

Places of the Collective in Dialogical Value Creation from the Perspective of Service-Dominant Logic

KITAGAWA Kota*

This paper develops the "dialogue" topic in service-dominant logic of marketing (SDL). While we stand on the fundamental premise (FP) 8 that "a service-centered view is customer oriented and relational," we assume "relational" contains the collective, which cannot be reduced to individuals' interactions. Consequently, the problem of Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b) that at the start and end of the dialogical process there is no room for the collective is evident. To solve this problem, we use theoretical and empirical methods. Theoretically, we incorporate "agencement," elaborated under the actor-network theory, into the topic of dialogue in SDL. Empirically, we identify the relationship between the collective and individual based on the case study of a dialogical product planning project. We confirm the decisive role of the collective, agencement, in the relationship building and the evaluation of co-created value in the dialogical process. While the scope is limited to the ideal interaction—dialogical value co-creation—the results throw doubt on FPs 10 and 11 of SDL.

Keywords: Service-dominant logic, Dialogue, Fundamental premises, Agencement, Agency

*Faculty of Economics, Kansai University

I. Introduction

One of the fundamental premises (FPs) of service-dominant logic (SDL), "a service-centered view is customer oriented and relational" (FP 8, Vargo and Lusch 2004, p. 11; 2010, p. 173), has recently become the focus of studies on inter-subjective interaction (Edvardsson et al. 2010; Löbler 2011; Yamauchi 2018). Although this paper follows FP 8 in the same manner as the above studies to focus on interactions, we focus on the "ideal" interaction—dialogue—to throw doubt on axiom 4 (FP 10) of SDL "value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary" and the newest axiom by Vargo and Lusch (2016) that "value cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements" (axiom 5/FP 11).

Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b) are some of the few studies that develop the topic of dialogue within SDL. In SDL, knowledge, an operant resource, is "the fundamental source of competitive advantage" (Vargo and Lusch 2004, p. 4, FP 4). Tacit knowledge, which is practicable knowledge shared by the participants to a service collaboration, is their most important source, which "dialogue" renews. Thus, Ballantyne and Varey (2006a, p. 224) see "dialogical interaction as an ideal form of collaboration within the S-D logic because it supports the potential for co-creation of value and sustainable competitive advantage." While SDL gives importance to the "relation" and "collaboration" of actors, considered as the ideal collaboration within SDL dialogue, surprisingly, in academic conversations on SDL, there is no theoretical discussion of dialogue after Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b).

Of course, Ballantyne and Varey's studies pose some problems. As Löbler (2011) said, the FP 8, "a service-centered view is customer oriented and relational," evokes social constructionism. The pioneer of the social constructionism, K. J. Gergen, criticizes "individualism." In individualistic works, relationships are seen as "the artifactual outcomes of individuals making their own private decisions" (Gergen, 1997, p. 215). These criticisms may surprisingly be applied to Ballantyne and Varey's works. The "residuum" of

individualism is seen in the very beginning and end of dialogue. First, in the beginning of dialogue, the institutional foundation of collaboration, "trust," which is necessary to realize dialogue, is merely seen as a result of the strategic interactions of individuals. In the creation process of institutions drawn by Ballantyne and Varey, there may be no room for "the collective," which is not to be reduced to the strategic interactions of individuals in, for example, a prisoners' dilemma repeated game. Second, in the end (consequence) of dialogue, value co-creation is seen by Ballantyne and Varey as the interaction of individuals. Thus, there is no room for the collective. I will assume the main determinant of the individualistic framework as an assumption of SDL: "agency" is used for constructing institutions and evaluating value and is the attribute of the individual (Lusch and Vargo 2014, p. 113; Vargo and Lusch 2016).

We see the above problems as a gap in the theory of dialogue within SDL. To solve them, we adopt Ballantyne and Varey's "relational" perspective and yet abandon the residuum of individualism. Specifically, we use three resources of theoretical and empirical studies: a concept developed by "actor-network" theorists, the findings of the above-cited researchers who develop intersubjectivity in SDL, and an observed case of a product planning project that creates a novel plan by dialogue between participants.

This paper is structured as follows. The next section identifies the two individualistic problems of Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b). The third section introduces the concept of agencement, developed by actor-network theory (ANT) to solve the above first problem, and then, the collective standpoint in value co-creation to provide clues on the second problem of Ballantyne and Varey. In the fourth section, we first present a case to confirm the relevance of agencement in explaining dialogical value co-creation from the perspective of the collective. Then, we determine the role of the collective in value evaluations to solve the second problem of Ballantyne and Varey. In fifth section, based on the presented theories and the case and using FP 8 in dialogical value co-creation, we develop axioms 4 (FP 10) and 5 (FP 11) within the range of dialogue.

II. Relational and individualistic views in the dialogue theory of SDL

1. Premise of Ballantyne and Varey

Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b) are some of the few researchers to develop the topic of communicative interaction, which would be the core topic of the value co-creation process in SDL. According to them (2006a, p. 225), dialogue is distinguished from monologue (one-way communication) and "communicative" interaction (listening and inform to each other). Specifically, dialogue is "an interactive process of learning together" (*ibid.*). Therefore, to realize dialogue, it is not enough that members merely listen and inform, but they also need to "participate" (Bohm, 2014) in a process that has the following three elements. First, every participant improves the understanding of a perspective, a framework, or the assumptions of other participants. Second, through collective inquiry, participants verbalize the "taken-for-granted and unspoken assumptions" of each participant and disrupt them (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006a, p. 230). Finally, participants constitute new agreements, perspectives, assumptions, or frameworks shared by all participants. This process is the collective reframing of assumptions, questions, and hypotheses, that is, the frameworks of participants. Therefore, each participant's framework gets transformed through this process. As a result of dialogue, they develop not only collective and individual frameworks but also a collective competency to use for co-creating more value. As this process is relational, Ballantyne and Varey (2006a, p. 225; 2006b, p. 339) stress their premise that "dialogue cannot be reduced to one person's activity alone or reduced to one person's perspective alone; it is inherently relational." In this paper, we use this premise through the process of dialogical value co-creation. However, here, "relational" is not the mere "interactive" relationship between "individuals" but a relation containing a "collective" that cannot be reduced to the strategic interactions of individuals.

2. The first problem of Ballantyne and Varey

The above Ballantyne and Varey's premise poses two problems. First, for the very beginning of dialogue,

Ballantyne and Varey (2006b) stress that "ethical underpinnings for dialogue are built on trust." Mutual trust is thus the necessary condition of dialogue. In other words, trust relationships, or "being trustworthy," that are "beneficial to all parties provide *structural* support that is useful for sustaining further value-creating activities" (2006b, pp. 337-338, italics added). The trust relationship is thus an "institutional" foundation for realizing dialogue. Here, "institution" is defined as the "routinized, coordinating mechanism" of actors' interactions (Vargo and Lusch 2016, pp. 5, 7). Then, who is the "subject," or "agency," constructing the institution, that is, the "object"? Because Ballantyne and Varey maintain the trust relationship is derived from the experience of "interaction between two or more parties" (*ibid.*, p. 337), the agency is represented by individuals. Indeed, Vargo and Lusch (2016, pp. 7) understand that institution has been "endogenously" generated" by individuals' interactions. Now, we can assume that this trust relationship as "institution" can be reduced to the strategic actions of individuals. In fact, Ballantyne and Varey (2006a) discuss the construction process of trust relationships from the viewpoint of repeated interactions of individuals:

"Give or take some attempts at persuasion at the outset, and then some experience in mutual informing and listening, extraordinary exchanges [dialogue] can occur when the trust level is adequate to the anticipated risk involved." (Ballantyne and Varey 2006a, p. 230)

Thus, we understand that the relationship as institution has no uniqueness in the "collective," as something cannot be reduced to individuals' strategic interactions. Additionally, if we interpret *with malice* this constructing process of the institution, that individuals precede the institution and each individual has his/her own "utility function," that is, a device for evaluation, as they encounter each other. This "individualism" is applied by not only Ballantyne and Varey but also the founders of SDL, Vargo and Lusch. Through repeated interactions, individuals gradually understand "trust" is better. Then trust becomes the "norm" of their interactions, that is, an institution (see Vargo and Lusch 2016, p. 6). Then, within a supportive

institution, individuals can realize dialogue. Through dialogue, they co-create higher quality of value than in the situation where a trust relationship as institution does not exist.

3. The second problem of Ballantyne and Varey

We talk about the end of dialogue and the evaluation of co-created value. The original SDL uses axiom 4/FP 10: "value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary" (Vargo and Lusch 2004; 2016). The sole evaluator of value is the beneficiary. However, Ballantyne and Varey (2006b, p. 345) stress there are "at least two evaluators in dialogical process" to develop FP 10 in dialogical value co-creation:

"The firm can only make value propositions (offerings), since it is the customer who determines value and co-produces it [. . .] However, there can be no satisfactory ongoing relationship development unless suppliers also determine their own sense of value, which means that, realistically, value propositions are *reciprocal* promises of value, operating *to and from* suppliers and clients seeking and equitable exchange. Thus value propositions are always two-way, quid pro quo [. . .]." (Ballantyne and Varey 2006b, p. 345)

We fully agree that value evaluation is also relational. However, there is a vagueness in value evaluation: "*between*" producer and customer (beneficiary) (Ballantine and Varey 2006a, p. 227), does the collective have its own place? In their works, again, the value co-creation would also be reduced to the strategic interactions of individuals. This individualism is the second problem of Ballantyne and Varey and stems from that SDL puts "agency" of value evaluation on, again, individuals (Lusch and Vargo 2014, p. 113).

Regarding the evaluation of co-created value, it is also important how do the following two topics relate to the evaluation and mutual transformation of individuals. As the mutual transformation of participants is a unique phenomenon of dialogue, we should clarify this relationship.

III. Ideas to develop dialogue theory under SDL

The purpose of this paper is to use the perspective of the unique collective for the process of dialogical value co-creation. To do this, we consider other theories apart from SDL. In the previous section, I pointed out two problems of the "relational" but "individualistic" theory of Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b). Both problems can be summed up as one point: there is no room for the collective in the issue of dialogue under SDL. A main cause is the assumption that SDL places agency in each individual. A clue to reconsider this assumption is provided by both Ballantyne and Varey (2006a) and Vargo and Lusch (2016).

First, Ballantyne and Varey (2006a) refer to N. Luhmann regarding who does communication? It is commonly known that he posited that the "social system" itself can only provide communications. In Luhmann's theory, a social system is assumed as the sole agency of communication and humans are assumed as the psychic system, which is in turn seen as an external environment to the social system. If we convert Ballantyne and Varey's (2006a, p. 228) term "communication system" to Luhmann's meaning of system, only the "communication system" itself has agency of communication. However, this thesis is too radical for reinterpreting the topic of dialogue of SDL because the role of the "beneficiary," who is a human and not the communication system, is crucially important for evaluating the consequences (product/service) of dialogical marketing communication. Not only in SDL, but also following common sense in real business environments, while an evaluation itself may be involved in dialogical communication, the final "evaluator" is the beneficiary. Therefore, within Luhmann's theory, we find a difficulty in integrating a social system as the sole agency of communication and the human as the evaluator. However, Luhmann's novel idea, that is, placing the agency not in the individual but the "system," is a clue to solving the individualistic residuum of Ballantyne and Varey.

We know that "system" is considered in SDL as a "service-ecosystem" which is defined as "*a relatively*

self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource-integrating actors that are connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange" (Lusch and Vargo 2014, p. 161). However, the problem of "service-ecosystem" is that it does not have agency but it is (i) a collective framework that structuralizes both cognition and interactions of individuals and also (ii) a "resource network" that is used by individuals in service interactions. How do we introduce agency to the concept of "system"? The next clue comes from Vargo and Lusch (2016), who try to develop not an A2A interaction dimension but the institutional or systemic dimension of SDL.

Vargo and Lusch (2016) consider the "assemblage" (or our more accurate term "agencement") of ANT as a concept similar to their concept of service-ecosystem. However, they keep using the concept "service-ecosystem" not "assemblage" and then choose Giddens' (1984) "structuration theory" over ANT, which gives strong agency to an individual, as the foundational theory of the service-ecosystem. The reason they do not chose ANT is that it is a "flat" theory that does not pose the analytical distinction between "micro," "mezzo," and "macro," thus not being able to provide us with "oscillating foci" (Chandler and Vargo 2011) of analytical levels to relativize the "meanings" (e.g., values) in individuals' interactions to better understand them.

While we understand the analytical significance of "oscillating foci" cannot be provided by ANT, to introduce agency to the collective, we reverse Vargo and Lusch's (2016) estimation by replacing service-ecosystem with a major concept of ANT, "agencement" (Callon 2013), to bring agency not to the individual but to the collective.¹⁾ Agencement means a "combination of heterogeneous elements that have been carefully adjusted [to] one another" (Callon, 2007b, p. 319, see also Callon 2013). The combination of heterogeneous elements means non-separable agency, comprising humans and things (e.g., materials, technologies, ideas, documents, rules, and norms). The word "carefully adjusted" implies a spatial array of humans and things.

ANT researchers stress that "*agencement*" comes

from the French term "*agence*" (in English, "agency") (MacKenzie 2009). Therefore, by using the word agencement, we can imply that agency resides in the "collective" of human *and* things. The socio-technical agencement is rephrased by "distributed agency."

"Human agency is a distributed agency that goes beyond the somatic resources of the individual; it is the variable outcome of a complex process of engineering. This agency can be described more precisely as a socio-technical *agencement* consisting of material elements, texts and discourses, competencies and embodied skills, routines and so on. Human STAs [socio-technical agencements] are variable, evolving and, above all, increasingly dependent on human activity itself." (Callon 2007a, p. 28)

While "human agency" undoubtedly exists, it is the human agency that has *already* been equipped as a well framed network of human and things. Thus, not the individual, but the collective, that is, the "human socio-technological agencement" has already been identified.

The institution in SDL or the "rule" means something that is coordinating individuals' interactions "(e.g. norm, meaning, symbol, law, practice)" (Vargo and Lusch 2016, p. 18) and is framing and networking other components (humans and things) of agencement.²⁾ The agencement changes the components (containing institutions), their configuration, includes and excludes components, and creates novel components through its activities. Thus, the first problem of Ballantyne and Varey that "there is no room for the collective in creating institution" may be solved if we replace the service-ecosystem with agencement, because the latter, as distributed agency, creates and changes the institutions that are its components.

In the following, to develop the issue of dialogical value co-creation, I replace service-ecosystem with agencement. However, two additional questions emerge. First, what special type of agencement can realize dialogue? Of course, it is not true that any agencement realizes "dialogue." ANT is of course not related to the topic of dialogue, and cannot answer this first question. Second, how does agencement, as

collective agency, reconcile the fact that persons, who evaluate the result of dialogue, exist? Again, ANT is not related to the topic of dialogue and cannot answer this second question. However, we can get a clue from Yamauchi's (2018) implications of Sushi restaurants in Japan:

"[...] resources 'become' resources largely as a function of the contexts in which they are embedded" (Chandler & Vargo, 2011, p. 39), and idea that can be developed more thoroughly through the concept of intersubjectivity. Here we can add that this becoming of an objective resource involves the becoming of a subjective one. When an actor makes one resource relevant, the actor presents her own self and thereby constructs and transforms her identity. [...] Through this intersubjective presentation and negotiation by means of her use of resources, she *becomes* a certain customer." (Yamauchi 2018, p. 831)

Applying such a story to the dialogue, we might think the framework (containing the criterion or device of evaluation) itself has been constructed through collective reframing—dialogue.³⁾ If we can see that this individual framework emerges from such collective transformation, we might solve Ballantyne and Varey's second problem that "there is no room for the collective in the evaluation in dialogical interaction." However, we need additional context. Thus, after this theoretical consideration, we consider a case in the next section.

IV. Case study: An illustration of a brain trust of product planning

1. Observation object: Consulting team for product planning

We observe the User Centered Innovation Laboratory (UCI Lab), which co-creates a client firm's product plan. UCI Lab designs an inquiry process for product planning that involves the co-investigation (with the client) of potential users, workshops with the client, co-creation of ideas and prototypes, and co-creation of the final project proposal, which is customized to fit the decision-making process of the client firm.⁴⁾

UCI Lab is a corporate venture of a midsize

advertising company, Yarakasukan Co., Ltd, which was launched on September 20, 2012 (start of the first fiscal year—FY 1). UCI Lab has 3-5 members. The agencement involving the team comprises (1) members; (2) collaborative network (investigating firms, analysts, illustrators, makers of motion pictures, and academic professors of "design thinking," ethnography, ethnomethodology, and anthropology); (3) client firm; (4) materials, such as documents for introducing UCI Lab to potential clients, equipment for workshop (vellum paper, sticky notes, candy-colored pens, cardboard etc.); (5) space (a small work space separated from an unpartitioned large office of Yarakasukan Co., Ltd.).

2. A case of dialogue between UCI Lab and its customer firm

(1) Individual identity may be created in collective transformation

Here, we investigate the place of collective in the dialogue between the leader "Mr. B" of UCI Lab and its client firm G (Mr. J, the manager of division H, and Mrs. K, L, and M of the product planning division of the client). We observed two business meetings between them on September 28 and December 26, 2016 (in FY 4), but did not communicate with the participants during the meetings.

The product planning division H of big manufacturing firm G created small device "z," which contains novel technology made by the R&D division of the firm. Division H wanted to produce device z, which can be built in other companies' furniture and fixtures. They request UCI Lab to lead the planning process. In the first contact between division H and UCI Lab, it was clarified that H had not yet decided on the target industry sectors. During the first contact, they shared the assumption that, in a certain sector "R," demand for the device already exists. Based on this assumption, they propose a hypothesis: if existing furniture and fixtures in sector R are equipped with the device, the need is satisfied.

UCI Lab interviewed persons who work in sector R. However, in these interviews, the expected demand did not surface. UCI Lab shared the consequences of this first interview with division H. Then, Mrs. J, K, L, and M agreed to expand their target sectors. UCI

Lab members were also interviewed on the demand of workers for device z. However, no sector showed a clear demand for device z. UCI Lab shared the result of this second interview in the meeting of September, 26 2016, which we observed. During the meeting, information sharing ended, after which the conversation between Lab's leader B and division H employees (Mrs. J, K, L, and M) continued for a further 30 minutes. At this point, Mr. K said:

K: I feel it is an unprofitable device, hmm ... I cannot clearly see a demand sector.

Subsequently, they started to analyze the information collected in the second interview and found a number of tasks that have different demand levels: the device could accomplish the task requiring *a certain demand level* more safely and easily than similar existing devices of other competitors. Mr. K said:

K: At any rate, I had the image that "yyy" [the function of the previous very successful product y of the firm F] is y and "zzz" [the function of the device z] is z. So the promised technology is z.⁵⁾ [After some pauses, it is] not really. We should clarify what [z] can do and [what z] cannot [do].

The image Mr. K refers to is his mind's *previous* framework. This is his first time to verbalize the framework. As such, we cannot confirm that he had recognized this framework before mentioning it. However, after they (including Mr. K) recognized that device z could fulfill a task requiring *the certain demand level*, Mr. K *retrospectively* verbalized his *previous* framework. This may mean that after collective discovery, that is, after the collective transformation of their collective framework, Mr. K recognized his previous framework *by comparing it to* the transformed framework. This implies that, dialogically, collective transformation happens first (thus, each person's framework is transformed) and, then, the individual's previous ineffective framework surfaces to her/his conscious mind. In other words, the emergence of "collective transformation" and creation of "transformed self" and "previous self" happen simultaneously.

(2) Collective story for evaluating the co-created value

Based on the information from the interviews and dialogue between leader B and Mrs. J, K, L, and M, UCI Lab created a new hypothesis: the project team had thought that the device should be built in other companies' furniture and fixtures; however, if the team takes advantage of the "small" device z and the "niches" in which it can accomplish the limited tasks requiring the certain demand level in limited sectors, the "single body" small application (in which the device is built) made by the client firm G, which can be set "in multiple places" in one job place, would fulfill the hidden needs (not yet be surfaced in the words of workers, that is, the interviewees) of the workers in the analyzed sectors.

UCI Lab made some application plans visualized graphically and explained them in writing. The Lab (leader B and Ms. D) showed the plans to division H in the business meeting of December 26, 2016. However, Mrs. J, K, L, and M cannot form mental pictures of success:

J: How should [we] deploy them [the plans]? Where should we sell them?

L: Difficult [to imagine the commercialization], hmm...

M: Right. I don't get the picture [of success].

The reason, they cannot imagine how to commercialize the plans is their previous success. Firm G previously commercialized device "y," which was not built in a dedicated application but in existing furniture and fixtures. It became a "big hit" device. This successful experience limits their future options for commercializing device "z." Mrs. J, K, L, and M complained about the plans of UCI Lab during the one-and-a-half-hour meeting. Then, J and B communicated rapidly and, finally, a new hypothesis emerged from their communication: in the previous interviews and analysis, the project team could picture the "scenarios" where a single body application would become useful for the limited tasks in the limited sectors, which we convert to a scenario where certain tie-up products in which the device is built become useful. Here, the scenarios can be used for searching tie-up companies with firm G (device z) and

communication scenarios with latent users to activate (actualize) their hidden, unconscious, or non-verbalized needs. The next steps are to find tie-up companies based on the documents and consult with other companies to find the best products in which the device can be built. Thus, in long-term communication, they converted "single body" plans to "built-in" ones. The following conversations are from the final minute of the meeting:

J: We finally define the next step in a round-about way. It might better that I should first request you the condition that the plan is "built-in."

B: Maybe. However, if you preliminarily condition it, we may go to a dead end.

K: Haahhhaa!

J: Indeed, haha.

B: We can picture the concrete scenarios of using it when we consider single body applications. Well, it is a necessary roundabout.

L: Indeed, we say it retrospectively from a higher position after we identified the next step.

H: How should I express the process and consequence of this communication ... good discussion, isn't it? [the end of the meeting]

Through dialogue, they finally understand the co-created "value" of interviews and collective analysis. The value is cognized as follows. First is the "gap" moved from "single body" to "build-in" plan based on concrete scenarios. Second is the long "journey" from the first to the last hypothesis. Retrospectively, even the roundabout in the journey contributes to their feeling of contentment towards the collective investigation (or service of UCI Lab as the facilitator of the investigation). It is important that the following three items were produced by the dialogue. First, the "journey" by which their collective framework was transformed. Second, the "gap" that resulted from the journey. Finally, a retrospective collective viewpoint is used for evaluating the value co-creation process. In other words, the journey that enables them to evaluate the value co-creation process was created by the collective or the dialogue itself, not by a specific individual.

3. Development of UCI Lab towards dialogical agencement

In the above subsections, we stressed that the collective precedes individuals or the collective and the individual identities simultaneously emerge by dialogue. Here, we identify how this dialogical agencement has emerged and developed. If we explain the process by the strategic interactions between individuals, we do not necessarily use the concept of agencement but the result of individuals' interactions and those that do not have agency, as follows. However, as we will see, first, the "material" and advertising business "situation" strongly contributed to the emergence of agencement (UCI Lab). This means that the emergence of agencement cannot be reduced to individual interaction. Second, agencement begun to work autonomously, apart from each individual intention, which leads to agency. Finally, it drove individuals' to contributions to realize dialogue, that is, a certain agencement increases dialogue and deeply realizes it. In other words, dialogue might need a special agencement.

(1) Emergence of dialogical agencement

In 2009, B (who later became the founder and leader of UCI Lab), as the planner of the planning division of advertising company Yarakasukan Co., Ltd., submitted a report on "the integrated marketing strategy of the launching of the new product," ordered by client firm G (the contact employee of G was Mr. N). B's report (the "material") accidentally attracted the notice of Mr. O, an employee of firm G, who thought that B might have the ability to plan new products. Then, O contacted B directly to require him to participate in a project for a new product plan. This project was launched but O was moved to another division within firm G. O's replacement was Mr. P. Ultimately, P and B completed the project. Like O, P also highly estimated B's capabilities of investigation and analysis. P strongly recommended B to Mr. Q (a colleague of P). Q incorporated B to G's project, which plans a novel large business system. B completed his proposal document of the business system.

B used the above accidental occurrences. At that time, B sought a business idea that could break an

advertising business situation in which he was embedded. The situation is a typical business structure by which ad planners (including B) work. At least in Japan, to get a new order, ad companies participate in the "orientation" of their clients (ad providers). The planners of ad companies make an ad plan in accordance with the orientation. The ad companies then compete in their "presentation" to the ad provider. The ad provider chooses only one ad company. In such a business situation, planners always have the possibility to lose against the competition. However, they cannot charge the fees of the plan to the provider. Mr. B wanted to charge fees for planning. Mr. B used this project with client firm G as his actual achievement and launched a product planning consultation team, "UCI Lab" (corporate venture), within Yarakasukan Co., Ltd. in September 2012.

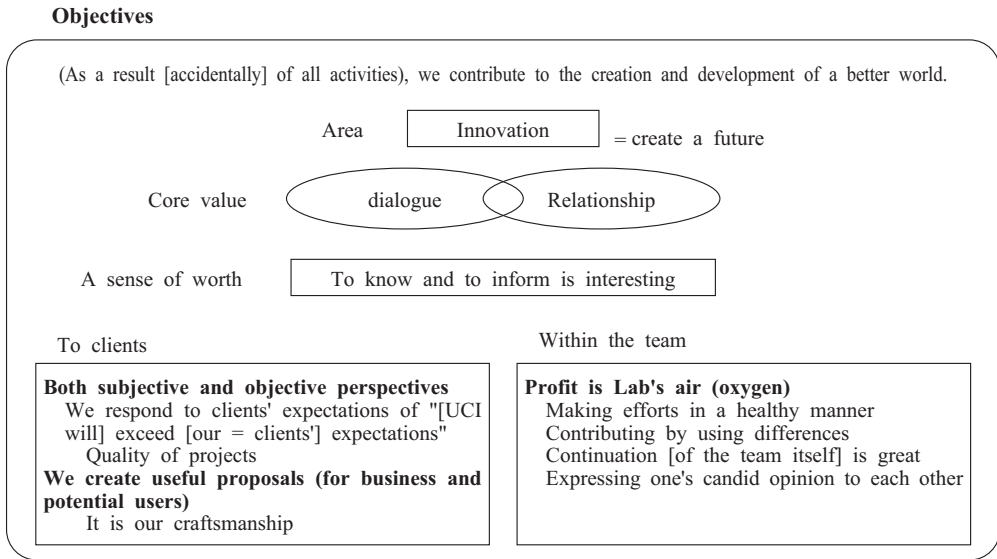
The ad situation, which he, an ad planner, had been embedded in had little room for dialogue with

the ad provider because the important point in this business is to what degree the planner is aware of the ad providers' intention and adequately expresses it in his/her presentation. Conversely, the new business situation (product planning) by the interaction between the material, his clients, and Mr. B, had much room for dialogue because it targeted creating new assumptions, problem definition, and hypotheses (solution) starting from zero.

(2) **Transformation of UCI Lab to further dialogical agencement**

In the summer of 2016 (FY 4), the UCI Lab team became aware of a challenge: members tried to tackle the fixed character of the team, which is based on the personality and competencies of team leader B, because his abilities stand out among the members. However, because the numbers and size of requests from clients (and potential clients) increased, the "run alone" of the leader B came to be limiting, which

Figure 1. Team's own objectives and projections



Projections

- In 2022
- Sales *****JPY
- Operating profit ratio **%
- 7 members
- Roles: "empath": two persons, "integrator": two persons, "who talk by illustrations": two persons, and "operator": one person
- Foundations of every person are "our important things"
- External brains: Ex-UCI [in the terms of the paper, the collaborative network]

Source: Internal material of UCI Lab, titled "Inventory of FY 5 and plan of FY 6," August 6, 2017. The drafts of these documents were created in February 2017.

meant they needed to rebuild the team's capacity to handle requests. Therefore, the team needed to re-define and clarify its characteristics. They invited a coach, named Junko Kuroki, the president of a coaching company. She had practiced team coaching based on the practical psychology of Arnold Mindell for therapy in a group setting (1989). She facilitated the creation of documents answering the questions of "who we are" and "what our important objectives are."⁶⁾ She counseled the team, its collaborative network, and clients. She interpreted their individual voices as fragments of the team voice under one system (in our terms, one agencement). The voice involves hidden conflicts between team members. This is because the leader dominated product planning by virtue of his excellent competence and, thus, other members did not have important roles in projects. The coach and members collaboratively created future images of new roles for the members to ensure a better fit with the voice of the team. Part of the outcome is represented by the following documents

(Figure 1).

The consequences of the cooperation between the team and coach are that the team consensually created the following documents (Figure 2).⁷⁾

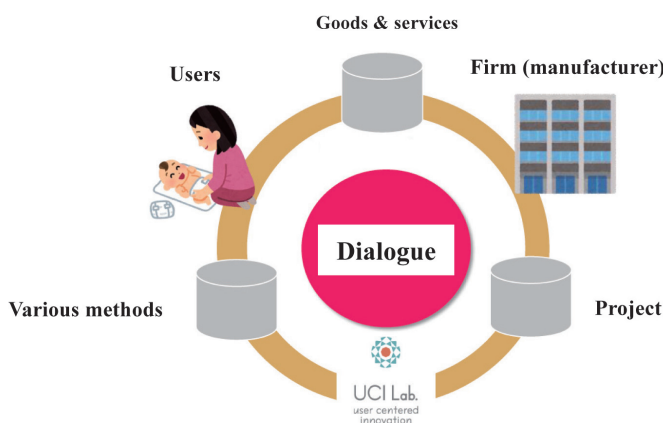
The procedure of creating these documents is based on Arnold Mindell's studies (especially the 1989 one). The documents, particularly the statement, gradually framed the agencement to which they refer. In November 2018, the statement seemed to enjoy a higher degree of verisimilitude than in the summer of 2016. The following subsections present the actualization process of the statement declaring the existence of dialogue: "We are the professional team of 'dialogue'.⁸⁾"

Since the document, the team has reconstituted its agencement for creating a higher degree of a verisimilitude of this statement. The process of agencement reconstitution is shown in Figures 3 and 4, which leader B created for explaining the aims of the team to Yarakasukan's management.

Figure 2. Team's aims, internally set

UCI aims

We aim to crystallize new value in your business system through "dialogue" between the contexts of the users and that of the firm



What is UCI?

We are

1. Innovation agent
[We do] everything needed to bring innovation to you
2. Professional team of "dialogue"

Source: Internal material of UCI Lab, titled "Inventory of FY 5 and plan of FY 6," August 06, 2017. The drafts of these documents were created in February 2017.

Figure 3. Plan of constitutional improvement of the arrangement, set by the team

- Approach
 - ✓ Investment in knowledge (Workshop Designer Training Program)
 - ✓ Strengthening cooperation with outside entities
 - ✓ Recruiting
 - ✓ Releasing part of requests [select and let go of some requests from clients]
 - +
 - ✓ Move from second floor [large office shared with other divisions, as noted above] to a small room on the third floor [used exclusively by UCI Lab] (Thank you very much)

Source: Internal document of UCI Lab, titled "Inventory of FY 5 and plan of FY 6," August 06, 2017.

Figure 4. Consequences of constitutional improvement of the arrangement, set by the team

- Consequences
 - ✓ Expansion of collaborative network (we clarify our advantages and can then connect to those who value these advantages)

FY 4	FY 5
[Omit. Nine names of firms, one-person businesses, academic researchers are shown.]	[Omit. Firms, one-person businesses, academic researchers, and in-the-wild researchers are shown.]

- ✓ Staff cuts (Ms. D and Ms. E): Because our aim was clarified and the contents of the works changed; most staff, except for these two, exhibited a fit with these.
- ✓ Merit and demerit of clarifying [collective identity and their aim]

Merit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Progress of Ms. C ○ Recruiting new members using Wantedly [online recruiting service] and employing Ms. F ○ Long- and short-term management with confidence, based on future team image 	Demerit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exit of Ms. D ○ Selections of work, requests, and clients
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- The organization needs this process to shape the aim and achieve results [planned profit and profit rate] in a healthy manner.

Source: Internal material of UCI Lab, titled "Inventory of FY 5 and plan of FY 6," August 6, 2017.

In this document, the subject of actions—the agency—is not an individual; instead, "organization" is used, which is similar to our term, "agencement." Before the statement was made, the leader had defined how to develop this agencement. However, based on the collaborative outcomes of the team, the coach clarified the identity of agencement as the statement and the characteristics of agencement started to become independent of those of the individual, leader B. The agencement became the subject of action, as the "agency" reconfiguring action on the basis of the

documents presenting its future image.

Investment in the materials, space, and competency that contributed to designing dialogue

To enhance the verisimilitude of the statement, the members were eager to develop the competency of "facilitators" of meetings and workshops to actualize dialogue. The competency is a design setting of communication to produce contingency and unexpected incidents for disrupting the assumptions of participants. In FY 5 and FY 6, some members took the "Workshop Designer Training Program," a 120-hour

program for working adults provided by Aoyama Gakuin University. The team members put effort and used leave time over three months to attend this program because they thought that the competence of designing workshops taught by the program would be useful in realizing the statement. The managers of Yarakasukan Co., Ltd. agreed to pay the tuition fee because the leader could justify the necessity of the training program on the basis of the statement.

For a better spatial agencement that could contribute to dialogue, they requested an executive of Yarakasukan Co., Ltd. to transfer the team's workplace from the unpartitioned large office to a smaller room. The large unpartitioned space did not contribute to promoting and deepening the collective thought process of the team because the space was noisy. The executive decided to transfer the team's workplace to the small room because he understood its intent and aim from the documents. From the viewpoint of Yarakasukan Co., Ltd., this transfer meant that the company invested (allocated) a large part of the spatial value of the branch in the team.

The team also invested in materials, such as a large whiteboard, stationery, equipment for making prototypes, to enhance the quality of communication in projects (especially workshops).

Transformation, affiliation, or exit of members

When one is keenly aware of one's ideal role, in some cases, one reflects on one's actions based on this ideal role and environment (e.g., actions of other members who also imposed their own ideal roles) and amends one's habitual assumptions and actions. One thus becomes an "acting teacher" of oneself and "performs" an ideal role. Conversely, agencement "teaches" one how to perform one's ideal actions. Ms. C was radically transformed by that process, an experience recounted by the team leader on April 21, 2017.

Leader B: After we tried to listen to the system's voice with the assistance of the coach, C's consciousness radically changed. Before that, she only tried to improve her profession, that is, "empathetic" listening of users. However, after that, she has realized that she should also take up management tasks as my assistant. That is

why we can now draw the future vision more easily.

On another occasion, Ms. C and the leader jointly looked back at the cause of her transformation:

Ms. C: Our relationship [between B and C] was a master-servant one; however, my standpoint changed, for example, when I expressed my opinion on hiring new staff.

Leader B: The timing is also right. In Workshop Designer [training program at the university], you can experience different roles from those in the workplace.

Ms. C: Through experiencing relationships with the other participants in the Workshop Designer, I recognized "I am a person who, in fact, likes organizing things." It is valuable for me to recognize, outside of the workplace, this possibility: "Oh, I have such an aspect!"

While Ms. C changed, Ms. D and Ms. E could or did not fit the framed agencement, as explained by the leader B on April 21, 2017:

Leader B: D's specialty is limited to a certain industry and not directly relevant to the contribution to realize dialogue. She may not have a sufficient aptitude for the [dialogical] relationship or the stance that UCI Lab tries to realize. When we [the entire team] try to draw the future image of the team, it is very difficult to create the image if the components are D, C, and me. It is easy when we draw this image without considering the components and, then, within the image [of arrangement], we give places [roles] to each component. Here is C, here is me. However, we reached the conclusion that "today's D does not have a place in this future image."

A few months after the interview, Ms. D left the team.

Selection of clients

From FY 4 to FY 5, the demand for UCI Lab exceeded the team's capacity because of clients' word of mouth in the informal "network of product planners." The team started to preferentially accepted working with clients who appreciated the "important objectives" of the team and, from the viewpoint of the team, contributed to realizing the "future image" of

agencement—dialogical agencement. Meanwhile, the team gradually distanced itself from clients that did not place high value on the team's competency in designing dialogue. Additionally, clients who did not have the potential to construct dialogical relationships with the team were excluded.⁹⁾

Leader B: How stressful, we work with clients who see [choose from many aspects of the life of users] what the clients would like to see! They only search for data that fits the assumptions and hypotheses which they already have. "Hmm... yes, certainly the user said that, however, it is not the main aspect of the interview, is it?" When we see such attitudes among clients, [I feel that] dialogue is natural for persons who can do it, while of course we [the persons] should enhance this ability; however, the clients who do not have the potential cannot do it at all. This problem arises not only from the innate qualities of the client as individuals, but also from corporate culture to which the client belongs to. The client's qualities, such as the characteristics of its organizational decision-making process and the type of manager who intervenes in the process, are inseparable from the culture.

Through client selection, the competencies of the team's clients, who contributed to dialogue, were enhanced. When the team works on a project with a client that can forgo its own assumptions and hypotheses, the possibility of creating novel and useful ideas in dialogue increases, as is the possibility of creating a product plan that brings high value to the client's firm. When excellent outcomes beyond the client's expectation emerge, the client talks to other

planners in his/her network about UCI Lab. This becomes an effective team advertisement for a future client that seeks a dialogical project. This "selection" was encouraged by the above virtuous cycle. Collateral evidence is shown in Table 1.

While sales did not increase significantly, individual projects became larger and longer. Additionally, the number of projects under a certain amount of sales proceeds reduced from 30 to 13 (internal document cited in Table 1). The number of larger and more challenging projects increased, which means that clients highly estimate the team's competency to facilitate their projects.

We subjectively checked many final proposals for the proposed project plan. Comparing FY 4, FY 5, and FY 6, there was an increase in the ratio of proposals where participants' assumptions and hypotheses changed (i.e., dialogue could be realized through co-investigation, workshop, or meetings) and the insights of proposals created in FY 5 and FY 6 had a deeper "gap" between the assumptions and hypotheses which the project team had in the beginning of the project and the ones in the end, compared to FY 4.

(3) Case findings that criticize the dialogue theory of Ballantyne and Varey

The case study yields three main findings. First, the material and existing business situation strongly contributed to the emergence of agencement (UCI Lab) and cannot be reduced to individuals' interactions. Here, the collective, as the material-human accidental interaction, and the existing business situation contributed to the building of agencement. Thus, from the first finding, we can empirically disprove the hidden thoughts in Ballantyne and Varey's works explained in Section II, that is, the institution is seen as a result of individuals' interactions. Second, agencement works autonomously, apart from each individual's intention. It means it may have agency. Thus, from the second finding, we can empirically disprove another hidden thought in their work, that is, an institution and an ecosystem do not have agency. Third, the situation in the Lab has begun to drive individuals to contribute to realize dialogue. This means a special type of agencement, strongly framed by the normative statement which require members to transform

Table 1. Projects become bigger, more challenging, and profitable

	FY 4	FY 5
Number of completed projects	50	34
Total sales	x	1.01x
Average sales per project	y	1.48y
Average profit per project	z	1.19z

Source: Internal material of UCI Lab, titled "Inventory of FY 5 and plan of FY 6," August 6, 2017.

collectively.

V. Discussion

1. Reconsideration of dialogue theory in SDL

Based on the case study, we eliminate the two problems of Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b). The first problem is that, in the construction of a relationship as supportive institution for communication, there seems to be no place for the collective, which cannot be reduced to individuals' strategic actions. Conversely, they stress that dialogue "is inherently relational." If by "relational" they mean the interactions between individuals, they only move from individual action theory to individual interaction theory. The fundamental unit remains the individual. Then, what is the collective which cannot be reduced to individual interaction?

Based on the case, the collective is agencement. First, agencement contributes to the construction of the relationship between the components of UCI Lab. It is the assemblage of, or unintended interactions between, materials attracting Mr. O, the idea of employee O of the client firm G for B to participate in a product planning project, the traditional ad business situation, and the intention of B to deviate from the situation. This agencement is difficult to be reduced to individuals' interactions. Thus, we may be able to argue that, agencement precedes individual(s). In our case, the individual's response to the contingency arises within agencement, which response creates a new situation with more room for dialogue inside agencement.

In regard to the problem in Section III on what type of agencement realizes dialogue, based on the case, "one" answer is agencement well framed by the normative statement that has driven components to realize the collective transformation of the participants' shared framework. Here, "well framed" means that, based on the normative statement, some components are developed towards the aim of agencement and others are excluded. In the case, dialogical agencement, which enhances the frequency and depth of dialogue, has recombined its elements based on self-definition. In the transformation, agency is seen

not in an individual but rather as agencement. The particular examples, showing that agency is agencement, are as follows. First, the agencement removes an individual (Ms. D) from itself, even she had been a member of the agencement since its very early period and even participated in the construction process of the self-definition of agencement ("we are the professional team of dialogue"). The newly defined agencement became autonomous and excluded its "human" component, who is a parent of this newly defined agencement.

The second problem is that, in Ballantyne and Varey's works, we cannot find room for the collective in the evaluation process of co-created value. In the case, we could confirm that collective cognition (the agreement shared by the participants to the collective), which emerged from dialogue in the transformation, has the decisive role in evaluation because it give the participants an "evaluation device," for instance, "gap" and "journey story." In the case, the collective, that is, the transformed agencement (therefore, the framework held by participants also transformed) and, then, after the transformation, the participants became retrospectively conscious of the framework *which they had previously had before transformation* and evaluate the product planning as a "gap" (difference) between the *previous* and *transformed* frameworks. In the results of the dialogue, "journey story," which means the retrospectively constructed story of participants' transformation (in which their previous frameworks are retrospectively formed or expressed and compared to the present frameworks), becomes a device that allows participants to easier recognize the value of the dialogical process of product planning. In this process, collective transformation precedes construction (or verbalizes), not only under the transformed present frameworks of individuals but also the previous frameworks.

The question is how our perspective of the collective can reconcile the fact that individuals as evaluators exist. Based on the case, individuals as evaluators are created from the collective stream of communication.

2. Reconsidering SDL fundamental premises

Based on the above findings, we develop axiom 4 (FP 10) and axiom 5 (FP 11). Before we develop the axioms, we posit two assumptions. First, we follow FP 7 that "a service-centered view is customer oriented and relational" and Ballantyne and Varey's (2006a; 2006b) premise that "dialogue cannot be reduced to one person's activity alone or reduced to one person's perspective alone; it is inherently relational." However, "relational" contains the collective (especially the "agency" of agencement for changing itself dialogically and evaluating co-created value, which are not reduced to individual interactions). Second, our development of axioms (FPs) can only apply to a situation where it is possible to realize dialogue.

Axiom 4 (FP 10) states "value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary." First, in the dialogue, the collective makes the agreement of evaluation or device of evaluation (here, the "journey story") agreed and shared by the participants. Second, in the dialogue, the "individual," as "sovereign" agency of evaluation, is created after or in parallel with the transformation of the collective. That is, in dialogical value co-creation, the collective creates both the shared device of evaluation and the evaluators (individuals) whose minds the shared device is embedded in; thus, in the dialogue, the agency of evaluation is the collective (the agencement) rather than the individual.

The second is axiom 5 (FP 11), the newest axiom added by Vargo and Lusch (2016): "value cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements." In this axiom, there might be unspoken (or vague) assumptions: first, there are individuals who have agency to "generate" institutions, and, second, their encounter and strategic interactions "generate" the institution. However, as opposed to Vargo and Lusch's assumption, we stress there is an agencement that facilitate individuals to develop interaction (communication).

3. Conclusion

As previously mentioned, this paper follows FP 8 and develops the "relational" from an individualistic meaning to the meaning stressing the agency of the collective and uniqueness of the collective. As such,

we eliminate the two problems in Ballantyne and Varey (2006a; 2006b) and the two axioms (FPs). We stress the specific role of agencement in dialogical value co-creation. This is implied following the "darkness" of dialogue in business and the managerial propositions below.

The characteristics of dialogue in the value co-creating perspectives of marketing highlight its positives, such as "participation," "leaning together," maintaining "competitive advantage" perceived by beneficiaries (see also the work on "S logic" in Grönroos 2000). However, from the viewpoint of constituting agencement, a well-built foundation of dialogue is a consequence of inclusions and exclusions. The term "dialogue," used in education, psychiatry, and conflict resolution methods, pertains to communication beyond individuals' and groups' boundaries (Bohm 2014; Seikkula and Arnkil 2006). However, in business, there is a strong pressure for making profit and, thus, a strong pressure for actualizing "dialogue," that is, an emerging novel and useful framework in regard to target users. Therefore, there is not sufficient time to wait for team members, such as Ms. D, to acquire the requisite competencies. Based on the statement, the members were eager to reconstruct agencement. This paper thus demonstrated the absence of tolerance for gradual human development in business dialogue.

From the managerial viewpoint, there are two suggestions to be made. First, agencement might be framed by investment. The performing of the statement is the process of framing agencement in line with the statement. "Framing" here means reconstruction of agencement by including or excluding elements (human, things, and space). When elements are enhanced, a relational outcome may develop between them. We confirmed framing is realized by investments (money and effort) on humans (competencies), materials, and space. This means that, when we enhance the possibility of realizing dialogue, we have to be mentally prepared for investment.

Second, a strongly framed agencement makes it easy to actualize dialogue. By investment and selection, the elements of agencement are enhanced and the relational outcome between them developed. We

can affirm that dialogue is actualized within the special agencement, which is strongly framed by the perspective of dialogue. Managerially, we argue that, if businesspersons want to enhance the possibility of actualization of dialogue, the reconstruction of business agencement is needed, along with their greater involvement in dialogue. The reconstruction process contains not only the inclusion or recombination of elements, but also harmful decisions that remove them from agencement.

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Notes

- 1) Harrison and Kjellberg (2016, p. 446) also introduce this concept in their discussion of "market shaping."
- 2) While the components are framed by institutions, movements or activities of components of an agencement necessarily bring consequences that are not recovered by institutions (framings). This consequence Callon (2007a) calls "overflowing" and changes agencement.
- 3) How a person evaluates the interaction or "perceive" its value is a must in marketing interactions (e.g., Prior and Marcos-Cuevas 2016, p. 540).
- 4) A project cycle is similar to the cycle shown by Marcos-Cuevas et al. (2016, p. 99, Figure 1). A mindset and a code of conduct in collective investigation and interpretation about possible uses with its client firm are similar to "design-oriented thinking," detailed in Venkatesh et al. (2012, pp. 297-299). However, in a project of UCI Lab, dialogical interactions with possible users are placed at the starting, middle, and later stages of the project (while design-oriented companies studied by Venkatesh et al., 2012, p. 299 use user research "only at the later stages" of their project) and information acquired in the communications is given more weight (than the design-oriented companies studied by

Venkatesh et al. 2012) as a source of collective interpretation of UCI Lab and its clients.

- 5) Engineers of firm G and Mr. K (unconsciously) thought that device z is promising and can deal with various tasks in business segments. However, the reality was rather different.
- 6) The development process of the agencement from the setting of its goal (in this case, the "statement") to its reconfiguration is similar to the process shown in Matinheikki et al. (2017, p. 129, Figure 1).
- 7) Because the members, as co-creators of the document, strongly agree on it, the performativity of documents is a case of "prescription" and "subscription" as in Andersson et al. (2008).
- 8) In regard to the "performativity" of an idea, see Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006).
- 9) In the same way, the collaborative network of UCI Lab has also been gradually "selected" by agencement based on the statement.

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