer to the first two protagonists (e.g. businesses) of the alliance, Alpha and Beta. The two other secondary firms are Gamma and Omega. Alpha and Beta are located in Belfiore and Bassone, respectively. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the two businesses did not know each other. However, the aggregating role of the Confindustria Verona, facilitated contact between them, especially when face masks shortage became severe.

Alpha is the founding organizer of the collaborative alliance examined in the study. The firm, with 498 employees and operation in America and Europe, had over 30-year experience in transformation and customization of non-woven fabric, plastics, paper, felts and wadding. According to the alliance document, Alpha's role in the alliance was to commercialize and certify of alliance products. Thus, the firm was responsible for market position and assessing conformity [7]. Beta manufactured equipment needed to protect temperature-sensitive freight during transit. The firm, a worldwide manufacturer, is an industry leader of cold chain protection and offered products to reduce clients' reliance on refrigerated units [8]. The company has 348 employees. The alliance document suggests that Beta purchased machines for producing specialized fabric masks to address shortage of surgical masks [9].

Omega, located in Trentino area of Rovereto, established a collaboration with Alpha and the alliance for manufacturing medical devices. Omega had experience collaborating with Alpha. Gamma another secondary firm in the project. The alliance document noted that Gamma creates the three types of fabrics to produce a single multi-layered fabric. This fabric was critical for producing surgical masks, the primary goal of new caused-based SE alliance. Gamma has been in business for over 30 years providing its services to various sectors – personal care, hygiene, medical industry, furniture and design, farming, building and even the motor vehicle sector [10]. The firm is a key supplier and customer of Alpha. We interviewed representatives of these businesses to obtain insights into cause-related alliances. The new SE alliance of specialized manufacturers is a unique collaborative innovation network with high technology intensity and learning opportunity. Thus, it offers a unique opportunity to investigate inter-firm cause-related alliance that is different from the traditional inter-firm projects.

5.3 Data collection

The longitudional development started first with two rounds of personal interviews for capturing data about the case-based SE alliance. Using purposeful sampling technique

(Kumar, 2011, p. 189; Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2013), a semi-structured interview was the primary data collection method (Yin, 2018). Two study authors conducted the interviews with one interviewing and the other recording. The first round of interviews in June 2020 involved the top managers (including the entrepreneurs, CEO, export manager and a project consultant). We obtained rich data from these informants as they had relevant knowledge about the alliance. All respondents received interview guide prior to each interview session. This allowed them to become familiar with the interview questions beforehand offered them the chance to prepare, obtain relevant data and avoid surprises and anxiety (Rashid *et al.*, 2019). These interview sessions provoked discussions on the alliance process, partners' motivation and challenges encountered.

In order to comply with the social distancing measures and quarantine restrictions guidelines implemented in Italy due to COVID-19 emergency, we conducted the first rounds of interviews through telephone, Zoom or Skype. The second round of interviews, conducted in September 2020 (9 months later), was to evaluate the progress of the cause-based alliance and examine various challenges encountered. The respondents consented to recording of interview session. The interviews lasted an average of an hour and 30 min.

Aside from personal interviews, we also examined internal documents on the alliance formation and implementation. Further, we utilized data from online sources, the media and notes from direct observations to develop our narratives (in Table 2).

6. Data analysis

6.1 Analysis and procedure

Data analysis follows an iterative approach. The first stage of data analysis is the transcription of interview data. The analytical process followed Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) six-step approach (see Figure 1): Codes developed *a priori*, provided systematic guidance on the analysis of the data. In the first stage, we independently read the interview transcripts and coded the data in an open manner (Rashid *et al.*, 2019) in response to how firms maximize collaborative value creation processes, and the challenges that emerge in the

Collected data		Collected data
Interviews	5 Personal interviews 3 Follow-up interviews	The first round of interviews took place via digital communication platforms such as Zoom and Skype. Four semi-structured personal interviews involving entrepreneurs, Commercial director, and Managing director of the four main network companies. The motivations and how the cause-based SE network is being organized were discussed. Three follow-up interviews with the two main protagonists of the network were done and during this phase, and discussions were centered on the progress made, and challenges encountered in the cause-based SE network. All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed
Internal documents	9-Page documents	Documents relating to the alliance formalization, and the unique roles of companies were observed. The researcher had access to these internal documents providing further insights into the operationalization of the SE alliance activities
Data collected online		Information about the alliance firms, and the cause-based SE alliance were collected from the official websites/social media sites of the alliance firms
Direct observation		The researchers had the chance to familiarize themselves with the operations of the SE network through a visit to the alliance offices, where the production of the PPEs take place

Table 2.
Data collection

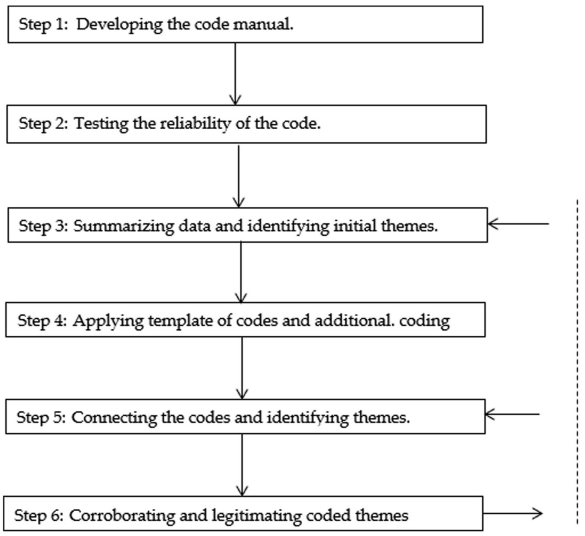

Figure 1.
Diagrammatic representation of the stages undertaken to code the empirical data

Source(s): Adapted, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, pp.84-90

course of the alliance. Next, we developed a list of codes comprising of terms based on research questions and theoretical concepts ("value definition," "value creation," "value balance," "value renewal" and "challenges") in a SE alliance. These terms were developed in line with the study objectives, aims and problem statement. We sort out the statements involving the specified codes in the data.

The second step involved testing the reliability of the identified code (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). To increase reliability and validity (Rowley, 2000), we follow Kraus *et al.* (2020) by reading and coding independently, discussed and compared our codes iteratively before we consolidated those into the main themes. We assessed the reliability of the codes using the expert review by a specialist in SE area. A cross-check of the empirical data (interview transcript) against the field summary was explored, thus allowing us to verify correct entries. The outcome of these reviews enabled the refinement of the codes.

The third step summarized data and identified initial codes. In this process, the empirical data is read thoroughly, the interviews are examined carefully, and eventually summarized. We used the data (transcripts, direct observations, direct interviews, internal documents) to deduce key points (as related to specified codes) to address research questions in this study. The fourth stage involved the use of a code book, uploaded into the ATLAS.ti software with the intent of analyzing meaningful relationships or associations between codes and themes. The coded texts were sorted and the codes retrieved were organized according to clustered themes across all data sources. We used an inductive approach, leveraging from the existing theoretical lens for this. The inductive codes were subsequently included in the predetermined code in the codebook (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The fifth step involved connecting codes for discovering themes and patterns in the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The final codes were duly corroborated for forming the key themes of this study. In the iterative process, several codes were merged into a single code, making an important part of the general themes of the study. Each code was further clustered under the headings/themes that relate to the research questions. Similarities and differences across various data sources began to emerge at different stages in response to questions in the study. The final step involved clustering the themes that were initially identified from the coded

texts. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) described this process as "corroborating", confirming that clustered themes are representative of the initial data analysis and assigned codes from the codebook. This stage followed an interpretive phase of the empirical data and involved observing the explanatory framework that is consistent with the proposed codes and themes. Based on this approach, the overarching themes that capture the phenomenon were further clustered and assigned simplified labels describing the meaning that underpinned the themes.

In the following section, we discuss the research questions, first, the analysis of results based on Austin's (2000a) four CVC: definition of value, value creation, value balance and value renewal, and finally, the discussion of the findings based on the challenges of cause-based SE network.

7. Discussion

7.1 The value definition for cause-based SE network

At the peak of Coronavirus pandemic (around March 2020 fatalities were growing rapidly in Italy and there was severe shortage of PPEs). At such a time of uncertainty, entrepreneurship orientation of businesses operators began to emerge to mitigate the challenge. In fact, our data finds that the entrepreneur of a protagonist in the alliance consulted with the Confindustria of Verona for a potential partnership for production and supply of masks for frontline and healthcare workers. At the stage, the primary goal was to contribute to the social cause of the pandemic and had no economic motivation. The participants recognized it at the time, according to our data. Specifically, the entrepreneur of the Alpha firm explained how the common value of the collaboration was defined: "*definition of value was possible through Confindustria, which allowed the meeting between the two protagonist companies, all of which had the opposite problems: Alpha had the skills and raw materials, Beta, on the other hand, possessed the technology and the machinery needed for the production of masks, and Gamma has easy access to global market channels*". Further, the respondent added that "*. . . for the production quantity and duration of the contract, we have not given ourselves a ceiling, today we have a production capacity of about 2,000,000 pieces of masks per month, so the goal is to get to saturate the production, but since it is not our main activity we do not want to do it at any cost and any condition. It was something born for social purposes. The duration of our agreement is two years because we have considered both the minimum time to see the results and for the investments made by both*".

Value definition in the case enabled actors to define expectations, benefits of the relationship to each actor, and more saliently, to the society (Austin, 2000a). Through it the partners develop "shared vision" and identified each other's expectations and perceptions. According to Corsaro (2019, p. 101), value representation is key to "*how a partner translates its ideas of value into something that can be easily observed by others, and its meaning shared among them*". Moreover, Austin and Seitanidi (2012a) highlighted that alliance partners rely on value definition for greater guidance and strategic alignment necessary for a shared vision and mutual corporation, also enabling partners to weigh the trade-offs across types of values and beneficiaries *a priori* (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012b) including an assessment of the resource requirements (both financial and human), products/services, technology and expertise position of actors.

Similarly, the clarity of the common objective could be found in these findings, as echoed by the Managing Director of Beta: "*In any case, we will see in the first two years of the partnership that we have given ourselves, we are already evaluating other ideas, other paths that can go forward. I considered this issue of masks for a social reason*". Such understanding of the common value enabled organizational alignments (of the opportunities, people, capital and context) to the social cause, as critical to SE capabilities (Austin *et al.*, 2006). Our findings

suggest that clarity of common value in a cause-based network enabled actors to commit to project goals and objectives. Scholars suggest that the absence of clarity on value definition has the potential to cause misdirection, misunderstanding and conflict of interest, thus disrupting the value generation activities.

7.2 The value creation process in a cause-based SE network

In the case, there is evidence of collective value creation using resources utilization and tasks assignment for generating social and economic value. For instance, the CEO of Beta notes that "*The co-creation of value with Alpha is daily because we collaborate very closely; when we need something, they intervene and vice versa*". As the two firms had some idiosyncrasies, their core business differed from requirements of addressing the pandemic (creating masks), inter-firm cohesion and interdependence signaled their intent toward the social cause. Thus, resource integration is critical for the collaborative value creation process (Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, b; Holm *et al.*, 1999; Wagner *et al.*, 2010). Thus "scrutinizing each other's resources and capabilities" from which the firms determine which and how the value can be created is an essential activity of value creation (Austin, 2000a, p. 78). Our data suggest that Alpha provided raw materials and skills, Gamma offered the technology and machines and Omega provided the commercial activities and distribution of the masks. Thus, resources and tasks were assigned accordingly.

Teng (2003) described value creation processes critical for generating a collaborative advantage for a firm's own value-added activities. In fact, aside from the technical resources, machines and equipment, distinctive skills are of great importance in this partnership. The entrepreneur of Alpha asserted that: "*. . . as a last resort we have the skills and knowledge that made us distinctive and eligible, it is the reason why so many companies are still not certificated . . . for meeting the laboratory tests*". Under such an environment, mutual trust of partners is critical to value creation, enabling openness and exchange of resources and technical know-how between partners (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Thus, effective communication, which allows for dialogues and collective sense-making, is necessary for value creation in the relationship (Corsaro, 2019). Value creation practices were observed in response to the question: how the production of facemask is possible within the alliance of firms?

(1) Gamma, although not formally part of the alliance, is the company that deals with the production of rolls of non-woven clothing material size 3.2 × 1.2 m in diameter weighing 3–4 tons; it only played a role of supplier for Alpha.

(2) Alpha takes the raw material and added value through activities such as cutting and the rewinding for further processing; moreover, it brings thirty years of experience working with these materials. In fact, it was ready to continue to evolve and improve the quality of its products more and more.

(3) Beta, as we have already seen, had no experience with materials but bought the machinery, as mentioned by the CEO: "*we observe the changes in production flow and the procedures are very important, but it is not always easy to maintain compliance. We have a know-how related to production processes and on this we are always ready because we are born as pure manufacturers.*" The company contributed to the alliance not only for the provision of the machinery but also the ability to manage the flows.

Based on these relationships, actors enjoy the exchange of three types of resources that are critical to value creation: general resource transfer, core competence exchange and joint value creation.

7.3 The process of value balance in a cause-based SE network

Just like any other alliance, actors seeking to advance mutual commitment to the social cause must create a system that promotes fairness and distributive justice. For instance,

v*alue balance* in a collaborative relationship is based on a stronger and enduring balanced exchange of value (Austin, 2000a), where actors develop more equitable working relations and high reciprocal relationships and interaction. Our data suggest the presence of value balance between actors, as lamented by the CEO of Beta "*. . . from the very beginning, we have agreed that the returns from this investment shall be split equally between the two protagonist companies, 50/50, noting this is the only way we feel the best solution can be achieved, and the costs related to production, trading, and waste are shared equally by the two companies*."

Moreover, other actors in the alliance were duly rewarded for each service rendered. For example, Alpha was compensated for the commercial services involving certification and sales of machinery. Also, an accounting system, using a more transparent excel sheet made available through a *OneDrive* online, was developed to record all the costs of the investments for adequate value appropriation, according to the alliance document. By this system, actors could see each item and its associated expenditure and revenue in real-time. This implies that actors are committed to fostering value appropriation, a practice that promotes mutual trust and reduced opportunism (Corsaro, 2019).

As the partnership emerges, the value appropriation systems can reduce tension between the partners due to misalignment of objectives (Wagner *et al.*, 2010) through mutually beneficial decisions related to management of revenues and the relative breakdown. These outcomes promote knowledge exchange through dialogue, and joint problem-solving (Parente *et al.*, 2018). The absence of these mechanisms may be a source of inter-firm conflict and even dissolution of the relationship.

7.4 The process of value renewal in a cause-based SE network

As the relationships evolve, expectations and priorities of partners shifted, requiring them to re-evaluate to either renew or terminate the relationship. After the implementation of the alliance outcome, partners evaluated the value of the relationship. In the case, the CEO of Beta provided positive feedback on the new relationship by adding, "*It is the first time that we have made a true partnership with a company other than a purchase, sale, contract. If the relationship continues to be this stable and the objectives are realized, I would like to do it again in other sectors preferably when there is considerable time to plan to make a real analysis of how it operates, how it could go or what we could do differently*.". The significance of the value renewal option makes the partners commit time, resources and efforts toward the alliance objectives. For instance, the owner of Alpha asserted that "*We will go forward in any case because we have a group behind us, such as Gamma, whose partnership enables us to go forward in a different direction by creating, optimizing and diversifying our productions to four different production lines . . .*" Moreover, commercial director of the Gamma, added that, "*. . . sure we will be interested in renewing our partnership contract especially when the alternatives are similar, efficient, fast, so much so that we can select a choice that is more practical*." These comments provoked the suggestion that when the partnership exhibits complacency – where actors stop the search for new opportunities, additional value-generating activities and revenue streams from the investments, would likely influence actors' commitment to renew the relationship (Austin, 2000a) as suggested above.

All respondents reported lack of major tension/conflict during the formation and implementation phases of the project. The lack of conflict and the frequent interaction in the partnership, promoted trust and strengthen future alliance constellation. This finding corroborates the study of Liguori and Pittz (2020). For instance, the CEO of Beta noted that: "*Yes, I want to renew this contract, maybe even with something different. If in some time an evaluation of the progress is favourable to us, it means that everything will be fine otherwise, if I will do it separately, only when something went wrong*." Further, the entrepreneur of Alpha

suggested that "*Our suppliers are so large that they have been very busy in the production of non-woven fabric, but not so much for the masks . . . They were all happy with the alliance, that none of them thought they would lose their jobs due to the Covid-19 crisis . . .*" At the stakeholders level, employees of Alpha expressed high satisfaction as they found the cause vital to society and alliance offered them employment During challenging economic environment. That the employees demonstrated a high commitment and satisfaction to this project, despite all the difficulty at the time of the pandemic. These findings signal stakeholder commitment to the alliance objective (Parente *et al.*, 2018).

7.4.1 The challenges confronting the cause-based SE network. The idiosyncrasies associated with each alliance business, the alliance experienced several challenges. First, as a prosocial motivation was the key driver of the alliance rather than a commercial motivation, finding right partners was challenging (Parente *et al.*, 2018). For instance, the owner of Alpha argued that "*finding the right partner was something that was difficult since none of the firms specialize in the supply of face mask, and importantly for social cause . . .*" emphasizing that the COVID-19 situation strained time and resources.

Second, since the four-alliance business were from different industries and sectors, they operated on different institutional logics, systems and guidelines. The integration of these institutional logics is consistent with network-based system critical for performance of the alliance (Shaw and Carter, 2007; Taylor and Thorpe, 2004). In study, there is evidence that firms integrated various systems for the co-creation of social value. For example, the businesses adopted an open system of accounting and costing. This allowed actors to enjoy transparency and promote due diligence in financial record keeping associated with the cause-based alliance network. The actors also adopted a system of open communication using emails and meetings enabling them to share relevant knowledge and information, particularly during the peak of crisis.

Third, leveraging the commitment of critical stakeholders was a key challenge (Faminow *et al.*, 2009). Our data suggest a lack of continued commitment of actors in this supply chain. Since the social motives far outweigh the economic ones, the sustainability of the caused-based alliance is questionable. For instance, the delay by Chinese raw materials suppliers resulted in the promised government support/incentive failing to materialize. It dissatisfied one of the key alliance partners, as reported by the respondents, which may potentially jeopardize alliance sustainability.

Fourth, the challenges of aligning economic resources of the alliance partners towards a social cause. Since the social cause is an enduring activity, clarity in the direction and expectation of diverse partners are however critical to the alliance success (Urban, 2020; Hossain, 2019). In fact, our data suggest that this is the first kind of cause-based alliance that the involved businesses participated. The lack of experience in managing and organizing social alliance projects challenged firms. According to the data, at the inception of the alliance, the parties had no idea of the cost of raw materials, the commercial price of masks, as well as the regulations involved. While Alpha, had met the requirements for government certification for non-medical use of masks, the alliance relied on it for the process, forcing partners to align their existing practices to the cause of the alliance. Thus, integration and information are necessary in alliances (Rossignoli *et al.*, 2018), especially for the success of cause-related alliances. Thus, building on inter-firm connection, and communication is fundamental to the alliance success.

The last challenge is the trust between alliance partners (Das and Teng, 2001). Although study respondents suggested the absence conflict during the first year of alliance, there was dissatisfaction among alliance partners regarding the future direction *o*, high dependency on some firms and problem of value distribution while balancing risks and rewards. The promotion of integrity (Liu *et al.*, 2018) concerning having loyalty to the social cause and the partnership allow firms to deepen mutual respect and thus avoids harmful behaviors.

8. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the collaborative value creation process for a cause-based SE network. To do this, we first contextualized the issue through a longitudinal case study of an Italian SE network for the production and distribution of PPEs. As the literature on cause-related alliances tends to concentrate on cause-related partnerships in the areas of marketing, branding and CSR, a dearth of research on cause-based SE alliances exists. Empirical investigation into collaborative practices of businesses involved in cause-based SE is lacking, making this study one of the first.

We leveraged the four-collaborative value processes from the literature to address the first research question in the study. These value processes precisely include value definition, value creation, value balance and value renewal (Austin, 2000a, b; Austin and Seitanidi, 2012a, b). Data show that the successful implementation of cause-related SE projects are associated with the clarity of purpose and direction, the distributive systems of tasks and activities, fair rewards systems and the perception of the organizational future aspirations. However, to achieve these, the services of experienced entrepreneurs in cause-related inter-firm partnership are required for smooth planning and implementation of the value processes. The institutional differences between businesses had a significant effect on the success and sustainability of the social cause project. As firms had different perceptions of social causes, the underlying motives of alliance businesses varied significantly. To reduce the institutional differences, businesses must engage in effective value definition through communication and interaction. Also, the selection of businesses that share similar traits and social concerns are appropriate for cause-related alliance.

The empirical findings suggest that involvement of all critical actors in the value creation in social causes require actors to assume ownership of the social project and increase level of commitment to the cause. In fact, the involvement of actors in the cause signals a firm's commitment to addressing the problems of society, and thus, enhances its social legitimacy. To achieve this, planned sets of guidelines on task allocation, responsibilities and duties of each actor are fundamental to the alliance performance. The sustainability of the cause-related alliance largely depends on whether the alliance has addressed the set goals of the cause. Successful caused-related alliance contracts tend to be renewed seamlessly. The empirical results suggest that there is an absence of tension/conflict, indicating the smooth implementation of the alliance project. The actors are mutually linked because they share similar motives and aspirations. Thus, frequent interactions and communications between actors are essential to the continuance commitment of actors to the social cause project.

Following Bendickson (2021), the findings of this study try to offer context that is applicable to nonacademics as well as academics. The findings of the study provide rich insights into the cause-based social alliance context, enabling practitioners to organize and implement successful inter-firm social alliance projects. The results further advance knowledge on collaborative value practices of inter-firm SE alliance, since its primary focus is to address social problems and simultaneously advance the economic interests of partners. The study offers scholars a foundation to develop literature on cause-related inter-firm alliance processes and challenges.

The study guides practitioners for organizing a successful cause-based alliance, and explains how to implement it profitably. The study is also useful for understanding the operationalization of the alliances and associated challenges. Managers of SMEs can enhance their collaborative capabilities for enhancing their participation and performance (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004).

The study does have some limitation, most importantly those associated with a qualitative case study approach. This may significantly limit application and generalizability of study findings outside the context. We encourage future studies on topics to replicate the collaborative value practices of a cause-based SE network, addressing a particular industry

or market or even comparing across different alliance levels with a diverse membership, and market/industry structure. There is also an urgent need to test the findings in a sample of large firms as size, capability and motives may vary for large firms. Further, a quantitative study on how collaborative value practices influence actors' social performance would yield interesting findings for the cause-based social alliance literature.

Notes

1. https://www.dupont.com/news/lowes-teams-up-with-dupont-to-support-companies-making-ppe.html
2. https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/ (accessed 24/05/2020).
3. https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/it (accessed 24/05/2020).
4. https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/emres/ppe.html (accessed 24/05/2020).
5. https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/emres/ppe.html (accessed 24/05/2020).
6. https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/emres/ppe.html (accessed 24/05/2020).
7. http://www.Alpha-vr.it/ (accessed 22/05/2020).
8. https://Beta.com/ (accessed 22/05/2020).
9. https://Beta.com/ (accessed 22/05/2020).
10. https://Gamma.com/ (accessed 29/7/2020).

References

Aarikka-Stenroos, L. and Jaakkola, E. (2012), "Value co-creation in knowledge intensive business services: a dyadic perspective on the joint problem solving process", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 15-26, doi: 10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.11.008.

Arshad Ali, S., Baloch, M., Ahmed, N., Arshad Ali, A. and Iqbal, A. (2020), "The outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)—an emerging global health threat", *Journal of Infection and Public Health*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 644-646, doi: 10.1016/j.jiph.2020.02.033.

Austin, J.E. (2000a), "Strategic collaboration between nonprofits and businesses", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 29 No. SUPPL, pp. 69-97, doi: 10.1177/089976400773746346.

Austin, J.E. (2000b), "The collaboration challenge: how nonprofits and businesses succeed through strategic alliances", *Manufacturing Engineer*, Vol. 83, p. 6, available at: http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=15794087&site=ehost-live.

Austin, J.E. and Seitanidi, M.M. (2012a), "Collaborative value creation: a review of partnering between nonprofits and businesses. Part I: value creation spectrum and collaboration stages", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 41 No. 5, pp. 726-758, doi: 10.1177/0899764012450777.

Austin, J.E. and Seitanidi, M.M. (2012b), "Collaborative value creation: a review of partnering between nonprofits and businesses. Part 2: partnership processes and outcomes", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 929-968, doi: 10.1177/0899764012454685.

Austin, J., Stevenson, H. and Wei-Skillern, J. (2006), "Social and commercial entrepreneurship: same, different, or both?", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 1-22, doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6520.2009.00354.x.

Barringer, B.R. and Harrison, J.S. (2000), "Walking a tightrope: creating value through interorganizational relationships", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 367-403, doi: 10.1177/014920630002600302.

Bendickson, J. (2021), "Building entrepreneurship research for impact: scope, phenomenon, and translation", *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 59 No. 4, pp. 535-543, doi: 10.1080/00472778.2021.1905822.

Berger, I.E., Cunningham, P.H., Drumwright, M.E., Berger, I.E. and Cunningham, P.H. (2004), "Social alliances: company/nonprofit collaboration", *California Management Review*, Vol. 47 No. 1, pp. 58-90.

Biskjaer, M.M., Kamari, A., Jensen, S.R. and Kirkegaard, P.H. (2019), "Exploring blind spots in collaborative value creation in building design: a creativity perspective", *CoDesign*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 374-391, doi: 10.1080/15710882.2019.1654521.

Bititci, U.S., Martinez, V., Albores, P. and Parung, J. (2004), "Creating and managing value in collaborative networks", *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 251-268, doi: 10.1108/09600030410533574.

Boddy, C.R. (2016), "Sample size for qualitative research", *Qualitative Market Research*, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 426-432, doi: 10.1108/QMR-06-2016-0053.

Brondoni, S.M. (2003), "Network culture, performance and corporate responsibility", *Symphonya. Emerging Issues in Management*, Vol. 1, pp. 8-24, doi: 10.4468/2003.1.02brondoni.

Coase, H.R. (1937), "The nature of the firm", *Economica*, Vol. 4 No. 16, pp. 386-405.

Cojoianu, T., Haney, A. and Meiring, A. (2020), "Strategic alliances as treatment for COVID-19 and beyond", *SSRN Electronic Journal*, Vol. 20, doi: 10.2139/ssrn.3616444.

Commons, J.R. (1934), *Institutional Economics*, University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Corsaro, D. (2019), "Capturing the broader picture of value co-creation management", *European Management Journal*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 99-116, doi: 10.1016/j.emj.2018.07.007.

Das, T.K. and Teng, B.S. (2001), "Trust, control, and risks in strategic alliances: an integrative framework", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 251-283, doi: 10.1177/0170840601222004.

Das, T.K. and Teng, B.-S. (2002), "Alliance constellations: a social exchange perspective", *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 445-456.

Deb, M. and Amawate, V. (2019), "Extending the knowledge on cause-related marketing (CrM) campaign with focus on skepticism", *VINE Journal of Information and Knowledge Management Systems*, Vol. 50 No. 2, pp. 329-348, doi: 10.1108/VJIKMS-05-2019-0061.

DiMaggio, P.J. and Powell, W.W. (1983), "The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48 No. 2, pp. 147-160.

Douglas, E. and Prentice, C. (2019), "Innovation and profit motivations for social entrepreneurship: a fuzzy-set analysis", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 99, November 2018, pp. 69-79, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.02.031.

Dworkin, S.L. (2012), "Sample size policy for qualitative studies using in-depth interviews", *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 1319-1320, doi: 10.1007/s10508-012-0016-6.

Ebers, M. (1997), "Explaining inter-organizational network formation", *The Formation of Inter-organizational Networks*, Vol. 1, pp. 3-40.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989), "Building theories from case study research", *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 532-550.

Faminow, M.D., Carter, S.E. and Lundy, M. (2009), "Social entrepreneurship and learning: the case of the Central America learning alliance", *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 433-450, doi: 10.1142/S108494670900134X.

Fereday, J. and Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006), "Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 80-92, doi: 10.1177/160940690600500107.

Griffiths, M.D., Gundry, L.K. and Kickul, J.R. (2013), "The socio-political, economic, and cultural determinants of social entrepreneurship activity: an empirical examination", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 341-357, doi: 10.1108/14626001311326761.

Harvey, C., Maclean, M., Gordon, J. and Shaw, E. (2011), "Andrew Carnegie and the foundations of contemporary entrepreneurial philanthropy", *Business History*, Vol. 53 No. 3, pp. 425-450, doi: 10.1080/00076791.2011.565516.

Hasse, R. and Kruecken, G. (2005), *Neo-Institutionalismus*, Rev. ed., Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld.

Hlupic, V. and Qureshi, S. (2003), "A research model for collaborative value creation from intellectual capital", *Proceedings of the International Conference on Information Technology Interfaces, ITI*, pp. 431-437, doi: 10.1109/ITI.2003.1225381.

Hockerts, K. (2006), "Entrepreneurial opportunity in social purpose business ventures", *Social Entrepreneurship*, Palgrave Macmillan, a Division of Macmillan Publishers, pp. 142-154.

Holm, D.B., Eriksson, K. and Johanson, J. (1999), "Creating value through mutual commitment to business network relationships", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 20 No. 5, pp. 467-486, doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199905)20:53.0.CO;2-J.

Hossain, S. (2019), "An exploratory study on the contextual factors influencing social entrepreneurial opportunity an emerging economy's perspective", available at: http://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/fapi/datastream/unsworks:56456/SOURCE02?view=true.

Huertas-García, R., Lengler, J. and Consolación-Segura, C. (2017), "Co-branding strategy in cause-related advertising: the fit between brand and cause", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 135-150, doi: 10.1108/JPBM-07-2015-0939.

Jepperson, R. (2002), "The development and application of sociological neo-institutionalism", in Berger, J. and Zelditch, M. Jr (Eds), *New Directions in Contemporary Sociological Theory*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, pp. 229-266.

Kraus, S., Clauss, T., Breier, M., Gast, J., Zardini, A. and Tiberius, V. (2020), "The economics of COVID-19: initial empirical evidence on how family firms in five European countries cope with the corona crisis", *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research*. doi: 10.1108/IJEBR-04-2020-0214.

Kumar, R. (2011), *Research Methodology: A Step-by-Step Guide for Beginners*, 3rd ed., SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, California.

Lafferty, B.A. (2009), "Selecting the right cause partners for the right reasons: the role of importance and fit in cause–brand alliances", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 359-382, doi: 10.1002/mar.

Lafferty, B.A. and Edmondson, D.R. (2014), "A note on the role of cause type in cause-related marketing", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 67 No. 7, pp. 1455-1460, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.07.021.

Lafferty, B.A. and Goldsmith, R.E. (2005), "Cause-brand alliances: does the cause help the brand or does the brand help the cause?", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 58 No. 4, pp. 423-429, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2003.07.001.

Lafferty, B.A., Goldsmith, R.E. and Hult, G.T.M. (2004), "The impact of the alliance on the partners: a look at cause-brand alliances", *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 7, pp. 509-531, doi: 10.1002/mar.20017.

Lambert, D.M. and Cooper, M.C. (2000), "Issues in supply chain management", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 65-83.

Lane, C. and Bachmann, R. (1996), "The social constitution of trust: supplier relations in Britain and Germany", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 17, pp. 365-393.

Lazzerini, M. and Putoto, G. (2020), "COVID-19 in Italy: momentous decisions and many uncertainties", *The Lancet Global Health*, Vol. 8 No. 5, pp. e641-e642, doi: 10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30110-8.

Liguori, E.W. and Pittz, T.G. (2020), "Strategies for small business: surviving and thriving in the era of COVID-19", *Journal of the International Council for Small Business*, Vol. 1 No. 2, pp. 106-110, doi: 10.1080/26437015.2020.1779538.

Liu, G., Ko, W.W. and Chapleo, C. (2018), "How and when socially entrepreneurial nonprofit organizations benefit from adopting social alliance management routines to manage social alliances?", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 151 No. 2, pp. 497-516, doi: 10.1007/s10551-016-3231-6.

Mair, J. and Noboa, E. (2006), "Social entrepreneurship: how intentions to create a social venture are formed", in Mair, J., Robinson, J. and Hockerts, K. (Eds), *Social Entrepreneurship*, Palgrave Macmillan, doi: 10.1057/9780230625655.

Menon, S. and Kahn, B.E. (2001), "Corporate sponsorships of philanthropic activities: do they help the sponsor?", *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 76-79, doi: 10.1080/15245004.2001.9961169.

Milgrom, P. and Roberts, J. (1992), *Economics, Organization and Management*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Nicola, M., Alsafi, Z., Sohrabi, C., Kerwan, A., Al-Jabir, A., Iosifidis, C., Agha, M. and Agha, R. (2020), "The socio-economic implications of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19): a review", *International Journal of Surgery*, Vol. 78, April, pp. 185-193, doi: 10.1016/j.ijsu.2020.04.018.

Parente, R., ElTarabishy, A., Vesci, M. and Botti, A. (2018), "The epistemology of humane entrepreneurship: theory and proposal for future research agenda", *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 56, pp. 30-52, doi: 10.1111/jsbm.12432.

Parker, B. and Selsky, J.W. (2004), "Interface dynamics in cause-based partnerships: an exploration of emergent culture", *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 458-488, doi: 10.1177/0899764004266016.

Pfeffer, J. and Salancik, G.R. (2003), *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*, Stanford University Press, California.

Powell, W.W. and DiMaggio, P.J. (Eds) (1991), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Ranney, M.L., Griffeth, V. and Jha, A.K. (2020), "Critical supply shortages — the need for ventilators and personal protective equipment during the Covid-19 pandemic", *New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 1-2, doi: 10.1056/NEJMp2009027.

Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M.A., Sameen Sabir, S. and Waseem, A. (2019), "Case study method : a step-by-step guide for business researchers", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 18, pp. 1-13, doi: 10.1177/1609406919862424.

Ratten, V. (2020), "Coronavirus (Covid-19) and entrepreneurship: cultural, lifestyle and societal changes", *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 747-761, doi: 10.1108/JEEE-06-2020-0163.

Ricciardi, F. (2014), *Innovation Processes in Business Networks: Managing Inter-Organizational Relationships for Innovational Excellence*, Springer, Wiesbaden.

Rossignoli, C. and Ricciardi, F. (2015a), "Inter-organizational relationships: towards a dynamic model for understanding business network performance", *European Planning Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 4, doi: 10.1080/09654319908720526.

Rossignoli, C. and Ricciardi, F. (2015b), *Inter-Organisational Relationships*, Springer, Heidelberg.

Rossignoli, C., Ricciardi, F. and Bonomi, S. (2018), "Organizing for commons-enabling decision-making under conflicting institutional logics in social entrepreneurship", *Group Decision and Negotiation*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 417-443, doi: 10.1007/s10726-018-9564-z.

Rowley, J. (2000), "Using case studies in research", *Management Research News*, Vol. 25, pp. 16-27.

Samu, S. and Wymer, W.W. Jr (2001), "Nonprofit-business alliance model: formation and outcomes", *Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing*, Vol. 5142, pp. 45-61, doi: 10.1300/J054v09n01.

Sarkar, M.B., Echambadi, R.A.J. and Harrison, J.S. (2001), "Alliance entrepreneurship and firm market performance", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 22 Nos 6-7, pp. 701-711, doi: 10.1002/smj.179.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009), *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5th ed., Pearson Education.

Scott, W.R. (2001), *Institutions and Organizations*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Shaw, E. and Carter, S. (2007), "Social entrepreneurship: theoretical antecedents and empirical analysis of entrepreneurial processes and outcomes", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 418-434, doi: 10.1108/14626000710773529.

Spinelli, A. and Pellino, G. (2020), "COVID-19 pandemic: perspectives on an unfolding crisis", *British Journal of Surgery*, Vol. 107 No. 7, pp. 785-787, doi: 10.1002/bjs.11627.

Taylor, D.W. and Thorpe, R. (2004), "Entrepreneurial learning: a process of co-participation", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, Vol. 11 No. 2, pp. 203-211, doi: 10.1108/14626000410537146.

Teng, B.-S. (2003), "Collaborative advantage of strategic alliances: value creation in the value net", *Journal of General Management*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 1-22, doi: 10.1177/030630700302900201.

Trotter, R.T. (2012), "Qualitative research sample design and sample size: resolving and unresolved issues and inferential imperatives", *Preventive Medicine*, Vol. 55 No. 5, pp. 398-400, doi: 10.1016/j.ypmed.2012.07.003.

Tsao, W. and Chen, Y. (2011), "A study of the impact and application of cause-corporate brand alliance on Taiwans tourist amusement industry", *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 316-331, doi: 10.5897/AJBM10.089.

Urban, B. (2020), "Entrepreneurial alertness, self-efficacy and social entrepreneurship intentions", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 489-507, doi: 10.1108/JSBED-08-2019-0285.

Vargo, S.L. and Lusch, R.F. (2004), "Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 1-17, doi: 10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036.

Wagner, S.M., Eggert, A. and Lindemann, E. (2010), "Creating and appropriating value in collaborative relationships", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 63 No. 8, pp. 840-848, doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2010.01.004.

Weerawardena, J. and Sullivan Mort, G. (2006), "Investigating social entrepreneurship: a multidimensional model", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 21-35, doi: 10.1016/j.jwb.2005.09.001.

WHO (2020a), *COVID 19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)*, available at: https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/covid-19-public-health-emergency-of-international-concern-(pheic)-global-research-and-innovation-forum.

WHO (2020b), *Novel Coronavirus*, World Health Organization (WHO) (Issue SITUATION REPORT-3), available at: https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/id.

WHO (2020c), *Novel Coronavirus*, World Health Organization (WHO) (Issue SITUATION REPORT-5), available at: https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/qa-for-public.

WHO (2020d), *Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)*, Vol. 2, World Health Organization (Issue SITUATION REPORT-2), available at: https://www.who.int/indonesia/news/novel-coronavirus/qa-for-public.

Williamson, O.E. (1975), *Markets and Hierarchies: Analysis and Antitrust Implications*, Free Press, New York.

Williamson, O.E. (1979), "Transaction costs economics: the governance of contractual relations", *Journal of Law Economics*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 233-261.

Williamson, O.E. (1981), "The economics of organization: the transaction cost approach", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 87 No. 3, pp. 548-575.

Williamson, O.E. (1985), *The Economic Institutions of Capitalism: Firms, Markets, Relational Contracting*, Free Press, New York.

Wymer, W.W. Jr and Samu, S. (2003), "Dimensions of business and nonprofit", *Journal of Nonprofit and Public Sector Marketing*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 59-76, doi: 10.1300/J054v11n01.

Yen, G.F. and Yang, H.T. (2018), "Does consumer empathy influence consumer responses to strategic corporate social responsibility? The dual mediation of moral identity", *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, Vol. 10 No. 6, doi: 10.3390/su10061812.

Yin, R.K. (2013), "Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations", *Evaluation*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 321-332, doi: 10.1177/1356389013497081.

Yin, R.K. (2018), *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed., SAGE Publications.

Yoo, D., Kim, J.A. and Doh, S.J. (2018), "The dual processing of donation size in cause-related marketing (CRM): the moderating roles of construal level and emoticons", *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, Vol. 10 No. 11, doi: 10.3390/su10114219.

About the authors

Lamin B. Ceesay is a PhD researcher and candidate at University of Verona. His research interest revolves around SMEs relationships, entrepreneurship and innovation practices. Lamin graduated with an MSc in Marketing and International Management from University of Naples Parthenope with Cum-laude. He is also graduate of MA in Integrated Marketing Communication from Vilnius University with distinction. Previously Lamin worked for a Multinational Commercial Bank in The Gambia as a senior officer responsible for the Bank's branding and communications. Lamin has also published a few research papers in the *Sage's Jindal Journal of Business Research*, and *European Journal of Business and Management Research*. He aspires to take up an academic career as a researcher and instructor at the Higher Education of Learning and Research in Africa and other parts of the World.

Cecilia Rossignoli is a Full Professor of Organization Science at the University of Verona (Italy), Department of Business Administration. Previously she served as Assistant Professor at the Catholic University of Milan. She was a co-founder and scientific director of Cetif, a research center for information and financial technology at the Catholic University of Milan from 1990 to 2001. She is a member of the faculty of the Graduate School of Accounting and Management University of Udine and University of Verona. Her research and teaching interests cover the area of Organization Studies and Information Systems. Cecilia Rossignoli has published, among others, on *Journal of Innovation and Knowledge, Review of Managerial Science*, *Journal of Business Research, European Management Journal, Industrial Marketing Management Electronic Markets, Journal of Intellectual Capital,*. She I, s a Member of AIS (Association for Information Systems) and member and co-founder of ItAIS (Italian Chapter of AIS). She served as President of itAIS from 2015 to 2019.

Raj V. Mahto is a Full Professor of entrepreneurship and Creative Enterprise Endowed Professor in the Anderson School of Management at the University of New Mexico. His research has been published in top academic journals such as *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Small Business Management, and Family Business Review*, etc. Raj serves on editorial review boards of *Family Business Review* and *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*. He is also an associate editor of the *Journal of Small Business Strategy, Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *Journal of Small Business Management*. Raj V. Mahto is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: rmahto@unm.edu