

# Scaling collaboration and innovation through tri-sector partnerships\*

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## Abstract

Tri-sector mindset brings private, public and government sectors and their resources together for social impact. This article introduces and discusses tri-sector innovations as a scalable way for entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs to unlock value, survive, and thrive in increasingly competitive and volatile marketplaces. Following a review of extant research, examples of tri-sector innovations and practical resources and tools to synthesize, develop, and deploy tri-sector innovations, an agenda for future research is provided.

*Key words:* Tri-sector partnerships, collaboration, innovation, co-opetition, value co-creation.

## 1. Introduction

Rising geopolitical tensions, the Russo-Ukrainian war, Brexit, mass shootings, the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural disasters such as the devastating February 2023 earthquakes in Turkiye and Syria are a few examples of an increasingly more turbulent world. The volatility phenomenon is not a local or regional issue and applies globally to emerging as well as developed nations. Furthermore, the world of business is not immune; the increased turbulence is also applicable to marketplaces and firms by extension (Chen et al., 2010; D’Aveni,

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1994, 1995; D'Aveni et al., 2010; Gottinger, 2006; Ndofor, 2018; Sheth and Uslay, *forthcoming*; Thomas and D'Aveni, 2009; Wiggins and Ruefli, 2005).

Consequently, the pressure for businesses to continuously create temporal advantages and value for customers and return for investors has been increasing (Sheth and Uslay, 2022; Whalen et al., 2016). Adopting an entrepreneurial mindset is especially beneficial when markets are turbulent (Alqahtani et al., *forthcoming a,b*; Alqahtani and Uslay, 2020). Arguably, the most efficient way to create value is through value co-creation as opposed to aggressive market conduct.

A primary approach to value co-creation that has been examined extensively in product development literature includes co-designing new products with lead users. The notion of value co-creation starts with co-ideation, and “can extend to the whole spectrum: co-conception (military and defense contracts), co-design (Boeing and United Airlines), co-production (Ikea), copromotion (word of mouth), co-pricing (eBay, negotiated pricing), co-distribution (magazines), co-consumption (utility), co-maintenance (patient-doctor), co-disposal (self-serve), and even co-outsourcing (captive business process outsourcing). Networks that marketing interacts with to connect structural gaps include consumer, distributor, supplier, regulatory, and competitor networks. With this broadened perspective, co-creation is likely to result in an aggregate optimal value that is greater than the sum of two (or more) local optima,” as in the case of traditional exchange transactions (Sheth and Uslay, 2007: 305). Recently, Lee, Uslay, and Yenyurt (2023) empirically examined both pre-launch (ideation, design, and testing) and post-launch marketing processes (promotion, pricing distribution, and maintenance) and reported that business-to-consumer interactions not only enhance pre-launch consumer participation in value co-creation but also create spillover effects to post-launch co-creation through the mediation of consumer-to-consumer interactions. A mindful marketing approach has been proposed as a way to deploy resources more productively and promote mindful consumption (Malhotra et al., 2012; Ndubisi and Uslay, 2014; Sheth et al., 2011).

Another primary approach to value co-creation, co-opetitive behavior, where firms simultaneously compete and collaborate has also been explored in extant literature (e.g., Crick and Crick, 2020, 2021; Nalebuff and Brandenburger, 1996). Arguably, there are more ways to collaborate than to compete, and the notion of co-opetition captures only a fraction of the dynamics of collaboration.

Notably, despite the conventional wisdom for an inverse association, Sheth, Uslay, and Sisodia (2020) have argued for a U-shaped relationship between competition and collaboration. That is, the level of collaboration among the players in a given sector is high when competitive intensity is low. It gradually decreases when competition increases to medium levels. However, the level of collaboration increases again as the competitive intensity increases even further since firms in

hypercompetitive conditions benefit from pacts and alliances in order to survive and thrive.

While Porter's seminal work on the five forces of *competition* framework (Porter, 1979) has had immense reach in classrooms and boardrooms around the world, the analysis and utilization of the five forces of *collaboration* can be an even more important source of competitive advantage and value for stakeholders. A firm can collaborate with its suppliers, work closely with customers and distributors,<sup>1</sup> it can have formal alliances with competitors (e.g., airlines<sup>2</sup>), and invest in new entrants and substitutes (e.g., Toyota's investments in electric vehicles and ride-hailing<sup>3</sup>).

In this article, I carry the merits of collaborations one step further and focus on tri-sector innovations. The concept of tri-sector innovations is closely related to tri-sector partnerships and implies the explicit consideration and inclusion of government, social, and private sectors to address significant problems and bring about positive change at scale (Warhurst, 2001; Uslay, 2019).

The rest of this article is organized as follows. First, I introduce and discuss the concept of a tri-sector mindset for partnerships/innovations which is an emerging topic of scholarly inquiry. Next, I review the literature and summarize the findings and contributions to date. Third, an overview of the resources and diagnostic tools available for managers and entrepreneurs is provided. I conclude with future research opportunities, and a tribute to Prof. Dr. Ahmet Acar.

## 2. Trisector mindset

The roots of tri-sector partnerships lie with CSR efforts and public-private collaborations. Porter and Kramer (2011) have emphasized the concept of shared

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<sup>1</sup> For example, it is common practice for movie studios to partner with other distributors, even for major studios that have their own distribution arms (Karniouchina et al., 2023). Crowdsourcing and crowdfunding have also become commonplace (Malhotra and Uslay, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Airline industry in the United States used to be a regulated monopoly prior to 1978, where airlines had clearly defined markets. The process of deregulation was accelerated during the Reagan administration in the eighties. Airlines began to compete directly for the first time. Airline industry competition became so intense that the amount of money they lost from 1990-1993 was more than the profits the industry had accumulated since its inception! The pain for investors even led to great regret for Warren Buffet who famously said, "when the Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk, if there was a capitalist down there, he should have shot Wilbur Wright" (Sheth et al., 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Toyota probably regrets exiting its investments in Tesla too soon. It invested \$50M for a 3% stake in 2010 which it divested in 2016 (Macfarlane, 2017). By 2022, Tesla was exceeding Toyota in quarterly profits and earning eight times more profit per vehicle (Li, 2022). Its market cap is larger than Toyota, General Motors, and Ford combined! (Schultz, 2023).

value which implies that businesses, in addition to making profits, should also offer value and improve the well-being of the communities they operate in. Shared value can be created at the product or service level, through the value chain or the ecosystem, and often requires public-private partnerships. A great example of this was among a nonprofit organization called Cola Life and the Coca-Cola Company. Consumers in Zambia were able to access soft drinks but not medicine. The successful partnership utilized the space between the cola bottles in the crates to distribute anti-diarrhea kits in Zambia (Stix, 2013). The partnership between Adidas and Grameen Bank (founded by Nobel Laureate Muhammed Yunus) to offer low-cost shoes in Bangladesh or the one between Heinz, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) to deliver vitamins and other nutrients in Africa are further examples (Klein, 2011).

As depicted in Figure 1, trisector mindset can be viewed as an extension of the micro-level value co-creation framework. Value co-creation between the focal organization and stakeholders often starts with customers and can include other stakeholders such as suppliers, distributors and even competitors. These efforts are typically driven by diads and can also involve organizations of different modalities (e.g., a partnership with a non-profit organization in the case of a private business).

The next step in the evolution to unlock potential and make impact is a tri-sector mindset that also involves the government. The need for companies to partner with not only NGOs but also governments has been acknowledged (Kramer and Pfitzer, 2016). The adoption of a tri-sector mindset involves adopting a tri-sector lens and identifying opportunities to innovate and solve problems through the alignment of resources and interests from private enterprise, public, and social sectors. Such an approach enables organizations to break down sector silos, utilize and leverage assets, and provide impactful, mutually beneficial solutions (Molbak, 2017). Jens Molbak's non-profit start-up NewImpact describes the tri-sector mindset as an:

*'All of Society' approach to problem solving, one in which we understand that companies, nonprofits, and governments each play a role in advancing societal progress. Each sector contributes to and benefits from this transformative approach. By leveraging existing resources and aligning self-interests from across all three sectors, we can achieve mutual benefit, profitability, and societal progress. This mindset proposes a fundamental shift in the way we view the world and the way we solve problems, focusing on the **HOW**, rather than the what. It is an impact- and human-centered approach that is scalable in nature and can be applied to solving **all** problems—big and small—in **all** impact areas, from public health and homelessness to economic challenges and systemic inequities (NewImpact, 2023).*

In addition to founding Coinstar, which represents a great example of tri-sector innovation that was a win-win for all stakeholders (Uslay, 2019), Molbak has supported several other noteworthy examples of tri-sector partnerships. For example, Propel, a New York-based company, has developed a mobile app called "Providers" using a tri-sector business model to revamp the \$70 billion US Food Stamp (SNAP) program. The app enables users to track their SNAP benefits and access discounts, coupons, and resources such as food pantries, farmers' markets, and social services. Propel has expanded its user base by using private sector to develop a powerful technology platform and provide additional programs and offers. The social sector is involved in enhancing the ability of nonprofits to reach their target demographics with region-specific support services. The public sector is leveraged by the company to improve the efficiency of the SNAP program, potentially saving billions of dollars annually. Propel's approach offers increased spending power to SNAP users, and its tri-sector model has allowed it to discover additional resources and provide more benefits to individuals and organizations across all three sectors.

Another example is Newark, New Jersey-based MoCaFi, which is using a tri-sector approach to increase credit and lending to Black and Brown urban communities and close the racial wealth gap. By leveraging data from the \$45 billion Section 8 Housing program, MoCaFi has strategically realigned existing resources from the private, social, and public sectors to structure a sustainable business model that aligns the self-interests of each sector. The private sector contributes to product innovation, while social organizations partner with MoCaFi to extend their reach and distribute prepaid cards and credit-building products. The public sector is accessed by partnering with local cities and accessing government databases to provide economic mobility. MoCaFi's investors include Radicle Impact, Newark Venture Partners, and MasterCard, and the company continues to grow by creating financial products and services that meet the needs of the communities it serves.

Uptrust, a San Francisco-based technology company, is working to reduce incarceration rates by addressing the issue of missed court dates. By adopting a tri-sector approach, the company is leveraging public sector databases and partnering with social sector organizations to provide a communication tool that connects attorneys, probation officers, and other officials with their clients. This helps clients stay out of jail by providing them with valuable resources and opportunities. Uptrust's software engineers have created a purpose-driven tool that reduces the workload of public defenders and has resulted in a 50% reduction in failure-to-appear rates, saving tax dollars. The company has received funding from several foundations and venture labs.

These cases all highlight the power of tri-sector solutions, where collaboration between the private, public, and social sectors can lead to significant positive impact for all parties involved. Other areas where NewImpact has identified opportunities for tri-sector innovation are food utilities, emergency rental assistance, job opportunities for older citizens, and supporting minority-owned small businesses and young workers.

Examples of tri-sector collaborations from emerging markets include IMMIB (Istanbul Mine and Metal Exporters' Association) which is the leading non-profit organization formed by a coalition of six sector-based NGOs that facilitates and promotes economic growth through exports, funded by private business memberships, and collaborates closely with the ministry of foreign trade and other government entities. IMMIB also offers training, consultation, and market research services to its members. CittaSlow project, which is a collaboration between local government, private sector and civil society organizations can be considered another example. The goal is to promote sustainable urban development through Slow Cities and improve the quality of life for citizens, reduce carbon emissions, and promote green (Cicek et al., 2019). These efforts have received funding from the European Union and coordinated in part by the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Urbanization.

While there is no set formula for how each sector should be involved, tri-sector solutions are adaptable and can be applied to a variety of areas. As a proponent of the tri-sector mindset, Molbak encourages entrepreneurs and existing organizations to explore their business plans through a tri-sector lens to uncover new opportunities for collaboration and impact. While Molbak has made great strides in cultivating a tri-sector mindset in the marketplace, the academic literature on the subject remains scant and not mainstream.

### 3. Literature review

In order to identify relevant academic literature, a keyword search using Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, and Google Scholar databases was conducted through June 2023. The former two databases enabled identification and access to full text peer-reviewed articles whereas the latter helped to cast a broader net than the subscription-based databases to identify citations for other scholarly works such as book chapters, conference proceedings or unpublished dissertations. The keywords “tri-sector innovation,” “tri-sector partnership,” “tri-sector collaboration” and their variants with “tri sector” and “trisector” were used. During review of the identified articles, noteworthy articles that were cited but did not use the above keywords were also added to the Table. After eliminating those that simply used the keyword terms but focused on a different topic or theoretical

framework, 22 scholarly articles (including the current research) were identified and included in Table 1, which summarizes the key findings of extant research to date.

Notably, Warhurst (2001: p.59) observed over two decades ago that tri-sector partnerships can help address numerous social challenges such as “social and political risk management, relationship management, including the resolution of local disputes, new local skills and local procurement, more effective environmental impact assessment and social impact assessment, more effective public consultation, environmental management after site closure, International standards, voluntary codes of practice, involvement of local contractors in social risk management and social investment, building trust and confidence and co-operation, consultation processes, integration of business strategies with regional development plans, rural poverty adjustment schemes and local education programmes, allocation of roles and responsibilities between partners and defining community expectations of business, closure planning, decommissioning, site remediation, viable future land-use options and employment options, the funding of social investment projects aimed at local community development priorities, the management of foundations as vehicles for social investment.” Building on Drucker’s (1993) concept of corporate citizenship and ultimately shared value, she also identified globalization, voice of society, voluntary codes of conduct, action groups, regulation, conditions of finance, supply-chain pressures, industry peer pressure, internal pressures, and environmental change as major global drivers of tri-sector partnerships.

Like Warhurst (2001), other scholars such as Yakovleva and Alabaster (2003), Idemudia and Ite (2006), Jimena (2007), and Ite (2007) have focused on cases from the mining sector and environmental merits (Wilson 2007), whereas Te Velde (2001) examined the role of tri-sector partnerships in the context of foreign direct investments (FDI) and reported benefits especially for flow of capital, technology, skills, and management techniques.

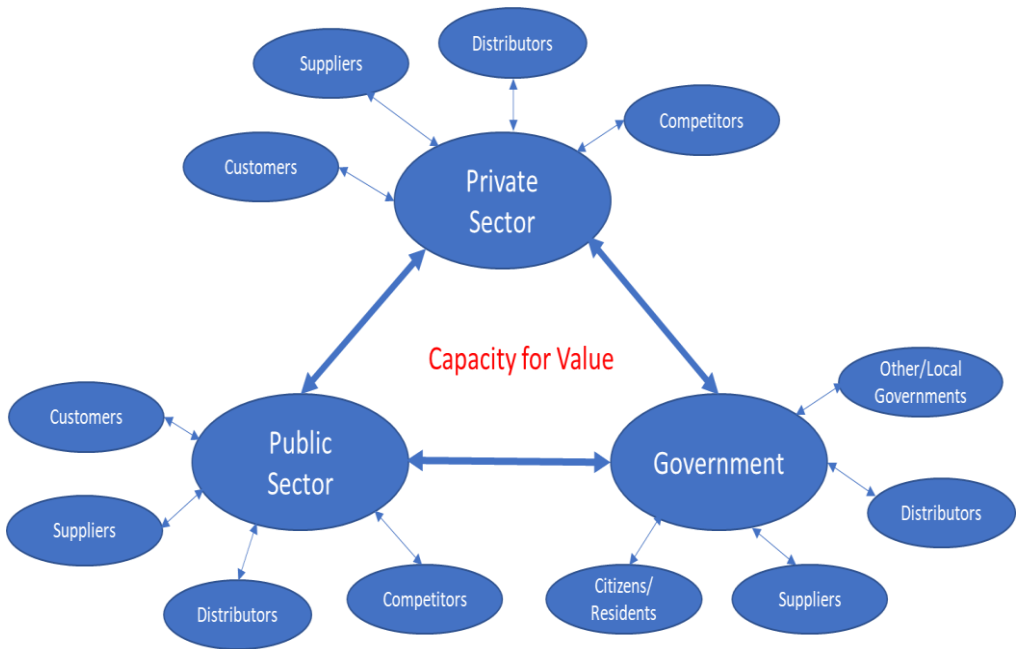
A second stream of studies displayed more of a social focus (e.g., Watson and Hegar, 2013; Wong, 2013). With cases focusing on upgrading slum housing (Otiso, 2003), road safety (Elsig, 2004), water and sanitation (Jaleta and Scott, 2009; Phumpiu and Gustafsson, 2009), and basic education rights (Bronzo et al., 2012), they have emphasized the social merits of tri-sector collaborations.

Finally, the potential merits of a tri-sector mindset for the private enterprise and for organizations in developed markets (in addition to public and governmental organizations and public at large in emerging markets) is a relatively new area of research focus (e.g., Klischewski and Simion, 2019; Uslay, 2019).

Table 1 provides an overview of extant work on tri-sector partnerships and innovation. Notably, while the identified studies demonstrate the value of tri-sector

mindset, they remain conceptual and primarily case-based, restricting the ability to derive generalizations. In addition, Figure 1 depicts the roots of the tri-sector mindset within the value co-creation framework and attempts to link the literature on value co-creation (micro-level) with the tri-sector approach (meso-level).

**Figure 1**  
A Tri-Sector Model of Value Co-Creation





**Table 1**  
**Select Articles on Tri-Sector Partnerships and Innovations**

Article	Methodology/Sample	Findings
Current article	Conceptual, literature review	Emphasizes the importance of tri-sector mindset. Reviews literature and offers research agenda.
Gring-Pemble and Perilla, 2021	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the Honey Bee Initiative by George Mason University as a successful example for tri-sector partnerships.
Uslay, 2019	Conceptual, case study	Introduces and discusses the value of tri-sector innovations to overcome shortcomings of marketing, society, and capitalism with examples of Coinstar, WinWin, and Roshni Rides.
Klischewski and Simion, 2019	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the dynamics of tri-sector partnerships in professional sports, particularly football, in terms of the integrative roles of football clubs, public institutions, and international non-governmental organizations.
Zajdel, Toader, and Michalcewicz-Koniowska, 2015	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the Local Action Groups that serve as catalysts for partnerships between public (gminas, local self-government units), economic (companies, private persons) and social <b>sectors</b> (associations, foundations) in Poland and Romania.
Feng, Shih-Chin, and Wen-Shan, 2013	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the Hwang Sun Enterprise which initiated a complementary partnership between local firms, university incubation center, and public sector in cultural/creative industries.
Watson and Hegar, 2013	Conceptual, case study	Discusses a tri-sector framework in the context of social work administration where individuals work to deliver services to distinct external entities as well as hybrid organizations while having to possess particular skills for successful mediation.
Kong, 2013	Conceptual, case study	Discusses how tri-sector collaboration can effectively make up a disaster response and achieve certain social objectives, particularly during the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake in Japan.

**Table 1** (cont'd)

Wong, 2013	Conceptual, case study	Discusses how social innovation in Hong Kong has required a tri-sector approach and how trust, an essential ingredient, can be attained through cross-sector collaborations.
Bronzo, dos Santos de Sousa Teosido, and da Rocha, 2012	Conceptual, case study	Discusses tri-sector partnership on access to water, and basic education and performance rights of children and adolescents in Brazil involving the State, civil society and private firms.
Herranz, Council, and McKay, 2011	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the Seattle-based tri-value social enterprise FareStart, which creates significant operating income in addition to financial support garnered from government and charitable contributions.
Jaleta and Scott, 2009	Conceptual, case study	Discusses a tri-sector partnership aimed at offering support to water and sanitation institutions in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa where expertise is sourced from multinational water companies, government agencies, civil society bodies, and non-governmental organizations.
Phumpiu and Gustafsson, 2009	Conceptual, case study	Discusses tri-sector partnerships in Latin America that aim to provide water and sanitation services to rural and peri-urban areas while analyzing the attitudes of municipal governments.
Jimena, 2007	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the potential of tri-sector partnerships in the context of the Canadian mining sector. Suggests that private firms can create nonprofit organizations and work with government for tri-sector positive impact.
Ite, 2007	Conceptual, case study	Discusses a sustainable community development model involving Shell, government, and NGOs in Nigeria.
Wilson, 2007	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the utilization of tri-sector partnerships as a solution to waste management in Marikana, South Africa given the systemic burden of poverty is unable to be confronted by government alone.

**Table 1** (cont'd)

Idemudia and Ite, 2006	Conceptual	Tri-sector partnership is proposed for the Oil companies' CSR efforts in the Niger Delta to gain traction.
Elsig, 2004	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the Global Road Safety Partnership between business, civil society and government as a successful example for tri-sector partnerships.
Yakovleva and Alabaster, 2003	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the tri-sector partnership between ALROSA mining, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), and SAPI Foundation for community development in the diamond mining sector in the Russian Federation.
Otiso, 2003	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the tri-sector partnership between state, voluntary and private organizations to upgrade slum housing and services in Mathare 4A area, Nairobi, Kenya.
Velde, 2001	Conceptual, case study	Discusses the application of foreign direct investment to tri-sector partnerships as it pertains to transaction costs, the efficient use of resources, and risk management.
Warhurst, 2001	Conceptual, case study	Utilizes business cases of tri-sector partnerships from mining and energy industries to make the case for corporate social investment and improve sustainability.

In the next section, several tools to facilitate tri-sector innovations are introduced. While the intended audience for these tools is primarily practitioners, they can also be deployed for research purposes.

#### 4. Tools for tri-sector innovation<sup>4</sup>

NewImpact has identified six tools for tri-sector innovations to date and made these publicly available and accessible.

1. *Spotlight interviews*: The Spotlight Interview is a research process that gathers insights and input from individuals with deep knowledge in a particular area

<sup>4</sup> This section is drawn from publicly available resources of NewImpact.

to identify barriers, opportunities, and other contextual factors. Unlike typical research interviews, the interviewee explores the role other sectors play and the possibilities if new resources were available. The process includes interviews with people from each of the three sectors, as well as impacted individuals. The questions assist in shifting the interviewee's perspective to include a tri-sector lens. The information collected is organized and graphically represented in a Spotlight Map, which aids in synthesis, exploration, and understanding. The Spotlight Map can identify potential areas of innovation, as well as trends of interest across the sectors and communities.

2. *Community Insights*: The development of viable solutions for impact requires listening to and capturing the needs and wants of communities. While interviews, surveys, and community roundtables are widely used methods to obtain community voice and insights, they may only represent a narrow segment of the community. To expand methods for listening to community needs, NewImpact is developing Community Insights, a cloud-based tool that uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to scrape and organize discourse from various sources. The machine learning models label each piece of discourse with information such as impact area, sentiment, type of discourse, source, geography, date, and related discourse, providing structure to the data to support uncovering trends and details in the community conversation. This tool is in the early stages of development and has broader applications beyond the tri-sector innovation framework.
3. *NewImpact Wiki*: This tool is a free online directory of organizations and their resources that aims to foster tri-sector solutions to solve complex problems across the country in various impact areas. The wiki is designed to reimagine, repurpose, and realign existing resources to support innovation with impact. Data in the wiki is tagged with geography, population served, and impact area, and currently includes over 794,000 organizations mapped to impact areas, 76,559 mapped resources, and 54,947 mapped datasets. The wiki can be accessed via two main interfaces: a cloud-based wiki editing interface and a cloud-based wiki data dashboard with interactive visualizations of wiki data. The dashboard enables users to filter information by geography, sector, sector level, and/or impact area, and to surface programs and resources from all sectors that can be leveraged and repurposed for impact. It also helps identify abundance or gaps in resources in impact areas, sectors, and/or geographies. In the future, the wiki will also include data from and links to open data sources about organizations and resources.
4. *Impact Journey*: A visual tool that breaks down complex systems into a detailed step-by-step journey from the perspective and experience of impacted

individuals. The tool is created by researching, interviewing, and gathering community insights, and it reveals potential leverage points, bottlenecks, and unmet needs. Impact Journeys are created using a simple and consistent visual mapping language and can convey different altitudes. The tool highlights the value of collaborative mapping and linking Impact Journeys to gain insights, ideas, and connections across impact areas, populations, and geographies. It is an effective tool for synthesis, analysis, focusing, and for sharing a rich picture of the impact area.

5. *Tri-Sector Innovation (TSI) Canvas*: This is a modified version of the Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010) that helps entrepreneurs and innovators design business models that unite profit and purpose. It integrates impact into the design process and uncovers existing resources that can be aligned to create value for customers and other beneficiaries. The TSI Canvas is highly flexible and can be used for a wide range of needs. It has three frames with blocks and prompts to spark ideation and expand possibilities and perspectives. The canvas is designed to be an iterative process that helps narrow focus and advance thinking towards a tri-sector model. The TSI Canvas can be used at any stage in the innovation process and can help organizations identify early innovation concepts, unite profit and purpose, create more value for customers, and leverage existing resources and opportunities.
6. *Tri-Sector Equation (TSE)*: This tool focuses on aligning self-interests across sectors to create mutually beneficial models that are scalable and self-sustaining. TSE is presented as a tool to help create a tri-sector strategy with impact and strengthens business models or concepts. It enables exploration of various relationships between all three sectors to find the most promising combinations for sustainable solution design with impact. It helps to create a strategy where each organization contributes and benefits from the model, aligns self-interests and resources, evaluates the fit for resources and organizations, defines the roles of each sector, and re-imagines existing resources. The TSE complements other innovation processes like the Business Model Canvas, Lean Canvas, and TSI Canvas. The TSE differs from the TSI Canvas since it is used to develop a firmer plan rather than identifying potential organizations and resources.

NewImpact website (<https://www.newimpact.care/>) is a great resource for scholars as well as practitioners who wish to learn more and utilize the aforementioned resources. In the next section, research questions are presented with the hope of advancing scholarly work in the domain of tri-sector innovations.

## 5. Research agenda and conclusion

Given the importance and promise of tri-sector innovations, there is a need to address the relative dearth of scholarly attention to this domain. Potential venues for future scholarly inquiry include:

1. *Enablers and hurdles*: What are the key factors that facilitate or hinder tri-sector innovation, and how do they vary across different sectors and contexts?
2. *Scaling and diffusion*: How do different tri-sector innovation models, such as those using social innovation labs, incubators or accelerators, impact the development and diffusion of new ideas and solutions?
3. *The role of trust in tri-sector partnerships*: How should trust be built and maintained in tri-sector partnerships and its impact on the success of the partnership? How do/should these strategies vary across different types of collaborations?
4. *The impact of government policies*: What is the role of government in promoting and facilitating tri-sector innovation, and how can it be optimized to support positive social and environmental outcomes? How does government policy affect the ideation, development, and sustainability of tri-sector innovation and partnerships?
5. *The effectiveness of tri-sector partnerships in addressing grand challenges*: How do tri-sector partnerships contribute to solving complex social and environmental issues such as climate change, poverty, and inequality (and other sustainable development goals by the UN)?
6. *The role of entrepreneurship*: How can entrepreneurs facilitate the formation and success of tri-sector partnerships?
7. *The role of innovation and technology*: How can standard tri-sector partnerships harness innovation to develop new solutions to social and environmental challenges? How can technology be leveraged to facilitate communication and collaboration among organizations from different sectors to form tri-sector partnerships?
8. *The impact of cultural differences*: How do differences among organizations from different sectors and cultural contexts affect the formation and sustainability of tri-sector partnerships?
9. *Measuring impact*: How do different types of tri-sector innovation impact economic growth and competitiveness at the regional, national, or global level? How can we assess the impact of tri-sector innovation on social and environmental outcomes? What are the most appropriate metrics to use?

10. *Volatility*: How do systemic volatility as well as black swan events such as COVID-19 pandemic affect tri-sector innovation, and what can we learn from the responses of different actors in the innovation ecosystem?
11. *Ethical Considerations*: How do power dynamics influence the decision-making processes in tri-sector innovation, and what are the implications for equity and inclusivity? Which other ethical considerations arise in tri-sector innovation, and how can they be addressed to ensure responsible and equitable outcomes? Any dark sides to the tri-sector mindset? Could the complexity of tri-sector collaborations be used to conceal corruption?

The above research questions offer a starting point to explore the dynamics of a tri-sector mindset and its potential to address social and environmental challenges. The use of empirical methods for investigation would be especially worthwhile since extant research has been predominantly case-based. Behavioral lab or field experiments can prove beneficial when primary data is not accessible. Finally, even though the phenomena that tri-sector innovations address tend to be global in scope, cross-cultural examinations would be helpful to further a coherent research agenda and advance the priorities for the marketing-entrepreneurship interface (Alqahtani and Uslay, 2022).

## 6. Limitations

The literature review was limited to full-text articles and keywords noted. Future studies can expand the search terms such as adding public, private and government + partnerships/collaborations/innovation, and also forgo a full text search to cast a wider net.

## 7. Tribute

Professor Dr. Ahmet Acar was a brilliant educator who pushed his students to perform up to their potential. He was also a master leader-administrator with statesmanlike qualities. It was no surprise to anyone when he rose through the ranks to serve as Chair, Dean, and subsequently Rector of Middle East Technical University with distinction and without undermining his principles, under very difficult circumstances. The genesis of this article as well as a few of my other publications can be traced back to a seed he planted during his first address to us during our first semester back in 1991. As his first act, he wrote “ALLIANCE” in capital letters on the board, which was still black (or rather green) at the time. And then he went on to explain the value of collaboration as a cohort as opposed to trying to perform individually or competing mindlessly. That lesson has stuck with me.

Schumpeter observed that “it is not enough to be remembered for books and theories. One does not make a difference unless it is a difference in people’s lives” (Uslay et al., 2009: 58). Undoubtedly, Ahmet Hocamiz made a profound difference in the lives of tens of thousands in the METU community and beyond.

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## Özet

### Üç sektörlü ortaklıklar yoluyla işbirliğini ve inovasyonu ölçeklendirmek

Üç sektörlü zihniyet, sosyal etki için özel, kamu ve devlet sektörlerini ve onların kaynaklarını bir araya getirir. Bu makale, girişimcilerin ve kurum içi girişimcilerin değer ortaya çıkarmaları ve giderek daha rekabetçi ve istikrarsız hale gelen pazarlarda hayatta kalma ve başarılı olmaları için ölçeklenebilir bir yol olarak üç sektörlü yenilikleri tanıtıyor ve tartışıyor. Mevcut araştırmaların, üç sektörlü yenilik örneklerinin ve üç sektörlü yeniliklerin sentezlenmesi, geliştirilmesi ve uygulanmasına yönelik pratik kaynakların ve araçların incelenmesinin ardından gelecekteki araştırmalar için bir gündem sunulmaktadır.

*Anahtar kelimeler:* Üç sektörlü ortaklıklar, işbirliği, inovasyon, ortak rekabet, ortak değer yaratımı.