Editorial

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Biographical notes: Konstadinos Kutsikos is an Assistant Professor of Information Management at the Business School of the University of the Aegean (UotA), Greece. He received his MBA and PhD in Computer Science from the University of Southern California, USA and his MS in Computer Science from Stanford University, USA. Before joining UotA, he had a ten-year international career balancing an academic, industry and entrepreneurial background, topped by a Managing Consultant position with PA Consulting Group in London. His current research work is focused on business systems design, with particular emphasis on service science and innovation management.

Management studies have long investigated the evolution of collaboration as it occurs within organisational boundaries. However, the widespread deployment of e-business strategic thinking, e-services and internet-related technologies has enabled new options for collaborating and sharing ideas, activities and projects among organisations that may be scattered in different geographies and cultural domains. The resulting interconnected organisations can be thought of as complex systems comprised of heterogeneous components that work together for accomplishing joint tasks.

Hence, exploring the potential effects of applying systems thinking in inter-organisational collaboration may pave the future of e-business. Relevant key questions that are raised include:

- How and why do organisations collaborate?

- How does co-creation take place?

- How can systemic thinking (models, methodologies, and tools) be used for managing distributed collaboration?

- How does innovation take place in such a business environment and how should companies change to adapt to this new scenario, leveraging the opportunities provided by new e-business technologies?

The aim of this special issue is to shed light to these questions through multiple viewpoints from experts across geographic and scientific borders.

Myllärniemi et al. discuss value creation in the context of business networks. The authors acknowledge that collaboration brings synergy to organisations and leads towards superior value co-creation. However, successful collaboration and value co-creation face several challenges that can be addressed with the help of an intermediator organisation

(IO). Based on theoretical and empirical research, the authors conclude that the activities and consequent value creating benefits an IO brings to collaboration depend on the role or roles it plays in the network. The authors identify five such roles (creator, coordinator, facilitator, node and resource) and analyse the IO's part in value co-creation in a collaboration network.

Extending value co-creation to new product development (NPD) is the focus of a paper by Bazyar et al. Their paper examines the impact of governance modes (norm of flexibility, trust, and monitoring) on NPD cycle time and the mediating role of relational ties strength in an empirical study of 112 firms that were involved in NPD relationships. The results of structural equation modelling suggest that the trust and norm of flexibility are positively related to strength of relational ties, while monitoring and strength of relational ties are not significantly related. On the other hand, relational ties strength is positively related to NPD cycle time. Results further show that the impact of trust and norm of flexibility on NPD cycle time are mediated by the strength of relational ties, leading to a set of interesting implications for research, theory, and practice.

The issue of trust is further examined in Msanjila's paper. His article presents an approach for identification and characterisation of trust criteria in collaboration networks by applying impact analysis, hierarchical analysis and causal influences. It also presents a set of trust criteria identified in the author's wider research and validated by real collaborative networks of organisations. The author then presents a model for assessing trust level of organisations based on mathematical equations formulated by applying systems engineering and system thinking concepts. He concludes by presenting the implementation and functionalities of a trust management system that was developed based on the formulated trust analysis mechanisms.

Switching to a technology-focused context, Kopanaki and Smithson explore the impact of inter-organisational information systems (IOS) on the flexibility of interaction among organisations. Based on previous research and on Vickers' appreciative systems thinking, the paper examines flexibility as a multidimensional concept, influenced by the inter-organisational context. Following an interpretive approach and a multiple case design, the authors analyse the flexibility of the interaction of two retailers and two suppliers. Based on the empirical findings, they show that the use of IOS can constrain even competent organisations and discuss how different organisational contexts affect the flexibility of inter-organisational collaboration.

In closing, Chen and Papazafeiropoulou examine a special case of collaboration networks, namely supply chains, and provide results of an extensive case study. Their paper explores the area of supply chain integration employed by 15 Taiwanese IT manufacturing companies, focusing on how the case companies and their suppliers integrate their supply chains. In doing so, practical implications for supply chain integration adoption are explained as a way to help researchers and organisations to better understand the supply chain integration in practice, in the wider context of collaboration networks.