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Resource integration: Adopting a paradox perspective to inform the management of tensions in customer resource allocation

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ABSTRACT

Service-dominant logic maintains that value is created collaboratively through a process of resource integration. Knowledge-intensive business services, the context for this study, are heavily dependent on customer resources for the fulfilment of the value proposition. Value co-creation is compromised when resources are not allocated in appropriate quality or quantity. While there is a growing body of research identifying antecedents to customer resource input, few studies investigate how customers might overcome barriers to resource allocation, particularly when faced with competing demands. This article uses a paradox perspective to explore the management of tensions affecting resource allocation. Empirically, we draw on interviews with service providers to identify perceived resource deficiencies, and with customers to explore resource allocation management. We show that it is possible to manage resource allocation tensions by devising novel solutions that integrate the two opposing demands. In addition, these solutions can result in an 'augmented' resource, particularly if the service provider is permitted to influence customer resource deployment. Finally, these novel solutions can activate an unintended by-product or secondary resource, enhancing the relationship between provider and customer.

1. Introduction

Service-dominant logic (S-D logic) states that value is co-created by multiple actors, including the beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). In response to a value proposition – an invitation from actors to one another to engage in service (Chandler & Lusch, 2015) – supplier and customer, or broader service systems, create value collaboratively through a process of resource integration (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Without the contribution of appropriate resources from customers, value propositions remain propositions (Hilton, Hughes, & Chalcraft, 2012). In knowledge-intensive business services, the context for this study, value creation is heavily dependent on customer resources (Bettencourt, Ostrom, Brown, & Roundtree, 2002). Resources can be defined as tangible and intangible entities that can be used directly or indirectly to co-create value (Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008). Possession of a resource is not, in itself, sufficient. The potential value of a resource is only realised when it is applied and incorporated (i.e. integrated) with other resources (Moeller, 2008). However, value co-creation is potentially compromised when an actor fails to provide resources of appropriate quality or quantity (Greer, 2015). Regarding the customer, this may occur because of the lack of availability of a resource, or the lack of motivation or competence to input the resource as required (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; McColl-Kennedy, Vargo, Dagger, Sweeney, & van Kasteren, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2011). The customer may also face competing demands for resources, particularly when they are scarce. For example, research on creativity suggests that creative teams achieve a higher quality of output when time (the 'resource') allocated to the creative task is unrestricted (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996). However, the manager or organization (the 'customer') commissioning the project may, because of budget constraints or deadlines, be under pressure to restrict allocation of the resource (Ortmann & Sydow, 2018). Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009, p. 706), in the context of creativity in new product development, argue that the desire for "exciting new products in short time frames…demands both sides of the coin", thus creating a tension. Tensions are the underlying source of paradox (Lewis, 2000) and paradox emanates from actors' responses to tensions. When actors polarize elements, tensions are cognitively constructed as paradoxical (Lewis & Smith, 2014). Paradox is defined as "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time" (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). Opposing propositions – for example, outstanding creativity and time constraint – are incontestable individually (they are both necessary) but, in the minds of creative teams at least, incompatible jointly (Poole & van de Ven, 1989).

Whereas some tensions can be resolved by taking an 'either/or' approach or by compromise, the nature of paradoxical tensions is such

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that this would only offer a temporary solution because the paradox will reappear in the future (Lewis, 2000). Sheep, Fairhurst, and Khazanchi (2017) regard paradoxical tensions as non-resolvable because they persist over time. A variety of strategies, or combinations of strategies, have been proposed for managing paradoxical tensions. Common to all is 'acceptance'. This involves learning to live with the paradox. Acceptance, or the adoption of a 'paradox mindset', sets the stage for 'accommodation' or 'integration'. This involves finding a novel, synergistic response that accommodates competing forces, simultaneously addressing conflicting demands (Smith & Lewis, 2011). Hargrave and Van de Ven (2017, p. 324) define synergy as "coordinating distinct contradictory elements in ways that are mutually advantageous". Alternatively, some studies propose a combination of integration and 'differentiation'. For example, Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009) identify ambidextrous firms that excel at both exploitation and exploration by iterating between differentiation and integration. In the context of product design, they show that, whereas clients display an exploitative orientation, preferring incremental improvements, designers embrace exploration, preferring to push creative boundaries. A purely exploitative orientation would result in a lack of innovation, while a purely explorative orientation could be wasteful. Engaging with both poles can lead to greater levels of creativity, combining novelty and relevance. In their example, designers iterated between periods of differentiation, where they explored new creative avenues, and periods of integration, where they moulded these ideas to meet the constraints imposed by the client. Other commonly cited paradoxical tensions include collaboration versus competition, empowerment versus direction, financial goals versus social goals, efficiency versus agility, and global versus local (Phillips, Chang, & Su, 2019; Schad et al., 2019; Smith & Lewis, 2011). However, Smith (2014, p. 1592) maintains that "we still know little about the specific nature and management of strategic paradoxes".

In our study, we adopt a paradox perspective to investigate how to overcome customer resource deficiencies that threaten the realization of a value proposition. We believe this is the first study to use a paradox lens to explore resource integration. The context of our study is client–marketing agency relationships. There are two research stages. The first, conducted with agency managers and creative teams (service providers), identifies examples of perceived inadequate resource provision by clients (customers). The second stage of the research, conducted with clients, explores how they approach tensions in resource allocation and how those adopting a paradox mindset neutralize the dilemma of choosing between one or other 'pole of the tension'.

With regard to our contribution to knowledge, and with the resource integration literature in mind, resource quantity and resource quality are core considerations, yet questions remain regarding the effect of resource deficiencies and how these deficiencies might be overcome (Plé, 2016). There is a need for research that increases our understanding of actor engagement and resource integration as precursors to value co-creation (Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti, Palo, & Baumann, 2016; Storbacka, Brodie, Böhmann, Maglio, & Nenonen, 2016) and for research that investigates how customers might overcome barriers to resource input (Mustak, 2019). In response to these identified gaps, we aim to show how a paradox approach to resource allocation and integration can help to overcome perceived resource deficiencies.

From the perspective of the paradox literature, there is ample justification for our study. Smith and Tracey (2016) argue that researchers could develop more compelling insights were they to discover tensions inductively from their informants rather than assuming a set of tensions at the outset. We do this in stage 1 of our study by investigating tensions in customer resource allocation from the perspective of service providers. We address the call of Sheep et al. (2017) to study multiple tensions rather than focus on a single tension and we respond to Huq, Reay, and Chreim's (2017) call for more research that investigates how organizations balance the two poles in tensions and unleash value from paradox. In addition, we answer the call for research that increases our knowledge of paradox in the context of interfirm relationships (Gnyawali, Madhavan, He, & Bengtson, 2016).

We begin by reviewing the literature on resource integration, followed by the literature on paradox. We describe our research context and our method for the two research stages, the first with service providers and the second with customers, present our findings, and discuss them in the context of paradox and resource integration.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Value co-creation and resource integration

S-D logic maintains that a supplier cannot unilaterally create value. Value is collaboratively created, to a greater or lesser extent, with the customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The customer is simultaneously a recipient of the service and an active participant in the realization of the service outcome to the point where the distinction between 'producer' and 'consumer' is indistinct (Baron & Harris, 2008). Both are regarded as provider and beneficiary (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). Although the concept of *co-production* – customer involvement in service production – is well-established (see Lovelock & Young, 1979), in this study we favour the term *value co-creation* because, although there are co-production activities in our study context, when viewed in its entirety, the realization of a marketing service such as advertising also includes dimensions of value-in-use (e.g. relational attachment, experience, and personalization). We adopt the reasoning of value co-creation as an aggregate concept that subsumes both co-production and value-in-use (Kohtamäki & Rajala, 2016; Ranjan & Read, 2016).

Value co-creation transpires through a process of resource sharing or integration. In response to a value proposition – a jointly-designed proposal that seeks the co-creative engagement of actors sharing resources to contribute to mutually rewarding outcomes (Eggert, Ulaga, Frow, & Payne, 2018) – supplier and customer (in the context of a dyad) contribute resources to which they have access, so that they can be integrated, through collaborative processes, for value co-creation (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Vargo and Lusch (2004) distinguish between intangible *operant* resources and tangible *operand* resources. Operant resources, the focus of this study, have been shown to be critical in supporting firm performance (Khan, Xuehe, Atlas, & Khan, 2019; Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008). Plé (2016) specifically examines customer resources and integrates customer participation and S-D logic literature to identify 12 categories of resource: informational, emotional, physical, financial, temporal, behavioural, relational, social, cultural, role (clarity), ability, and willingness. However, not all customers possess the requisite resources, or else are not allowed, able, or willing, to integrate resources as required (Edvardsson, Kleinaltenkamp, Tronvoll, McHugh, & Windahl, 2014; Hibbert, Winklhofer, & Temerak, 2012; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012). When integration is hindered by an inadequate quantity or quality of resource, defective or diminished value co-creation occurs (Greer, 2015; Vafeas, Hughes, & Hilton, 2016) resulting in a negative impact on outcomes, with actors worse off or not benefitting as much as they might (Frow, McColl-Kennedy, & Payne, 2016).

2.2. Paradoxical tensions

Competing demands are inherent in organizations and emanate from individual sensemaking, relational dynamics, multiple conflicting institutional logics, and the performance of organization itself (Smith & Tracey, 2016). Furthermore, divergent demands become more salient during times of resource scarcity or change, creating organizational tensions (Smith & Lewis, 2011). From a paradox perspective, tensions are "persistent contradictions between interdependent elements" (Smith & Lewis, 2011, p. 382). They are contrary propositions which, when considered individually, are plausible and valid, but when juxtaposed, seem incompatible (Poole and Van de Ven, 1989). Examples

include learning – incremental improvement versus radical innovation – and organizing – control versus autonomy (Benner & Tushman, 2003; Gnyawali & Madhavan, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).

In response to tensions, managers can: choose one or other 'pole' (*either/or* dilemma); compromise (which implies the poles are extremes of a continuum); take a contingency approach (*if/then*); or leverage the 'paradox' in a way that captures both extremes (*both/and*). The limitation of the first approach (either/or) is that the persistent nature of some tensions means that choosing one or other pole is only a short-term solution. The tension will re-surface in the future (Miron-Spektor, Ingram, Keller, Smith, & Lewis, 2018). Furthermore, there are instances where no choice can adequately resolve the tension because both opposing forces are necessary and entwined (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). Lewis (2000, p. 763) refers to "vicious cycles" that result from the defensive behaviour of actors who, by selecting one pole of the tension and suppressing the other, intensify the underlying tension. Regarding compromise, Eisenhardt (2000) is dismissive, describing it as a bland halfway point that fails to stimulate organizational vibrancy. A contingency perspective would ask under what conditions either A or B is appropriate. A paradox perspective, however, engages both poles simultaneously, aiming for a novel synergy, in the same way that the ambidextrous organization simultaneously manages evolutionary and revolutionary change (Clegg, Stewart, da Cunha, & Pina, 2002). The paradox perspective argues that long-term sustainability, what Lewis (2000, p. 763) refers to as "virtuous cycles", requires a creative way of addressing multiple, divergent demands. It recommends that managers acknowledge the competing demands of opposing poles and seek synergy between them to produce creative approaches to managing the tension (Lewis, 2000; Smith, Besharov, Wessels, & Chertok, 2012). Synergy can be achieved through collaboration or through unilateral leadership, working through tensions to arrive at a 'both/and' approach that finds a link between the two contradictory elements to enable action (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). To those with a paradox mindset, tensions are an opportunity to create integrative solutions. A practical example is the manager who struggles with the necessity of delegating a problem to a junior manager while knowing how best to solve the problem. Rather than adopting an either/or approach, the manager is encouraged to examine both viewpoints, identifying the benefits and limitations of each, and ultimately seeking a link between the two poles. There is no solution as such, but rather a synergy whereby the manager shares his/her knowledge with the junior manager to help them learn to solve problems for themselves (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008).

While there is growing consensus on the definition of 'paradox' as contradictory yet interdependent demands that exist simultaneously and persist over time (Hahn & Knight, 2018; Smith & Lewis, 2011), researchers in organization studies variously refer to a paradox *perspective* or *lens* (e.g. Hargrave and Van de Ven, 2017; Lewis, 2000; Lewis and Smith, 2014), a paradox *mindset* or *cognition* (e.g. Miron-Spektor et al., 2018; Smith and Tushman, 2005; Waldman, Putnam, Miron-Spektor, & Siegal, 2019), and a paradox *theory* (e.g. Cunha, Rego, Oliveira, Rosado, & Habib, 2014; Raisch et al., 2018; Schad, Lewis, & Smith, 2019; Sheep et al., 2017). Smith and Lewis (2011) highlight the potential for creating a theory of paradox and present their 'Dynamic Equilibrium' model, with tensions, management strategies, and outcomes, as a basis for a theory. However, Lewis and Smith (2014) refer to paradox as a *metatheoretical perspective* or *paradigm* which can be used to inform research focusing on the nature and management of tensions. They advance a set of four core elements. First, *underlying assumptions* regarding the existence of tensions and the 'construction' of paradox. Second, a set of *central concepts* relating to the definition of 'paradox', generic responses to paradoxical tensions, and ideal outcomes. Third, *interrelationships* between response and outcome and the possibility of vicious or virtuous cycles. Fourth, *boundary conditions* which identify where a paradox approach is most appropriate (for example, in the context of multiple conflicting goals). The notion of paradox as a metatheoretical paradigm will be adopted for this study. Brodie, Löbler, and Fehrer (2019) describe a paradigm as an accepted perspective of a particular discipline at a given time, that furnishes researchers with direction as to how phenomena should be thought about and researched. A paradigm provides foundations and direction for future theory building.

2.3. Paradox in interorganizational and value co-creation literature

Our study contributes to a growing, though still limited, body of research that applies a paradox approach to interfirm relationships and value co-creation. Paradox has been applied to the simultaneous pursuit of competition and cooperation in alliances (e.g. Gnyawali et al., 2016). Oinonen, Ritala, Jalkala, and Blomqvist (2018) and Tóth, Peters, Pressey, and Johnston (2018) apply a paradox perspective to co-development and value co-creation respectively. The former considers the use of a paradox approach to manage three aspects of interfirm relationships: contractual versus relational governance, knowledge sharing versus knowledge protection, and customer-specific versus general goals. The latter study investigates tensions in the context of formal and informal communication networks. However, Kohtamaki and Rajala (2016) suggest that greater utilization of a paradox perspective in service research would provide insight into the paradoxical dimensions that exist in value co-creation.

Our study contributes to the value co-creation literature by showing that a paradox approach to resource integration can overcome barriers that customers face in resource allocation. From a practitioner perspective, we aim to demonstrate that customers of service firms have it within their power to "break through the gridlock of polarized *either/or* debates" (Schad et al., 2019, p. 115) that recur time after time, and instead to manage resource tensions such that resource allocation and value creation are enhanced. We address two research questions:

RQ1. What customer resource deficiencies do marketing agencies (service providers) experience?

RQ2. How do marketing practitioners (customers) manage the seemingly inherent tensions in resource allocation?

Although the focus of our study is the management of tensions in resource allocation (RQ2), we pose RQ1 in order to reveal resource deficiencies from the perspective of the service provider. While we could have bypassed service providers and asked customers to identify for themselves their resource deficiencies, we felt that reporting the perspective of service providers would give a holistic and balanced view of the resource integration process from both sides of the dyad.

In summary, businesses typically face competing demands for resources. This is accentuated in the current hypercompetitive business environment in which firms operate with tighter economic and temporal resources (Cunha et al., 2014). Smith and Tracey (2016, p. 458) highlight that "scarcity emphasises limited resources, which generates conflict between opposing demands". These demands often appear to be mutually exclusive and yet equally justifiable. In the context of client–agency relationships, the literature suggests there are competing demands, for example, in relation to time, with agencies requesting more time for the creative process than clients are able to provide in an environment of fast-changing markets and tight deadlines (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2019). In addition, a plurality of views in interorganizational relationships, driven by incongruent goals or divergent perceptions of what constitutes value, can lead to tensions of resource allocation in value co-creation (Niesten & Stefan, 2019; Smith & Tracey, 2016). A paradox perspective, which focuses on the coexistence and management of tensions between seemingly contradictory forces (Hargrave and Van de Ven, 2017), is well-suited to an examination of the management of customer resource allocation and competing demands or goals in client–agency relationships.

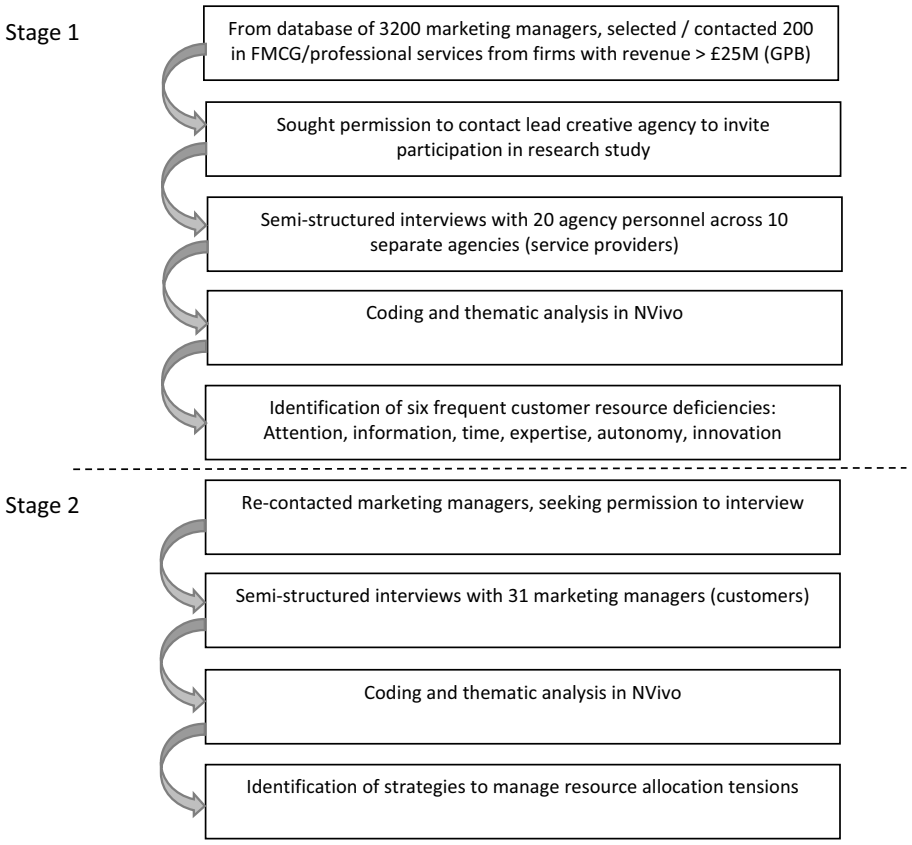

Fig. 1. Overview of the research strategy.

3. Research design and method

Our research consisted of two stages (see Fig. 1). The first stage, addressing RQ1, was exploratory and inductive (though not without some presuppositions, given our reading of the literature), with the aim of uncovering deficiencies in customer resource allocation from the perspective of service providers. The data for this first stage are drawn from a larger study of client–agency relationships conducted in 2015 by the authors. The second stage addressed RQ2 – how customers manage tensions – and took an abductive approach, going beyond the basic accounts that actors give of their behaviour, which are often unreflective and taken-for-granted (Blaikie, 2000), to construct meaning. We adopted a qualitative approach, using semi-structured one-to-one interviews for both stages, because of the opportunity it gives for greater immersion in actors' worlds, together with flexibility (appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research) and thick description (Bryman, 2012). Although we report stage 1, we focus our attention on stage 2 because our principal aim is to explore how customers manage resource deficiencies.

3.1. Research context

The context for the study is client–agency relationships. Marketing agencies, and consulting firms in general, are examples of professional service firms (Rogan & Mors, 2014), characterised by the application of complex knowledge to create largely intangible and customized outputs for clients (Greenwood, Li, Prakash, & Deephouse, 2005). Although marketers (also referred to as 'clients' or, more generically, 'customers') hire agencies to produce creative services such as advertising, it has long been recognised that clients themselves have to conform to certain role requirements, including the provision of multiple resources (Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2006). Clients actively participate in the creation of the service outcome, and the quality of their performance influences the quality of the outcome (Beard, 1996). Client engagement in the creative process is not by invitation but is a pre-requisite. Clients can be involved in every stage of the problem-solving process from problem identification to the development and implementation of the solution (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakola, 2012). For this reason, the context is very suitable for the investigation of resource integration and value co-creation and this is reflected in the growing body of research in value co-creation that has taken an interest in the client–agency relationship (Keegan, Rowley, & Tonge, 2017).

To fulfil the value proposition, clients of knowledge-intensive business firms provide resources such as information, expert knowledge, effort, and financial resources (Aarikka-Stenroos & Jaakola, 2012). Information is crucial for efficient and effective problem-solving and ensures the creation of client-specific solutions (Abecassis-Moedas & Benghozi, 2012). Agencies require access to expert knowledge that provides direction and goal clarity (Petri & Jacob, 2016). Effort manifests itself in the form of motivation and cognitive resources directed towards the accomplishment of the task (Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005). Financial resources have a direct impact on the amount of time the agency is given to devote to a project, and research shows an association between time and good creative ideas (Hill & Johnson, 2004). When one or more requisite resources is deficient, value creation may be inhibited (Echeverri & Skälén, 2011).

3.2. Data collection

Our sample was purposive to ensure the strategic selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). With regard to agency informants (stage 1), we wanted to speak with creative teams as well as client services managers (boundary-spanning personnel). With regard to clients (stage 2), our aim was to seek the perspectives of managers from organizations of varying size from a variety of sectors. Interviews were one-to-one. We used semi-structured interview guides for both stages.

In stage 1, the aim was to identify customer resources that, in the opinion of the service provider, are frequently lacking in quality or quantity. We asked respondents about roles, actions, and outcomes for the key stages in a typical project (problem identification; compilation of the brief; briefing; monitoring and outcome evaluation) and allowed issues relating to resource allocation to emerge inductively. The interview guide for stage 2 was informed by the findings from the first stage. Customers were asked questions relating to the resource deficiencies that emerged from stage 1 namely: attentional engagement, information, time, expertise, autonomy, and innovation. Respondents were asked about competing demands for these resources and, if they acknowledged tensions, how they managed them. They were also asked if there were other customer-based resources, that we had not raised, that were scarce in client–agency relationships. In each stage of research, respondents were asked the same core questions but, as is typical in semi-structured interviews, the researchers sought clarification, probed, and allowed respondents to deviate where this was judged to be relevant and informative.

For stage 1 of data collection (service provider perceptions of customer resource deficiencies) we began by purchasing a database with a total of 3200 marketing managers in the UK. From this sampling frame, we selected and contacted 200, inviting them, together with their lead creative agency, to participate in the research (for stage 1 of this paper, we draw only on data collected from the agency participants). The selection of the 200 was based on the likelihood of frequent interaction between client and agency to ensure a richness of information. For this reason, we only contacted client firms with a turnover above £25 million (GBP) and restricted ourselves to sectors that are known 'heavy users' of marketing agencies (for example, fast-moving consumer goods and professional services). For purely practical purposes, we limited ourselves to firms in the South of the UK to reduce travel time to interviews. There was no reason to suppose that geographic location would influence the results. 10 clients gave us permission to contact their agencies and invite them to participate in the research. Although there was the danger that some agencies would feel obliged to take part (having been proposed by their client), this was not apparent during interviews. All respondents, and particularly creative personnel, were very keen to have the opportunity to express their opinions. The largest participating agency employed 400 people and the smallest 11. Of the 20 individual participants across the 10 agencies, 10 were from client services (account managers or account directors with an average of 13 years' experience) and 10 from creative teams (senior creatives with an average of 14 years' experience). Interviews with the 20 individuals lasted between 45 and 75 min, the average being 60 min. All interviews were conducted face-to-face over a six-month period in 2015 and were recorded and transcribed.

Stage 2 of the data collection (customer management of resource allocation) was conducted over a nine-month period starting August 2018. We re-contacted the 200 marketing managers inviting them to participate and 31 agreed. Table 1 presents the contextual information for each participant. All participants were working, or had worked, on a regular basis with agencies, although the more senior respondents (Heads of Marketing or Marketing Directors) no longer interacted on a day-to-day basis. Two respondents (Anna and Vicky) were from the same organization.

3.3. Data analysis

For stage 1, we adopted the Gioia Methodology (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). We chose a particularly 'rich' transcript and analysed it line-by-line to develop an initial list of 1st-order terms (codes). The task was conducted independently by both researchers, using NVivo 10.

We compared and refined the two lists to arrive at one definitive list. As the two researchers continued the process of coding subsequent transcripts, the list of terms inevitably increased but was subsequently examined to identify similarities allowing us to reduce the list of terms to a more manageable number. Once coding was complete, the 1st-order terms were given phrasal descriptors, based on terminology used by respondents. The next stage involved a process of abstraction to 2nd-order theoretical themes that were one-step removed from respondent accounts. The final step in the process was to determine whether it was possible to aggregate any of these themes to overarching dimensions. The process is shown in Fig. 2.

In coding the data for stage 2 (using NVivo 12), we identified data segments for the two competing demands for each of the six resources. For example, for the resource *attentional engagement*, respondents recognised the importance of devoting time and mental energy to develop the brief. A good brief saved time in the long run by helping the agency to 'get it right first time'. However, many respondents also acknowledged the tendency to cut corners to save time because of the demands of an excessive workload. Choosing the latter strategy resulted in reduced task-performance and resource deficiency. The next step in the analytical process was to identify how respondents managed the tension and whether they achieved equality between the two opposing poles. Continuing with the example of *attentional engagement*, we found that some clients managed the two strategies – task focus versus multitasking (Gruszka & Necka, 2017) – by involving the agency in the development of the brief, thus finding a novel synergy rather than choosing between one or other tension (Smith, 2014). Rather than the agency being the recipient of the brief, the agency acted as an extension of the marketing department, crafting the brief with the client. Clients considered the outcome of a team-developed brief to be superior to an individually produced brief. We refer to this synergy as *resource augmentation*. Furthermore, we found that involving the agency in the development of the brief led to heightened levels of trust and commitment in the relationship. The relational resource was thus increased. We refer to this 'by-product' of managing the paradox as *secondary resource activation*. In order to substantiate the analytical process for stage 2, we show "proof quotes" (Pratt, 2008, p. 501) for the opposing poles for each resource, the management of the tension, and the additional resource activation (see Appendix)

4. Findings

4.1. Stage 1

The analysis process (Fig. 2) resulted in the identification of six customer resource deficiencies. The first concerned the level of attention given by the client to the preparation of the project brief. We call this *attentional engagement* (Ocasio, 2011). It is the deliberate application of an individual's cognition to a specific task. "Some clients are shabby about getting us a proper brief which is dangerous because you can come back with work and they say 'it's not on brief' and you have nothing to fall back on" (Caroline) and 'We used to have face-to-face briefing meetings but we don't do that so much now because [the client] has got busier' (Richard). We interpret this as being a symptom of a lack of attentional focus by the client. Task overload means that cognitive resources are fragmented and only a portion of the necessary resource is devoted to task fulfilment (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991).

The second concerned the provision of *information*. 'You've got to guess sometimes. You shouldn't really. I should send the brief back and ask for more information, but sometimes it's easier to do it as you think it should be done' (Julian). Information relating to core elements such as goals, preferences, and context is essential for solutions that are client specific (Jaakkola & Hakanen, 2013). Furthermore, information needs to be transferred using appropriately structured mechanisms to ensure effective knowledge transfer (Suh, Derick Sohn, & Yeon Kwak, 2004).

The third concerned *time*. "Time restrictions are the biggest problem. You don't get time to explore the job. You lose the thinking time at the beginning. You look back and think 'if only I'd had more time'" (Chris). Studies have highlighted the necessity for sufficient time to

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Table 1
Contextual information for stage 2 respondents.

Respondent (pseudonym)	Industry sector	Role	Years of experience in marketing (1–5, 6–10, > 10)
Alastair	Retail banking	Head of Marketing	> 10
Alison	Legal	Head of Marketing	> 10
Amanda	Retail (home furnishings)	Head of Marketing	> 10
Anna	Higher education	Brand Manager	1–5
Barbara	Insurance (retail)	Marketing Manager	1–5
Caroline	Financial services	Marketing Manager	6–10
Clare	IT	Marketing Director	> 10
David	Utilities	Marketing Director	> 10
Deborah	Food and drink	Marketing Director	> 10
Fiona	Utilities	Marketing Director	> 10
Graham	Security (B-to-B)	Marketing Director	> 10
Heather	Construction	Marketing Manager	6–10
Helen	Food and drink	Senior brand Manager	1–5
Isla	Travel	Marketing Director	> 10
Jeremy	Food and drink	Marketing Director	> 10
Kevin	Construction	Marketing Director	> 10
Louise	Financial services	Senior Brand Manager	6–10
Maggie	Food and drink	Marketing Director	> 10
Mark	Publishing	Head of Marketing	> 10
Matt	Retail (home furnishings)	Head of Marketing	1–5
Nick	Legal	Head of Marketing	> 10
Olivia	Food and drink	Senior Brand Manager	1–5
Peter	Food and drink	Brand Director	> 10
Rachel	Hospitality	Marketing Controller	> 10
Robin	Charity (heritage)	Head of Marketing	> 10
Sandra	Food and drink	Marketing Manager	6–10
Sarah	Publishing	Head of Marketing	> 10
Simon	Consumer goods (electrical)	Marketing Director	> 10
Steve	Insurance (retail)	Marketing Manager	6–10
Tom	Insurance (retail)	Marketing Manager	6–10
Vicky	Higher education	Marketing Manager	> 10

explore creative solutions (Lawson, 2001; Wang, Wenyu, Hairong, & Zhou, 2013).

The fourth concerned *expertise*. “We really need to meet the decision makers at the outset. It prevents a lot of time wasting. You get a senior manager who suddenly says to the junior ‘that's not what we wanted. Why did you ask the agency to do that?’” (Clare). Junior managers lack the expertise to translate the requirement into a brief (Smith, Collins, & Clark, 2005).

The fifth concerned the extent to which clients grant their agencies *autonomy*. ‘We want them to give us the message they want to communicate and then give us the scope to explore and make recommendations…We have one client who tells us in a very prescriptive way where everything should be.’ (Sam). A combination of job autonomy (freedom to use discretion when performing tasks) and supervisory autonomy (‘supervisors’ giving consideration to the perspectives of subordinates) is a predictor of intrinsic motivation and creativity (Li, Li, & Chen, 2018).

The sixth concerned risk orientation and *innovation*. “They might say ‘we love that idea, but our brand isn't ready for that yet.’ Client timidity is a big barrier to us creating great work” (Amy). Some felt this was because of the increased pressure on marketers to demonstrate a return on investment. Organizational culture and personal risk-orientation have an impact on innovation (Garcia-Granero, Llopis, Fernandez-Mesa, & Alegre, 2015). Ali, Ali, Al-Maimani, and Park (2018) highlight the perception that a higher degree of control (formalization) hinders exploratory innovation.

4.2. Stage 2

We present the findings according to the six resource deficiencies identified in stage 1. In each instance, we discuss the importance of the resource, the resource deficiency, and the approach to management of the tensions influencing resource allocation.

4.2.1. Attentional engagement

All clients recognised the importance of a good brief for an efficient process and effective outcome. However, many admitted that excessive workloads meant it was difficult to devote sufficient time to the task, resulting in a substandard brief. There was a tension between focusing single-mindedly on the task and juggling a multitude of necessary tasks:

> Everybody is always busy. If you wait for a free slot to do it, you'll never find one. It's easy to say you've not got time but it's a false economy. The process is there to guarantee quality and efficiency, but you get into bad habits and I can think of many occasions where I've rushed it. (Deborah).

Some clients told us that, rather than resigning themselves to a substandard brief, they invited the agency to jointly formulate the brief. Although there was still a time-commitment, clients said that a jointly-formulated brief would save time in the long run because it would reduce the need for the agency to contact the client for clarification and would ensure both parties were aligned in terms of interpretation, reducing the risk of the agency producing unsatisfactory work. Joint development of the brief harnesses and focuses the client's attention thus augmenting the resource. Joint development of the brief is the catalyst for a better brief than might have been written by the client alone:

> We discuss the project and they [the agency] develop the brief in the meeting. They can ask questions. It works really well. This way, we get fewer issues further down the line. The creative work they come back with is near enough what we are expecting. (Barbara).

In addition to resolving the attentional engagement resource issue, respondents noted that joint crafting of the brief also improved the relationship: ‘the agency begins to see itself as a strategic partner rather than a supplier. It changes the nature of the relationship for the better’ (Graham). Thus, not only does the action of co-creating the brief accommodate the tensions through novel synergy, it simultaneously activates the relational resource.

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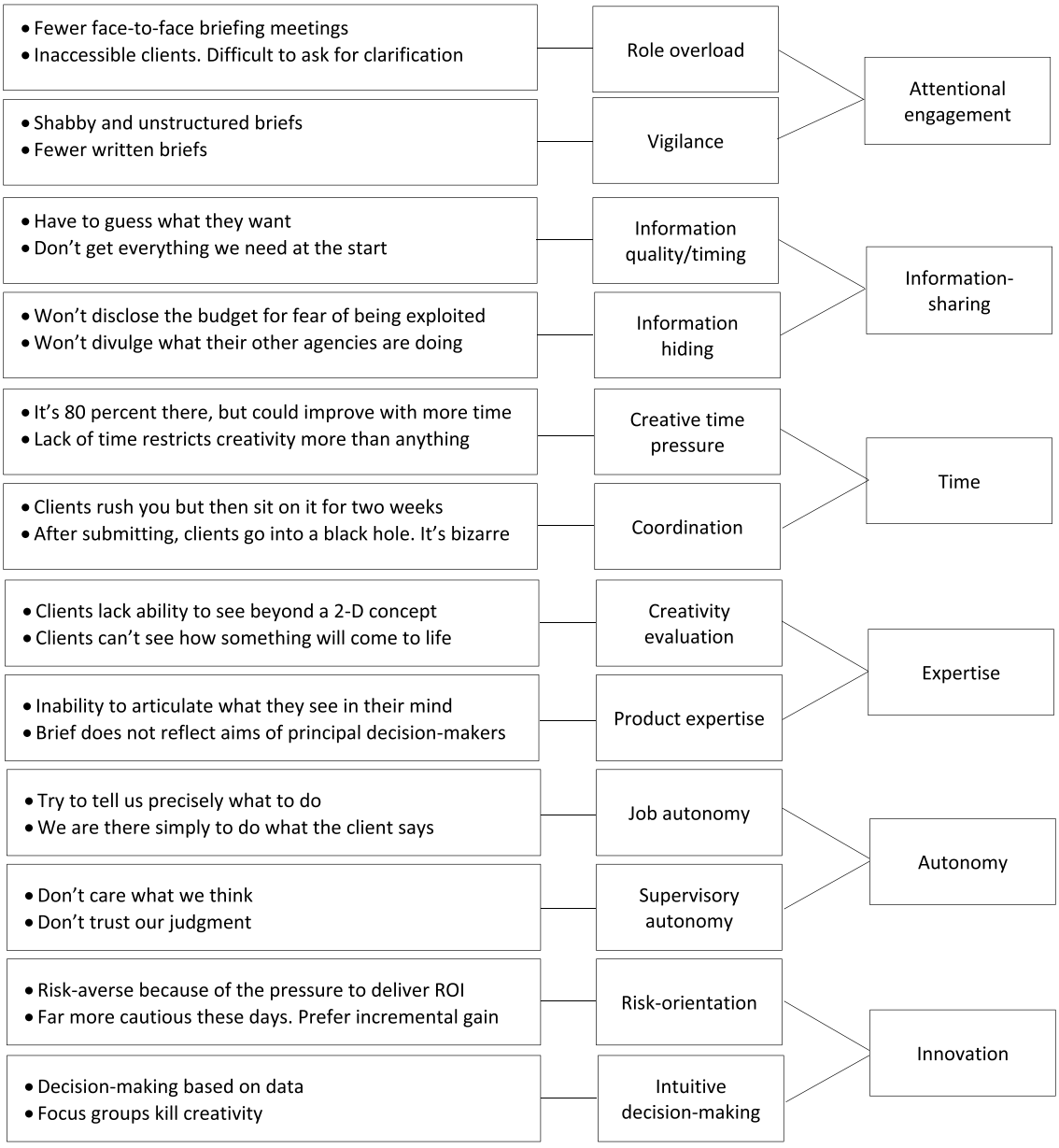

Fig. 2. Stage 1 data analysis.

4.2.2. Information

Clients recognised the need to provide the agency with sufficient information for it to be able to respond with relevant creative work:

> Clearly you need enough, you need sufficient, information to be clear on the context, and where you're trying to get to. All of that sort of stuff. Otherwise they can make mistakes. (Peter).

However, some respondents identified the tension between providing sufficient information so agencies could deliver a quality output versus providing so much that they struggled to isolate core information:

> Obviously, what you have to be careful of is overloading people. There's no point sending reams of stuff. There's a tendency for people to say "well, if in doubt I'll send them everything" and sometimes that's worse because people get overwhelmed. (Peter).

Despite this, clients indicated pressure from agencies to provide an abundance of information. Attempts by clients to limit information to avoid overload would be interpreted as a resource deficiency: 'you get a list of information that the agency wants, and it includes everything including your inside leg measurement' (Kevin). Many clients recognised the need for a balance, 'I would like to see a halfway house where it's not about throwing everything at the agency but about giving the agency the best and relevant insight' (Alastair).

The suggestion from some for resolving the tension was to use a briefing template. This would typically consist of answers to key questions such as objectives, target audience, and core proposition: 'I have been trying to discipline the team to use the template. It's one side of A4 with bullet points. That really focuses the mind' (Mark). The consequence is an augmented resource allocation – information of optimum quantity and relevance. Several clients said they invited the agency to provide its own template. Agency involvement in shaping the content of the brief had a positive effect on its commitment. It not only

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ensured an optimum allocation of information but also activated the relational resource:

> I will always sit down with a new agency and say, “what do we think, what do we agree makes a good brief?” We create a template together. That way they own it and feel involved. It has their fingerprints on it. (Tom).

Our first stage of research revealed a suspicion that clients sometimes hide information. We found that some did indeed intentionally withhold information:

> Ideally, we will be as open as possible, but there are some occasions where that isn't the right tactic. This crops up particularly with bigger agencies. They'll say, “It would be great to know what your PR agency is doing”, but if I know the agency has a PR department, I will ask myself why they want to know. I understand that it might help if they have the bigger picture, but equally I know that they are trying to zoom in on that work and take it. If there is the suspicion that an agency is trying to increase its share of the pie rather than doing it for my benefit, that's when I hold back information. (Nick).

This perspective identifies an additional tension in information sharing, namely, complete transparency so that the agency has a comprehensive picture of the client's strategy versus withholding information in order to protect oneself from opportunistic behaviour. In this instance, the client opted for one of the two alternative poles rather than seeking an accommodation.

4.2.3. Time

Clients recognise that there is a minimum amount of time required for a quality output. Anything less could negatively affect creativity, partly because of the inability to explore a range of solutions, and partly because of the stress it places on creative personnel:

> The agency needs to spend time getting immersed in the brand and the organizational context. (Jeremy).

> Sometimes you brief a job on a Friday at 4 pm and you need it Monday morning. As a client, you need to understand the impact that can have. The more this type of thing happens, the more it puts a lot of strain on the agency and it becomes demotivating. (Rachel).

On the other hand, all respondents acknowledged that time is a luxury. Time frames are shorter, and technology is such that firms can and do react instantly to external events.

> Clients don't have the time they used to have. Maybe that message hasn't got back to the agency yet. Well, welcome to my world. It isn't going to be how it used to be. Let's accept it's gone. We need to work out how to deal with it. (Graham).

Several respondents described an accommodation that simultaneously accepted deadlines while also accepting that too little time negatively affected performance. It involved meeting the agency before the start of the year to share the annual plan. With knowledge of the schedule, the agency could undertake a degree of preparation prior to formal project briefings. In this way, the pressure exerted by deadlines is mitigated. In fact, this accommodation augments the resource allocation by giving the agency more time than they would otherwise have for the incubation stage of the creative process, where an individual is unconsciously processing information and generating ideas:

> We created a marketing schedule for next year. We presented it to them during the final quarter of this year. They can plan their resources. You need to work with an agency that you trust enough to say, “We've got a major project that's going to hit us next May.” With this information, they can do some of the thinking upfront. (Sandra).

Besides accommodating the tensions in time-resourcing, this approach delivers the additional benefit of enhancing the relationship between client and agency: ‘We have quarterly strategic reviews to discuss what's coming up, what they can plan for, and to tell them how our business is going. It buys motivation and means they feel involved’ (Mark).

Respondents added the proviso that not all work could be identified several months in advance. There was inevitably a proportion of work that was reactive: “you might have to say, ‘Look, sorry guys, you've got two days to do this job’” (Peter). Instances would invariably arise where no accommodation was possible.

4.2.4. Expertise

Senior clients recognised the necessity of delegating project management to subordinates. Not only does it contribute to the personal development of junior managers, it frees up time for senior managers to concentrate on higher-level strategic tasks: ‘it's a fact of life, we have to delegate agency tasks. It goes back to this time-poor issue’ (Graham).

However, with delegation comes risk. Some of the consequences highlighted by respondents included misinterpretation of the firm's requirement, resulting in poor briefing by the junior manager; elongation of the time required to accomplish tasks, resulting in additional charges; and poor management of the agency leading to conflict, to the point where the agency -bypasses the junior manager to access the expertise of the senior manager:

> Junior members of the team might get to version six or seven. If you're working with a retained agency, it's eating into your contracted hours. If it's not a retained agency, then I will be billed. (Amanda).

Clients highlighted two approaches to accommodate these tensions. The first involves a degree of oversight from the senior manager, for example by checking the brief before it goes to the agency:

> You don't mark the work of your juniors, but you make suggestions. It shouldn't go anywhere near an agency until I've seen it. A poor brief means more iterations and more money. (Nick).

The novel approach that some clients advocated was to involve the agency in training junior mangers. This simultaneously acknowledges that, on the one hand, delegation is an inevitable aspect of project management but, on the other, a lack of expertise can lead to costly negative consequences. The approach confronts the two tensions by sharing the development of the expertise with the agency:

> My team spend a day a month at the agency. They learn how to write a brief and how to evaluate creative work. They learn what happens to a brief once the agency receives it, so they appreciate how important the brief is. They even get to work in a creative team that responds to the brief. It's a fun way of learning about the importance of the brief and how interpretations can be misaligned. (Amanda).

This approach develops expertise that is attuned to the needs of the agency. The resource is augmented. It has greater value because the agency uses its knowledge to cultivate expertise in its partner: ‘it means agencies can mould junior managers from the start and instil good practice’ (Louise). Furthermore, this approach activates the relational resource by increasing interaction between client and agency, by demonstrating the agency's benevolence through its investment in the training of junior managers, and by increasing client dependence: ‘they've [the agency] become an essential component. We rely on them more and more’ (Heather).

4.2.5. Autonomy

In stage 1, agencies lamented the lack of autonomy they received from many clients. When questioned, clients acknowledged the importance of giving agencies freedom:

> Unless you give them freedom, you're tying one hand behind their backs. That seems pointless to me because the reason for going to these people is to get creativity that's unencumbered. (Caroline).

The use of the word ‘unencumbered’ is reference to the idea that

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greater creativity emerges from those external to the organization, unconstrained by established mental models. However, clients are simultaneously trying to ensure that creative work does not stray outside the bounds of acceptability. In addition, they exercise control to improve the likelihood that the agency meets the brief at its first response:

> You want to ensure that the creative work is where it needs to be. I don't have the slack in my budget to pay for work that goes off-brief and needs several stages to bring it back-on-track. I admit I err on the side of caution and that I am ultimately rather prescriptive, but it protects me. (Isla).

Some clients try to accommodate the tensions by holding an intermediate meeting, a 'tissue meeting', between the initial briefing and the agency's formal response. This gives the client the opportunity to check that interpretations of the brief are aligned:

> With bigger projects we will usually have a tissue session to make sure we are aligned. It means I can voice objections or justifications for particular approaches. While I might be erecting barriers to approaches, I am also part of the discussion that explores how to overcome barriers. (Amanda).

Furthermore, some mentioned the positive effect of this approach on the relationship. Resisting the temptation to be prescriptive is a demonstration of trust: 'you are demonstrating that you trust them to do great things creatively, beyond the brief but not at the expense of the brief' (Sandra).

However, there were also situations where clients said there could be no accommodation. The agency would be told what was required with no freedom to deviate. For example: "sometimes, for certain stakeholders, you get a job where you have to follow their instructions. It's what I call a 'just do it' brief" (Nick).

4.2.6. Innovation

Clients recognised the need for ideas that establish marketplace differentiation. Innovation is an essential resource for an organization but is dependent on managerial risk preference. Clients acknowledged the need to access creative thinking that produces new ideas or reconfigures existing ideas: 'If they start thinking like us and start giving me the advertising I think I want, we've lost the plot' (Maggie) and 'we want them to look at it in a different way. We don't want the same as everyone else' (Alison).

However, while espousing novelty, many admitted that they were unlikely to pursue ground-breaking ideas. Pressure to demonstrate a return on investment means that many clients eschew risk in preference for caution and incremental growth. Some admitted they did not relish the prospect of justifying radical ideas to their superiors: 'clients would love to change the world but there is a lot of conservative pressure. Clients who can be disruptive are the exception' (Caroline).

Some clients advocated an approach that was more contextualised. Risk-taking was not outlawed but had to be applied in appropriate contexts, with some brands/problems warranting a novel approach and others a 'hold' approach. Other respondents adopted an approach that accommodated both radical and incremental:

> I've told my agencies that I welcome radical ideas so long as they are part of a response that also delivers the expected. We need to see a plan B as well as plan A. We can't always reinvent the wheel. And you know sometimes, after a period of time, we come back to those radical ideas and develop them (Nick).

This balanced approach enables the client to adopt a conservative position in the short term while still providing scope for reassessment in the future: 'they made us realise we were asking the wrong question. They moved the goal posts' (Olivia). By sanctioning radical as well as incremental responses, the client not only releases the innovation resource that the agency seeks, but also contributes to maintaining a motivated agency which, in turn, improves creativity and the relationship climate:

> Some designers can get to a point where they feel they are just reworking old ideas. It's quite disheartening for them. Creative people need to be creative. We need to show we trust them so that they aren't afraid to challenge our thinking. (Rachel).

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Theoretical implications

Value co-creation is dependent on the integration, by actors, of mutual resources through a process of collaboration and dialogue (Grönroos, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). In our chosen context, agencies (service providers) combine their resources with those of marketers (customers) to create value outcomes. However, in order to fulfil the value proposition and realise the maximum potential value outcome, the customer, as well as the service provider, needs to allocate the appropriate quality and quantity of requisite resources (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014; Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012). Failure to do so results in defective value co-creation (Greer, 2015). Stage 1 of our study revealed that marketing agencies (providers) complain that they are unable to co-create maximum value because of the inadequacy of key resources applied by marketers (customers). The principal goal of this study was to understand, from the customer perspective, the reasons for these resource deficiencies and whether, and how, customers overcome resource constraints.

We found that customers are confronted by tensions when allocating resources for integration. Vargo and Lusch (2017) suggest that the existence of tensions and paradoxes points towards areas where theory building is needed. We address the call for research that explores the resource integration process and, more specifically, factors that lead customers to refrain from providing necessary inputs (Mustak, Jaakkola, Halinen, & Kaartemo, 2016; Plé, 2016). Although our study is context-specific (client–agency relationships), all of the resources identified in our study are prevalent in generic business contexts, so the allocation issues and management strategies are relevant and, with some modification, transferable.

Our study makes several contributions to knowledge. First, we explore strategies for overcoming potential customer resource deficiencies. Customer resource integration, both in the S-D logic and customer engagement literature, has been explored in relation to antecedents such as customer motivation, volition, and knowledge (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017; Hollebeek, Srivastava, & Chen, 2019; Malshe & Friend, 2018; Pera, Occhiocupo, & Clarke, 2016; Storbacka et al., 2016). However, there is a lack of research into the impact and management of tensions in customer resource allocation. Regardless of how motivated, willing, or capable a customer may be to contribute resources and participate in value co-creation, institutional constraints can hinder resource allocation. Customers face competing demands for resources. Paradox has much to offer as a framework for increasing our understanding of resource allocation strategies and we believe this paper is the first to use a paradox approach to examine customer resource integration.

Our study shows how customers can manage resource allocation so that resource scarcity need not detrimentally affect resource integration. For example, marketers are aware that agency performance is dependent on a well-constructed brief and that writing a good brief requires significant mental application. However, the demands of the job are such that isolating sufficient time to give the brief the attention it deserves is almost impossible because of the multitude of tasks that fragment cognitive resources. This tension, together with others revealed in our study, persists over time and is seemingly unresolvable.

While some choose between the competing poles, often choosing the pole that leads to a deficiency in resource allocation (as perceived by our agency respondents in stage 1), we show that others adopted a solution – that of co-crafting the brief with the agency rather than writing it in isolation – that accommodates both poles instead of a trade-off of one against the other (Smith & Tracey, 2016). That said, some of those respondents highlighted that a 'both/and' approach was not always feasible, and that context might dictate having to adopt a dynamic approach, on some occasions accommodating the opposing poles of the tension but also sometimes taking a contingency perspective and choosing one or other of the poles (Smith, 2014; Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Second, we show that, in some instances, the service provider can influence or control customer resource deployment. To date, there has been limited research that explores how service providers can interact to enable customer resource integration. There is a recognition that more research is needed if firms are to successfully leverage customer-owned resources (Harmeling et al., 2017; Hibbert et al., 2012; Ng, Plewa, & Sweeney, 2016). In the case of attentional engagement described above, rather than bemoaning customer resource inadequacy or demanding more of a scarce resource, agencies can manage the deployment of the customer resource. In co-crafting the brief with the customer, the agency helps to ensure that the scarce resource is deployed effectively. This is more than just compensating for a customer resource deficiency. The agency accepts the resource allocation but works with the customer to manage its deployment. In so doing, it augments the resource. We see this as an example of a novel synergy (Eisenhardt & Westcott, 1988; Schad et al., 2019). The brief that emerges is likely to be better than it would have been had the customer written it in isolation. Similarly, with information provision, the service provider can influence the deployment of the resource by developing a briefing template with the customer so that the optimum quality and quantity of information is provided. The resource is augmented because its value is greater than it might otherwise have been had the customer decided, in isolation, what information to provide to the service provider. In the case of expertise, we show how the service provider can resolve the tension between delegating to a junior on the one hand versus retaining decision-making by an expert on the other, by accepting responsibility to train junior managers. This ensures that training is tailored to the needs of the service provider. A participative approach, that takes into consideration stakeholder preferences through knowledge exchange, is more likely to reduce conflict (Guaita-Martínez, de Castro-Pardo, Pérez-Rodríguez, & Martín, 2019).

Third, we show how the accommodation of both poles in the management of strategic paradoxes not only offers a synergistic resolution to choosing one or other pole but can also activate an unintended second resource as a 'by-product' of the process. For example, we found that the strategy of involving the service provider in co-crafting the brief had a beneficial effect on the relational resource by making the partnership more collaborative and less adversarial. In the long run, it reduced the potential for conflict that comes from misinterpretation of the brief and increased agency commitment. This is an important finding because we know that the presence of a relational resource is an important enabler for value co-creation (Neghina, Caniels, Bloemer, & van Bergelen, 2015; Petri & Jacob, 2016). Fig. 3 shows the process of resource integration including the synergistic solution to accommodate both poles of the tension, the application of resources by the provider to facilitate customer resource deployment, and the activation of a secondary resource that enhances the deployment and integration of provider resources.

5.2. Managerial implications

The findings from stage 1 of this study revealed the frustration of service providers who feel unable to fulfil their value proposition because of the lack, or inappropriateness, of customer resource provision. The second stage of our study may help customers and providers to manage customer resource allocation and deployment more effectively, so that there is a greater likelihood of maximising the value co-creation process.

Customers can overcome many seemingly irreconcilable and competing resource demands. A paradox perspective shows that it is not always necessary to adopt an *either/or* stance. Novel solutions can be found that accommodate opposing sides of the tension which, in practical terms, means that the provider is more likely to be able to deliver the service as promised. In some situations, customers can invite the service provider to participate in the solution, thereby improving the likelihood that the customer resource is deployed as effectively as possible. A good example in the context of our study is the writing of the brief. Previously the preserve of the marketer, we found examples of marketer and agency co-crafting the brief. Although this requires the agency to input resources at an earlier stage in the value co-creation process than would normally be required, it allows the agency to harness the marketer's engagement so that it is employed productively. The result will be a focused brief that gives the agency everything it needs at the start of the project, saving it time (resources) in the long run. Furthermore, the involvement of the provider in the solution increases collaboration, thereby improving the relationship. It is a demonstration of the customer's trust in, and commitment towards, the provider, which will most likely be reciprocated in the form of enhanced motivation.

There are, however, several qualifications. First, as some respondents admitted, circumstances can sometimes dictate that it is impossible to overcome institutional constraints and that, in the words of many of our respondents, the provider has to accept the situation and 'just do it'. Novel solutions may be the preferred approach, but not always the default approach. Second, some of the solutions identified in our study, such as sharing the strategic marketing plan with the agency

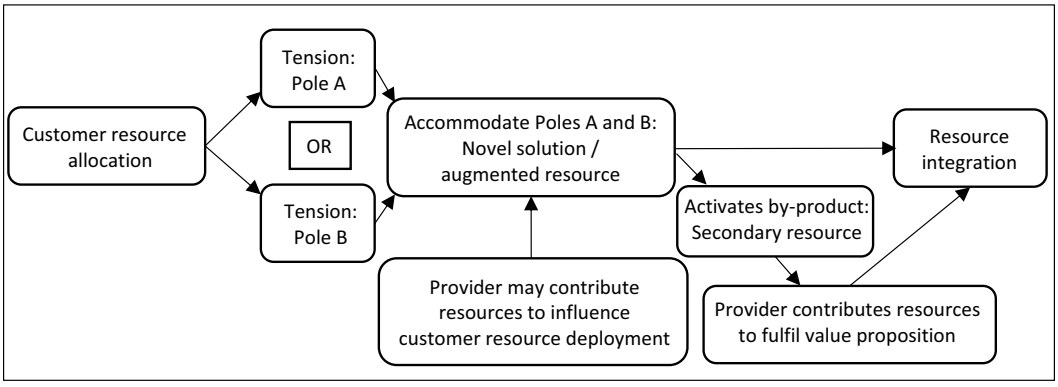

Fig. 3. Engaging a paradox perspective for resource integration.

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at the start of the year, require a significant element of trust. Clients who prefer the freedom to operate on a project-by-project basis are unlikely to develop the closeness and intensity of trust required to share this level of sensitive information. Novel synergistic solutions lend themselves more to long-term relationships than to one-off transactional exchanges. Third, it was primarily senior managers in our study who identified the possibility for novel solutions. In situations where the customer is a junior manager, providers may need to take responsibility and recommend alternative methods for resource allocation. That said, we acknowledge that there is a power imbalance in many provider–customer relationships such that service providers may be nervous of suggesting anything that might be misinterpreted as opportunism. Finally, regardless of seniority, some customers may not see it as their responsibility to solve problems relating to resource scarcity, allocation, and deployment, regardless of the fact that the quality of the service outcome may suffer. To some, the resource is what it is and if the service provider wants to work with the customer, they must do so on those terms. Furthermore, if they judge the service outcome to be inferior, they have the option to find an alternative supplier. In these circumstances, service providers need to decide if they can, and are prepared, to work under these conditions.

6. Limitations and future research

As might be expected, the limitations of this study suggest avenues for future research. First, although our research collected the views of agency and client respondents, it was not truly dyadic. Future research could gather data from matched pairs in a relationship. This would allow the researcher to build a rich picture of relationship context in order to determine the effect of context on the management of tensions. For example, to what extent are novel solutions, characterised by enhanced collaboration and interaction, dependent on relational dimensions such as trust, openness, and power symmetry? A dyadic approach would also provide the opportunity to explore the extent to which tensions in customer resource allocation can be co-managed by customer and provider. This is important because, in situations where the provider is working with a less experienced customer, there may be opportunities for the provider to proactively recommend ways of dealing with a resource tension.

Second, we noted that, in some situations, customers said that accommodation of both poles of the tension was not feasible. Future research could explore the dynamic nature of resource allocation decision-making. In what circumstances are managers forced to choose between opposing poles of the tension rather than accommodating the paradox? What are the barriers to the consistent application of a paradox perspective? Are there psychological as well as structural barriers?

The context for our research was the client–agency relationship, a business-to-business professional service. Although all of the resources identified in our study are generic, sector context may influence the management of tensions. Furthermore, our context was one in which customer resource allocation is mandatory. Future research could explore the management of resource tensions in a variety of sector contexts and in contexts where there is greater discretion over whether or not to allocate the resource.

Finally, we, and our respondents, assumed that accommodating both poles in a paradox was likely to lead to a better outcome than choosing one or other of the poles. However, this may not always hold true. Two of our respondents discussed occasions where their agencies, under extreme time pressure, produced some of the best creative work they had ever seen. Are there some circumstances in which a resource deficiency could actually be beneficial rather than, as one might assume, value-destroying? Future research could compare the respective value outcomes from accommodating tensions versus selecting one or other tension.

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Appendix

Additional respondent quotes for stage 2.

Resource: Attentional engagement	Pole A: Task focus	The brief should be the most important job that day. (Steve)
		If you don't put the effort in upfront, the rest of the process will be very hard. (Alastair)
	Pole B: Multi-tasking	These days, people have a million things on their agenda and sometimes the prioritisation of important things over urgent things doesn't happen. (Peter)
		There are so many things to do, the temptation is to cut corners and think “I can brief the agency at the water cooler.” (Tom)
	Synergy: Primary resource augmentation	The best outputs come from collaboration with the agency. For example, I had one job, probably the best creative work I've seen from an agency, where I spent the best part of a day with the creatives discussing the project…Some agencies can lever the brief from you. This can be more effective and time-efficient in the long-run than me writing the brief in isolation. (David)
	Synergy: Secondary resource activation	Drafting the brief together makes the whole partnership less transactional and more relational. It's less adversarial and more collaborative. (Alastair)
Resource: Information	Pole A: Full information-sharing	Typically, I'm asked for audience insights and strategic information. As an organization, we don't always have some of the information the agency wants, but I appreciate this information is important. (Matt)
		I think my briefs have got more in-depth and now, I very rarely do less than, even on a small job, of three- or four-page brief, to give an agency absolutely everything of what they need to work with. (Alison)
	Pole B: Partial information-sharing	It's possible to give too much information. Some clients can be over-diligent. They put in a whole lot of information that is not laser-focused on the problem and outcome. (Clare)
		There's a tendency to dump everything in a brief without any distillation of the problem to be solved. (Robin)
	Synergy: Primary resource augmentation	Templates mean you apply a systematised approach. It's a standardised framework which helps you to think about, you know, the core five or six questions that need answering. (Peter)
	Synergy: Secondary resource activation	The template was a combined effort. Input from us and the agency. We worked with the agency to make sure it worked for them. They bought into it and appreciated it. (Jeremy)

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Resource: Time	Pole A: Immersion	Without doubt, time is a big issue. You have to build enough time into the creative process. Naturally, as a client, I want the best possible work going out the door because it has my name on it as well as the agency's name. (Maggie)
		There is an optimum amount of time to deliver on a project. If we take big strategic projects, three to four weeks is what is really needed. This amount of time means the project stays front of mind and gives the agency the chance to explore options. (Amanda)
	Pole B: Time pressure	Time frames are much shorter than most agencies would say is acceptable. I'm working on a brand refresh project at the moment. I asked the board if we could start planning the project, without actually executing anything. Just do some prep work. But I never got sign off. And then they say, "we want to do it now and we need it tomorrow." You know, I could have started it a year previously and done some preparation. You don't get the luxury of that anymore. (Kevin)
		Many businesses are incredibly reactive. The requirement can change very quickly. When that's the case, if the agency wants to work with you, they've just got to go with it. I'm under that pressure, so they've got to be under that pressure too. (David)
	Synergy: Primary resource augmentation	I say to them, "this brief is coming in six months' time You can start thinking about it now to make sure you've got everything lined up, so you've got the right resources in place." (Robin)
	Synergy: Secondary resource activation	It makes them feel like an extension of your own marketing team. They feel five desks away not five miles away. It's more of a partnership. (Jeremy)
Resource: Expertise	Pole A: Decision-making delegation	It can be quite challenging, but we have to give them [juniors] space to develop. (Sandra)
		You have to let them [juniors] have ownership of the briefing process, but with that, inevitably, will come mistakes. (Robin)
	Pole B: Decision-making retention	The person briefing the agency hasn't ensured agency interpretation. They just hand over the brief and assume the agency understands. It can be because of a lack of confidence and not wanting to get into an in-depth discussion. (Nick)
		The challenge we have is that a lot of briefing goes on at a relatively junior level of the organization and is received by a relatively junior person at the agency. So, there is often a disconnect between what the client wants and what the agency thinks they want. (Alastair)
	Synergy: Primary resource augmentation	The agency develops our team so that they become the right people to for it to deal with. It's a win-win situation. (Graham)
	Synergy: Secondary resource activation	The training is beneficial. It's a good idea for the client to spend time at the agency. It builds understanding of agency processes and it builds the relationship. (Rachel)
Resource: Autonomy	Pole A: Freedom	Getting a different perspective is invaluable and that's why we hire a creative agency; to get that different perspective, to get people who are not bogged down in the day-to-day and who don't feel the same kind of brand constraints or whatever that we feel. They're freer. (Caroline)
		We need to always make sure we give the agency the problem and not the solution. (Sandra)
	Pole B: Control	Sometimes they [the agency] try something new but I'll be a little bit conservative because I want to keep the DNA of [the brand]. (Olivia)
		We recognise it [control] is an issue. Our stakeholders have a massive influence on the end result. It's not just the agency that's controlled, we, the marketers, are too. Even if we really love the agency's ideas, they won't see the light of day unless they get stakeholder buy-in. (Barbara)
	Synergy: Primary resource augmentation	You need to ensure you minimise the misses. You need an on-going dialogue between handing over the brief and seeing the first output. It shouldn't be micro-managing but what I call a check-in. (Clare)
	Synergy: Secondary resource activation	You have to lead without controlling. You have to show them you trust them to do their job. (Robin)
Resource: Innovation	Pole A: Risk-taking	I'm always up for an off-the-world idea. Anything that shows us they've been thinking around the project and not just responded with the obvious. (Clare)
		I want them to come to me and say: "We've had this idea and we want to show it to you". I want them to disrupt my thinking. (Tom)
	Pole B: Risk-averse	Marketers are less inclined to be brave. The business has invested in marketing and wants a return. "I've got a good gut-feel for this" is not a good enough justification. (Graham)
		Although at the briefing stage we ask for a wildcard idea and tell them we want them to explore, my experience is that, a lot of the time, although we want the range of options, the final outcome is always the safe option. (Anna)
	Synergy: Primary resource augmentation	I'm happy to see radical ideas as part of a balanced approach. It can help us to refine our thinking. It can be a useful way of deciding where boundaries need to be. (Kevin)
	Synergy: Secondary resource activation	'I could say, "it's not our job to keep you motivated," but what would happen is that the best creatives in the agency would leave, and you have to start building relationships from scratch and getting them up to speed with the brand. So, it's all about balance. It's partly the client's responsibility. It comes down to building a relationship and showing some respect. (Tom)

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