THEORETICAL ARTICLE

Infusing tribal reciprocity into service research: towards an integrated and dynamic view of repayment, retaliation and restorative justice for regenerative service ecosystem wellbeing

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Abstract

Service exchange among actors and the notion of reciprocity have gained momentum in service research. However, reciprocity's underlying facets and nature have been neglected. Drawing on a tribal notion of dynamic reciprocity facilitates the understanding of contemporary service interactions in service ecosystems. We explore reciprocity's tribal elements of repayment, retaliation and restorative justice. This tribal view of reciprocity is also linked to relational and regenerative wellbeing. We derive a conceptual framework for service ecosystems research and practice. An expanded view of reciprocity for service exchanges within and across system levels is required to facilitate regenerative service ecosystem wellbeing.

Keywords Dynamic reciprocity · Repayment · Retaliation · Restorative justice · Values and value co-creation · Regenerative service ecosystem wellbeing · Tribal perspective

> *As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise (Luke, 6:31, cited by Charles Darwin 1871/1981, p. 106).*

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1 Introduction

In the Descent of Man (1871), Charles Darwin relates to reciprocity as the cornerstone of a system of values and principles of conduct. Anthropological data across numerous cultures (Marshall 1961; Schwab 1995) align with Darwin's (1871) presumption that reciprocity has been a central tenet of behaviour in society (Gouldner 1960). Similarly, in the domain of service research, Edvardsson et al. (2011) maintain that norms and values shape the formation of service ecosystems. In such systems, individuals relate to *social norms and values* so as to appraise behaviour, approve of resource integration and value co-creation, and endorse or oppose other individuals' actions (Edvardsson et al. 2012). One such social norm is the *norm of reciprocity* (Gouldner 1960). Reciprocity, mostly in the form of *repayment*, is ubiquitious within value co-creation and service literature (Andersson et al. 2016; Chung and Jeon 2020; Dean and Alhothali 2017; Hernández-Ortega and Franco 2019; Mpinganjira 2019) but appears to not be used or defined consistently. Moreover, links to its flip side, i.e. *retaliation*, as well as to the related concept of *restorative justice* have been neglected. Mostly, these constructs have been investigated in isolation and single-sidedly (Frey-Cordes et al. 2020; Greer 2015; Grégoire and Fisher 2006; Jung and Yoo 2017; Lee and Kim 2019a). Furthermore, society has predominantly advanced a Westernised and rather *mechanistic* view of reciprocity (Weiner 1980; Young 2011) and ignored the *dynamic nature* of an *integrated concept of reciprocity* (Chen and Chen 2004; Metge 2002). The latter is more *family and community focussed* rather than centred on the individual only (Best 1934; Ekeh 1974; Marsden 2003). Moreover, from a tribal perspective the "'norms of reciprocity' must be [viewed] as part of a larger system—a reproductive system" (Weiner 1980, p. 71). Such a view encompasses the *wellbeing of the system* where individual wellbeing is inextricably linked to family and community wellbeing (Hepi et al. 2017; Love 2017). Wellbeing is also directly connected to the notion of restoration and an offence or transgression is seen as a sign of unwellness (PACT 2020).

Such tribal perspectives connect to a recently renewed interest in the conception of reciprocity (Hart 2021; Spiller and Stockdale 2013), the contemporary view of the existence of a networked economy and the characteristics of such service ecosystem as evolving, replicating and self-adjusting, as promoted in service literature (Chandler and Vargo 2011; Vargo and Lusch 2016; 2017). Moreover, recent scholarly explorations have also investigated the notion of service ecosystem wellbeing (Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser 2020; Frow et al. 2019). However, the tribal and contemporary spheres have not been connected properly. A contemporary Westernised and mechanistic view of reciprocity leaves gaps in the understanding of and requirements for the design of service exchange systems and platforms and how increasingly service-driven economies (The World Factbook 2021) should operate. This is also in light of newer forms of interaction and exchange in the service marketplace becoming more prevalent, such as actor-to-actor or peer-to-peer networks where actors participate in value co-creation via platforms which connect them (Huang and Kuo 2020; Lee and Kim 2019a; Palma

et al. 2019; Quero et al. 2017; Zervas et al. 2017). Recent disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and increased interest in remote or contactless services (Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser 2020), sharing platforms (Mont et al. 2021) and the "untacting" from service providers (Lee and Lee 2020) might have accelerated this.

Integrative and dynamic reciprocity to achieve and maintain a wellbeing equilibrium is necessary to better navigate contemporary service exchange. Service exchange is defined as the mutual application of knowledge and skills among actors (Vargo and Lusch 2016).

The *aim* of this paper is to infuse a dynamic and integrative conception of reciprocity, derived from a traditional tribal society and linked to wellbeing, into service research and devise and apply a framework employable by service scholars and practitioners. In detail, the *objectives* of this research are to (a) explore and draw on a tribal and multi-faceted approach to reciprocity, (b) infuse the notion of ownership over reciprocal wellbeing co-creation into systems thinking, (c) unravel the interplay between the individual and the collective relating to reciprocity and wellbeing and (d) reconceptualise the nature of service ecosystem wellbeing via its relational and regenerative aspects.

The article is organised as follows. It commences with an overview of literare on service exchange in service ecosystems by examining contemporary perspectives on exchange, values and norms, value and value co-creation as well as resource integration and reciprocity. This is followed by an analysis of the traditional tribal values and value concepts drawing on one tribal economy which to this day has the core value of reciprocity embedded in its culture, i.e. the Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. Unlike other indigenous concepts like guanxi (Liu and Mei 2015), which centres on positive reciprocity (Chen and Chen 2004), the Māori concept focuses on the values of repayment (positive reciprocity), retaliation (negative reciprocity) and restorative justice in one approach. Next, an integrative reciprocity framework is presented. It links the findings from traditional Māori society to contemporary service research. The framework is then applied to the context of the sharing economy. The article closes with a discussion of the implications and sets an agenda for future research.

2 Review of literature

2.1 Service exchange in service ecosystems

A contemporary view of service interactions maintains that the adequate unit of analysis for service exchange is the service system itself (Vargo et al. 2008). A system hierarchy can be identified consisting of micro, meso and macro levels (Chandler and Vargo 2011). Individual actors are situated at micro level where direct service exchange occurs. The meso level contains more actors. Exchange at this level can be direct as well as indirect. The latter eventuates when actors are not directly connected but via other actors. More complex structures are located at macro level where actors are involved in direct and indirect exchange (Chandler and Vargo

2011). At times, direct service exchange is disguised by the structure of the market and masked as indirect exchange, due to the fact that intermediaries are present which act as the "switchboard" for direct exchange (Vargo and Akaka 2009). To denote that systems can change and evolve over time, Chandler and Vargo (2011) introduce the term service ecosystem, defined as a comparatively autonomous, self-regulating system of actors integrating their resources. The actors are interlinked by institutions and mutual value creation which is achieved via reciprocal service exchange (Vargo and Lusch 2016; see Table 1 for an overview of key terminology used in this paper).

2.2 Values and value

It is in these service ecosystems where resource integration activities unfurl to co-create value, which is the benefit that actors receive in return for engaging in such activities (Edvardsson et al. 2012; Lee and Kim 2019b; McColl-Kennedy et al. 2012). Resource integration reflects the rendezvous with and utilisation of available resources while adhering to prevalent *values and norms* (Edvardsson et al. 2011; 2012). Values also *shape* service ecosystems (Domegan et al. 2012; Edvardsson et al. 2011) and it is values and norms that influence service exchange and value co-creation. Norms outline *how* to pursue certain value co-creation activities, whereas values entail notions of *what* standards can be used to evaluate behaviour (Edvardsson et al. 2014; Parsons 1951). These values, more generic and abstract in nature, and norms, more specific guidelines, as well as rules devised by institutions (Vargo and Lusch 2016), enable the functioning of service ecosystems.

Individuals relate to social norms and values so as to appraise behaviour, to approve of resource integration and value co-creation, and to endorse or oppose other individuals' actions (Edvardsson et al. 2012). Conformity to values and norms goes beyond any specific advantage or immediate gratification from interaction and exchange. It creates solidarity among the actors so that collectivity, order and stability in the system can emerge (Gouldner 1960; Parsons 1951). The reason why individuals reciprocate is because they have internalised some general social or group norm.

3 Reciprocity

3.1 Reciprocity as exchange paradigm

While reciprocity has been a prominently featured concept in sociology (Blau 1964; Ekeh 1974; Homans 1958; Molm et al. 2007a, b), Vargo and Lusch's (2016) notion of service ecosystems includes mutual value creation via *reciprocal* service exchange. Mutuality is a relational exchange norm to improve the wellbeing of the interpersonal connection as such and is based on shared interests (Heide and John 1992). However, the resulting value for each actor is not necessarily balanced. Reciprocity, derived from Latin meaning moving backwards and forwards,

Table 1 Key terminology

Key term	Definition/Explanation	Reference(s)
Service ecosystem	A "relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource–integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through [reciprocal] service exchange"	Vargo and Lusch (2016), p. 10
Co-creation of wellbeing	"A transformative *process* whereby a focal actor's subjective wellbeing is the *outcome* of balancing challenges and resources to achieve an equilibrium (*state*), and this depends on the focal actor's and other engaged actors' psychological ownership over the focal actor's wellbeing and subsequent resource integration."	Chen et al. (2021), p. 389; italics in original
Service ecosystem wellbeing	"A system's transformational capability to balance challenges and resources within and across system levels to achieve system-level specific and overall service ecosystem equilibria and wellbeing via new actor and resource combinations, to adapt to system inherent or external critical incidents."	Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser (2020), p. 1115
Relational and regenerative service ecosystem wellbeing	A system's transformational capability to balance challenges and resources within and across system levels to achieve individual, system-level specific, and overall service ecosystem equilibria and wellbeing via regenerative cycles of reciprocity in exchanges of engaged resource combining which take psychological ownership over the dynamic co-creation of their own, others' and the system's wellbeing, and utilise restorative justice to respond to system intrinsic or extrinsic critical incidents.	*This paper*, extending Chen et al. (2021) and Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser (2020)
Service exchange	The exchange of an actor's aptitude to serve other actors and, when actualised via the solicitation of specialised human skills and knowledge, interpreted as service, it is the fundamental basis of exchange and the root of all economic activity.	Vargo and Lusch (2016)
Resource integration	The rendezvous with and utilisation of available resources.	Edvardsson et al. (2011, 2012)
Value co-creation	The benefit realised from integrating resources through reciprocal engagement activities and interactions with other actors in the service ecosystem.	Based on McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012)
Norms	Comprise how an actor is to pursue certain value co-creation activities.	Edvardsson et al. (2014); Parsons (1951)
Values	Entail notions of what standards an actor can use to evaluate behaviour.	Edvardsson et al. (2014); Parsons (1951)
Reciprocity	An actor's active mutual other-orientation and exchange which occurs on a quid-pro-quo basis.	Graumann (1995)
Repayment	Equals positive reciprocity, i.e. repaying a psychological debt by giving benefits to another actor in return for benefits received.	Fehr and Gächter (2000); Molm et al. (2007b)
Retaliation	Equals negative reciprocity, i.e. revenging by penalising the other actor an eye for an eye.	Schieffelin (1980)

Table 1 (continued)

Key term	Definition/Explanation	Reference(s)
Restorative justice	Relates to repairing a negative act, transgression or conflict through the mutual involvement of all actors.	Wenzel et al. (2008)
Utu and muru	A contractual system of cycles of obligations where an equivalent return must always be made. *Utu* entails both positive and negative reciprocity. *Muru* is part of utu and the restorative action taken to correct an imbalance.	Firth (2011); Ministry of Justice (2001)
Sharing economy	Peer-to-peer markets as alternative suppliers of goods and services to the traditional industries.	Zervas et al. (2017)

is active mutual other-orientation (Graumann 1995). It represents a somewhat tighter exchange rule, i.e. a quid-pro-quo scenario. In service interactions the value which actors derive from reciprocal exchanges with other actors and the integration of resources (cf. Molm et al. 2007a) may be measured in equality in terms of the exchange (i.e. monetary) value. However, the experienced value by each actor might differ as it is linked to the value in use and dependent on the context the actors are embedded in (Quero et al. 2017; Vargo and Lusch 2016). Nevertheless, if the actors are not willing or capable to collaborate, resource integration cannot occur. If they do not adhere to resource integration rules and codes of conduct, asymmetric service exchanges and value co-creation processes might eventuate (Edvardsson et al. 2011).

Reciprocity is a key variable through which communal social rules are facilitated to generate social stability (Gouldner 1960). Reciprocity usually connotes *repayment* (Mpinganjira 2019).

3.2 Reciprocity as repayment

Within the act of reciprocity there is an inherent obligation by the receiver to repay a psychological debt (Fehr and Gächter 2000; Sahlins 1965) by giving benefits to somebody in return for benefits obtained (Molm et al. 2007b). In the service literature there is a renewed interest in reciprocity and reciprocal behaviour. For example, Dean and Alhothali (2017) reveal that as an antecedent, reciprocal communication can enhance service opportunities, and Anderson et al. (2016) show that satisfaction with the service encounter leads to enhanced reciprocal behaviour. More nuanced towards actor characteristics, Gilliam and Rayburn (2016) incorporate personality traits in regard to the propensity towards, and actual display of, positive reciprocal behaviour among frontline employees. For a similar context Chung and Jeon (2020) investigate social exchange relationships of flight attendants with their peers and managers and resulting job satisfaction. Related to a wellbeing context, Mpinganjira (2019) analyses behaviour in virtual health communities and finds that participants' willingness to reciprocate is contingent on their indeptedness among other factors. Reciprocity seems to also have caught practitioners' eyes, for example, as one of the important principles of building memorable customer experiences (Iterable 2021).

While these studies have examined reciprocity between actors from a constructive point of view as exchanges at micro level, there is little coherence in the use and application of the term. Only scant research exists on how repayment applies in a service ecosystem and how reciprocity's other elements come into play. Furthermore, as outlined above reciprocity is not confined to direct exchange but may also occur indirectly amongst multiple actors (Chandler and Vargo 2011; Mpinganjira 2019). The benefit may be passed on to a third party before a compensatory benefit is returned to the original giver (Molm et al. 2007a, b). This indirect reciprocity is also reflected in Bagozzi's (1975) generalised exchange and Sahlins' (1965) generalised reciprocity. It refers to giving benefits to a third party, such as a collective, and thus allowing the individual to draw benefits from this community or group. Therefore, it is also called group-generalised exchange (Ekeh 1974). However, an

investigation of direct and indirect reciprocity and their prevalence across and within system levels is lacking.

3.3 Reciprocity as retaliation

Extant literature comprehends *negative reciprocity* (Sahlins 1965) as the effort to receive something for nothing with impunity. The concept has similarity with value co-destruction (Echeverri and Skålén 2011), defective co-creation (Greer 2015), dysfunctional or defensive behaviour (Jung and Yoo 2017; Lee and Kim 2019b), where at least one party does not fulfil their resource integration obligations. Such action is an apparent violation of the norms and values of reciprocity and, to gain balance, there is a threat of retaliation. However, true negative reciprocity is the opposite of positive reciprocity (i.e. repayment vs retaliation) and in this paper retaliation is seen as a negative reciprocal act, i.e. an eye for an eye (Schieffelin 1980; Frey-Cordes et al. 2020).

In service research, negative reciprocity has mostly been associated with customers' response to service failures, where customer retaliation is the attempt to rebuke and make a service provider pay for the harm caused (Grégoire and Fisher 2006). Newer research also investigates staff member's retaliatory response to customer incivility (Frey-Cordes et al. 2020). Such body of research, however, focuses on discrete service exchanges (Greer 2015) occurring at micro level. Thus, an investigation into retaliatory behaviour during service exchange in an ecosystem is missing.

3.4 Restorative justice

During an act of restorative justice, a third party intervenes to restore balance and harmony through the imposition of punishment. The term refers to the repair of a negative act, transgression or conflict though the mutual involvement of the offenders, victims and their respective communities rather than just a punitive system as seen with retribution and retaliation (Wenzel et al. 2008).

Different types of justice have received ample scholarly attention (Espino-Rodríguez and Ramírez-Fierro 2019; Lee and Kim 2019a; Ozkan Tektas 2017). In service research, restorative justice is associated with service recovery where reparation is offered to customers to compensate for a service failure to redress their grievances and restore equilibrium (Grégoire and Fisher 2006). Restorative justice is also reported to lower customer's intentions to take revenge or retaliate following fair service recovery (Grégoire et al. 2009) and may restore satisfaction and repurchase intentions (Michel and Meuter 2008). However, restorative justice applies beyond a one-to-one settting, thus making it applicable to the dynamics within service ecosystems. For example, the result of punishing behaviour towards free riders is enhanced cooperation within the social system (Fehr and Gächter 2000). Thus, restorative justice should not only benefit the victim and/or the community but also the offender through moral rehabilitation (Bazemore 1998). Nevertheless, there is scant evidence of how restorative justice can work as a control mechanism in service ecosystems.

To address the limitations identified, drawing on knowledge from tribal communities can assist with filling the gaps. To do so, an understanding of traditional tribal systems and customs is essential.

4 Tribal systems and customs

Within traditional tribal social systems a set of values existed which allowed the communities to survive and function. One such custom was the notion of reciprocity. It traces back to indigenous and ancient cultures (Mauss 1966), such as the Aborigines in Australia (Schwab 1995; Tibbett 2004), the Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand (Firth 2011; Metge, 2002), the Melanesian culture (Malinowski 1922; 1926; Thurnwald 1921; Schieffelin 1980), the First Nation peoples of the Pacific Northwest Coast of the United States and Canada (Boas 1966; Komter 2004), traditional Chinese cultures (Chen and Chen 2004; Liu and Mei 2015), ancient Greek society (Seaford 1998) and others (Marshall 1961; Radcliffe-Brown 1922).

This article employs the Māori concept of utu (and muru), a unique mechanism in traditional social ecosystems due to its integrative nature (repayment, retaliation, restorative justice) which is transferrable to modern-day communities.

4.1 Traditional Māori tribal systems

The pre-European Māori tribal system distinguished a range of social structures: te waka, (te iwi,) te hapū and te whanau, a system that has its parallels in Vargo and Lusch's (2016; Chandler and Vargo 2011) notion of different levels within service ecosystems. The waka was the biggest grouping of Māori society containing a loose tribal confederation (Mauss 1966). For the next biggest grouping the term iwi has been brought into current use, and it can be translated as tribe (Buck 1962). It consisted of several related hapū (sub-tribes or descendent groups) (Walker 1990) and entailed multiple whānau (extended families). The whānau as the basic unit for ordinary social and economic affairs included several generations of individuals (Firth 2011).

4.2 Values and value in Māori tribal social systems

Within such tribal social structures (Wolfgramm et al. 2020) a set of values existed which allowed the communities to function. Te Aho (2007) identifies a common set of core values (ngā tikanga) for appropriate conduct within Māori society. Among these is the "primary value and ordering principle" (Metge 2002, p. 320) of *utu* and *muru*, i.e. reciprocity and restorative justice (Mead 2016). *Utu* and *muru* are connected to the exchange system in pre-European Māori society. Firth (2011) describes the economic situation as one where the values assigned to objects activate the use and gratification which they offer. Other than use value (Vargo et al. 2008) products or services would be compared for exchanges and hence also had exchange value.
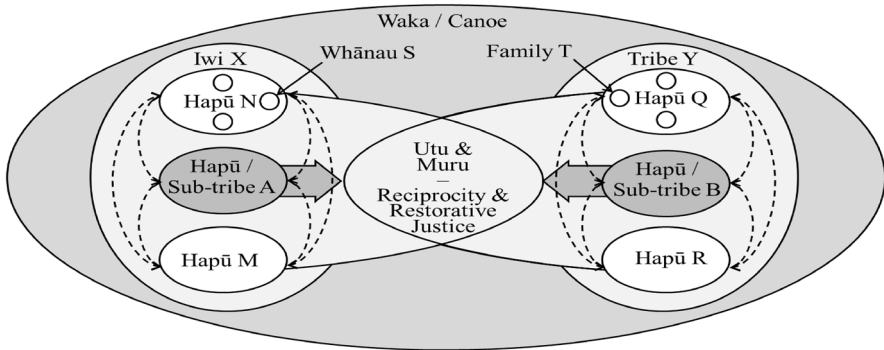
Fig. 1 The custom of reciprocity and restorative justice in traditional Māori tribal systems

Utu, and muru as a form of utu (Ministry of Justice 2001) is visually interpreted in Fig. 1.

4.3 An integrative view of reciprocity

The Māori concept of *utu* has been translated as reciprocity, equivalence, compensation, balance, recompense or repayment but also as revenge (Buck 1962; Firth 2011; Mead 2016; Moorfield 2021; Walker 1990). Utu applied to economic affairs and social contexts, was considered as one of the essential motivations to action, and as with gifts so with services an equal return always had to be made (Firth 2011). As such it was a contractual arrangement with a system of service obligations. "(…) although the [services] and [counter-services] take place under a voluntary guise they are in essence strictly obligatory, and their sanction is private or open warfare" (Mauss 1966, p. 3).

Restoring the imbalance of giving by counter-giving did not have to ensue concurrently but could be years later (Firth 2011; Walker 1990) and hence stretch over a longer timeframe. The unwritten obligation could exist between individuals and groups (Moorfield 2021). It created a cycle of to give but also to accept and it was also common to repay somewhat in excess (Firth 2011; Chen and Chen 2004). Such a system instigated a *see-sawing of obligations* and inflated an individual's mana, i.e. their status, prestige, influence, or power within a community (Firth 2011; Maning 1863). The imbalance through these acts of outdoing kept the relationship between the parties alive (Metge 2002). Mead (2016) speaks of the process of *take–utu–ea*, that is, violating customs or protocol gives rise to an issue or cause (take) which requires appropriate response (utu) to restore balance and return to a state of equilibrium (ea).

Utu applied to two scenarios at once, i.e. reciprocation of good as well as bad deeds (Metge 2002) and thus incorporates positive and negative reciprocity into one single system (Firth 2011). Figure 2, upper part, shows the progression from positive reciprocal exchanges to negative ones where parties retaliate, caused by
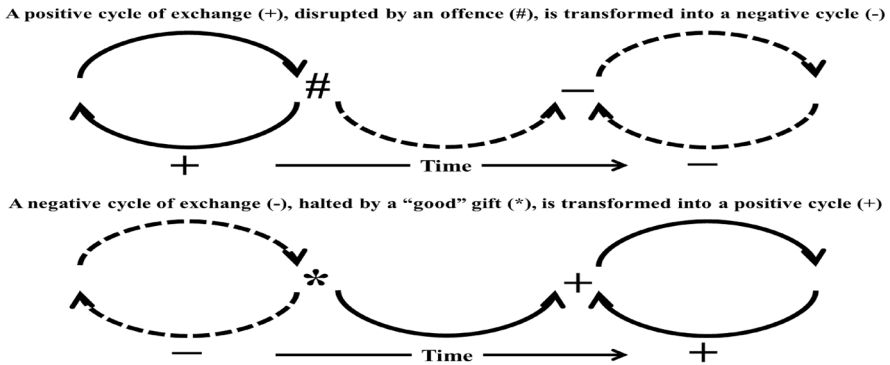
A positive cycle of exchange (+), disrupted by an offence (#), is transformed into a negative cycle (-)

A negative cycle of exchange (-), halted by a "good" gift (*), is transformed into a positive cycle (+)

Fig. 2 From positive to negative utu, from negative to positive utu (Adapted from Metge 2002)

an imbalance or transgression. A good gift or compensation can reset the negative cycle and turn it into a positive one (Fig. 2, lower part; cf. Schieffelin 1980).

Should a transaction arise without another party restoring balance over time, a *muru* would be the likely reaction. Best (1934) describes *muru* as the robbing of those individuals who had committed a wrongdoing against the public and describes it as a disciplinary measure. However, it was not a mere stripping of another party (Metge 2002). Rather, it was a permitted and established system (Maning 1863) of ritual compensation (Moorfield 2021), restorative (Ministry of Justice 2001) or social justice (Firth 2011). It followed clear protocol and practice to return the affected party to their original position in society (Moorfield 2021). Figure 3 depicts an offence by one party that remained unrestored and necessitated a raid (muru) to be performed by the other party.

In summary, the mechanism of utu and muru indicated a strong dominance of the community over the individual: "To assail one was to assail the lot" as the individual had "no right to deprive the community of [one's] services by meeting with an accident" (Best 1934, p. 87). A dual principle connected to the individual within their social context was at work. It was the conflict of social harmony versus re-compensation. On the one hand, others were essential to the individual's welfare and wellbeing. Hence, the individual had to conciliate the others. On the other hand, the others were potential rivals. Therefore, the individual had to guard themselves from loss (Firth 2011).
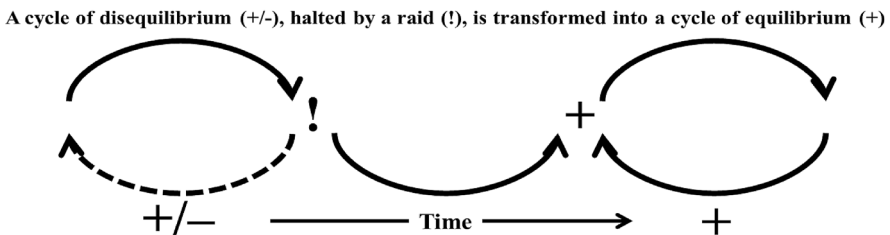
A cycle of disequilibrium (+/-), halted by a raid (!), is transformed into a cycle of equilibrium (+)

Fig. 3 A muru re-establishing utu following a non-restored disequilibrium between the parties

5 Conceptual integration—an integrated and dynamic intra- and interlevel reciprocity framework for regenerative service ecosystem wellbeing

Tribal social systems and customs are not identical to contemporary service exchange and service ecosystems, particularly due to the latter ones not being determined by lineage and descent (Love et al. 2018; PACT 2020). However, the unique reciprocity practices employed within and between groups in traditional societies aid with understanding and managing exchange in service ecosystems. This is assisted by the fact that both, traditional social systems and contemporary service ecosystems signal similar levels within and across which actors engage (Chandler and Vargo 2011; Wolfgramm et al. 2020). Moreover, recent developments of service markets abandon traditional market mechanisms and establish new modes of exchange, converging towards exchange mechanisms resembling those at play in tribal communities. In those newer forms of peer-to-peer exchange actors in networks interact to co-create value and might at times even form "tribal" associations to a brand (Huang and Kuo 2020; Lee and Kim 2019b; Quero et al. 2017). Here, the integrative and dynamic notion of utu and muru taking a long-term and cyclic perspective is of interest to service ecosystems research for reasons outlined below.

Markets exist via the cooperation and interdependence of actors. While some actors may not directly trade with each other, they rely on the community to co-create value for the good of everyone. This resonates well with the tribal way of how communities functioned (Firth 2011; Weiner 1980).

Moreover, recent work in the space of service ecosystems applies the notion of a resources–challenges equilibrium approach to individual (micro), community and organisational (meso) and societal (macro) wellbeing (Chen et al. 2021; Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser 2020). An individual is embedded in a wider service ecosystem and co-creating wellbeing for and with that person is the result of harmonising challenges and resources to reach an equilibrium (state). This is contingent on the individual actor's and other engaged actors' psychological ownership over the individual actor's wellbeing and ensuing resource integration (Chen et al. 2021). In other words, the more the actors have a sense of possession over their own and others' wellbeing and are willing to uphold this, the more their own and the service ecosystem's wellbeing will benefit. Such view connects to the traditional notion of community centricity exposed in tribal cultures. Disruptions, e.g. in the form of transgressions or offences, which can be a challenge to others in the system and the system itself, require effort to return the system to a state of equilibrium and restore individual, community and service ecosystem wellbeing. Service ecosystem wellbeing here is defined as a system's transformational capacity to offset challenges with resources within and across system levels to attain system-level and overall service ecosystem balance and wellbeing through new actor and resource arrangements, to adjust to system intrinsic or extrinsic critical incidents (Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser 2020; Kuppelwieser and Finsterwalder 2016). To manage and improve service ecosystem wellbeing, such as required in peer-to-peer networks, we can draw on community based societies, their customs and notion of wellbeing.

In tribal economies, such as Māori society, wellbeing was directly related to the concept of restoration. It entailed that in Māori culture an offence could not be viewed in isolation and was a sign of unwellness (PACT 2020). An individual's wellbeing was and still is linked to the wellbeing of the collective (Wolfgramm et al. 2020) and an offence and disequilibrium in an individual's wellbeing impacted the entire community and required collective intervention (Quince 2007).

The bigger picture here was the overall purpose to protect and maintain a *state of wellbeing and equilibrium* of all parties by responding to the environment and rebalancing negative disturbances of life with positive events. By removing, mitigating or isolating harm and the effects of harm with the outcome of resolution, healing was achieved and life balance restored (Kelly and Dreyer 2021; Metge 2002). Therefore, not restoring balance in Māori society had negative consequences (Best 1934), highlighting the nature of reciprocity. While this might appear to be a "flow and counter-flow of [exchanges] causing oscillation between disequilibrium and equilibrium [, a] particular time–space orientation" (Weiner 1980, p. 73) was central. It was structured around regenerative cycles (Weiner 1980) which went beyond the logic of immediate and discrete acts of giving and receiving.

The traditional Māori notion of wellbeing also transmutes into newer conceptions which propose Māori relational economies of wellbeing (Wolfgramm et al. 2020) by drawing on traditional values and worldviews including the intra- and intergenerational connectedness of humankind and its embeddedness in the physical and nonphysical environment (Mead 2016; Wolfgramm et al. 2020). A tribe's, sub-tribe's or extended family's—as well as a contemporary community's—existence and wellbeing relies on dynamic reciprocity. This is achieved by taking a longer timeframe and regenerative cycles into account (Firth 2011; Weiner 1980) and via the duality of utu with its integral part of muru (Ministry of Justice 2001; PACT 2020) to maintain the long-term strength and health of the community. Not adhering to reciprocity leads to a community's reduced performance, places its existence in a vulnerable position (Adar and Huberman 2000), potentially causing a system break down (Ekeh 1974).

In summary, there are recent infusions into service research visible of a notion of a dynamic wellbeing equilibrium in combination with psychological ownership and value co-creation as well as service ecosystem wellbeing. The Māori concept of reciprocity which incorporates equilibria and wellbeing states can be drawn on to enhance this contemporary understanding via (a) the *time horizon view of regeneration*, (b) the *integrative mechanism of reciprocity* and *restorative justice* and (c) the *community focus*, and (d) by taking a more *relational* standpoint. While economies of wellbeing are defined as the capacity to craft a circle in which citizens' wellbeing propels wealth, stability and resilience, and contrariwise (Gurría 2019), the Māori notion goes beyond a focus on people and, as already stated, centres on the interrelatedness of humanity itself and to their material and non-material environment (Kelly and Dreyer 2021; Weiner 1980; Wolfgramm et al. 2020). This directly bridges to notions of embeddedness in systems comprising of actors and resources, service ecosystem wellbeing, and the relational nature of service exchange (Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser 2020; Vargo and Lusch 2016). Therefore, via the tribal infusion of a dynamic, integrated and time-spanning notion of reciprocity this paper introduces *relational and regenerative service ecosystem wellbeing* as

a system's transformational capability to balance challenges and resources within and across system levels to achieve individual, system-level specific, and overall service ecosystem equilibria and wellbeing via regenerative cycles of reciprocity in exchanges of engaged resource combining actors who take psychological ownership over the dynamic co-creation of their own, others' and the system's wellbeing, and utilise restorative justice to respond to system inherent or external critical incidents.

Figure 4 presents a framework showing the effects and direction of utu (repayment and retaliation) and muru (restorative justice) in combination with the relational and regenerative co-creation of wellbeing in service ecosystems. Direct reciprocity usually occurs between actors within each level as part of economic and social exchange, and aiming at maintaining positive cycles of reciprocity also means taking ownership of one another's wellbeing. However, direct reciprocity not only exists across system levels but, because of the concept of pooling and redistribution of resources, it is masked as indirect exchange and can "jump" between system levels even though givers and recipients might be at the same level. Here, the exchange commodity is "given" to the entity at the level directly above, held in some form of community pool, and then drawn upon by other actors. The receiver of the original
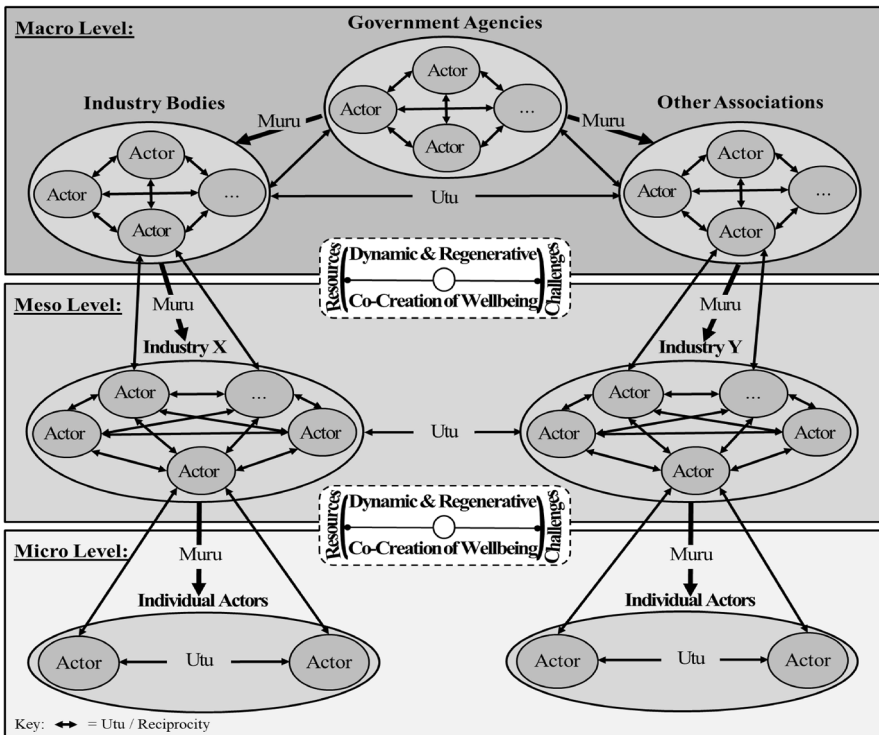

Fig. 4 Framework for dynamic and integrated reciprocity and restorative justice to maintain relational and regenerative service ecosystem wellbeing

contribution has to have an association with the same collective as the giver and the benefit is reallocated within the same system.

Negative cycles of reciprocity occur within the same level, such as in disputes between a customer and a staff member but may also happen between levels as in disagreements between a customer and the firm as such. However, as also indicated in Fig. 4, restorative justice re-establishes an equilibrium via a directive from a higher systems level, in the form of an obligation to compensate the offended party for the offence or transgression. For example, following a failure by the service employee causing a challenge and disequilibrium for the customer, compensation is provided according to the policies set out by the firm at meso-level, whereas if the firm itself has failed, compensation is directed by a higher body, such as an industry ombudsman at macro-level. Restorative justice can be applied to end a cycle of negative reciprocity or as a preventative measure to stop such a cycle from commencing. As with Māori society, the purpose of restorative justice is to reestablish the affected party to their original position and bring back individual but also system equilibrium and wellbeing. Direct and indirect reciprocity as well as restorative justice might also be influenced by the political system at macro level which either promotes or prohibits certain forms of exchange in and self-regulation of the system.

6 Illustrative application of the framework to the sharing economy

The framework introduced above can be applied to contemporary service exchange as occurring in the sharing economy, i.e. in peer-to-peer markets as alternative suppliers of goods and services (Lee and Kim 2019a; Zervas et al. 2017). Depending on their size, sharing economy platforms can be much more impersonal compared to traditional tribal systems where members would interact, know one another and maintain long-term relationships. Sharing economy actors can be more loosely coupled via the platforms they use and ties might not necessarily develop or be very strong, i.e. some reciprocity cycles might be rather short in duration. However, comparable is the focus on and the dominance of the community over the individual (Best 1934), the dynamics and the longer timeframes from a systems wellbeing perspective with regenerative cycles as explicated below.

As visible in Fig. 5, at micro level individual actors such as consumers and employees can be identified, for example, Uber riders and drivers (peer-to-peer). The time spent together in the car is when direct reciprocity can occur. Technology though, via the intermediary (Uber platform) at meso level, masks elements of the relationship between rider and driver as an indirect exchange (Vargo and Akaka 2009). That is, booking a ride via the Uber platform initiates the reciprocal economic agreement with the driver when selecting pickup location, requesting a ride and receiving an estimate of the fare to be charged (Uber 2021). Uber signals the nearest drivers and one of them accepts and takes the rider to the target location. Payments are banked into the driver's bank account once a week and are masked as indirect reciprocal repayments due to the intermediary. Social exchange is usually short lived and limited to the time of the ride. Riders and drivers might not necessarily meet again. Besides the more economic exchanges (money for ride),
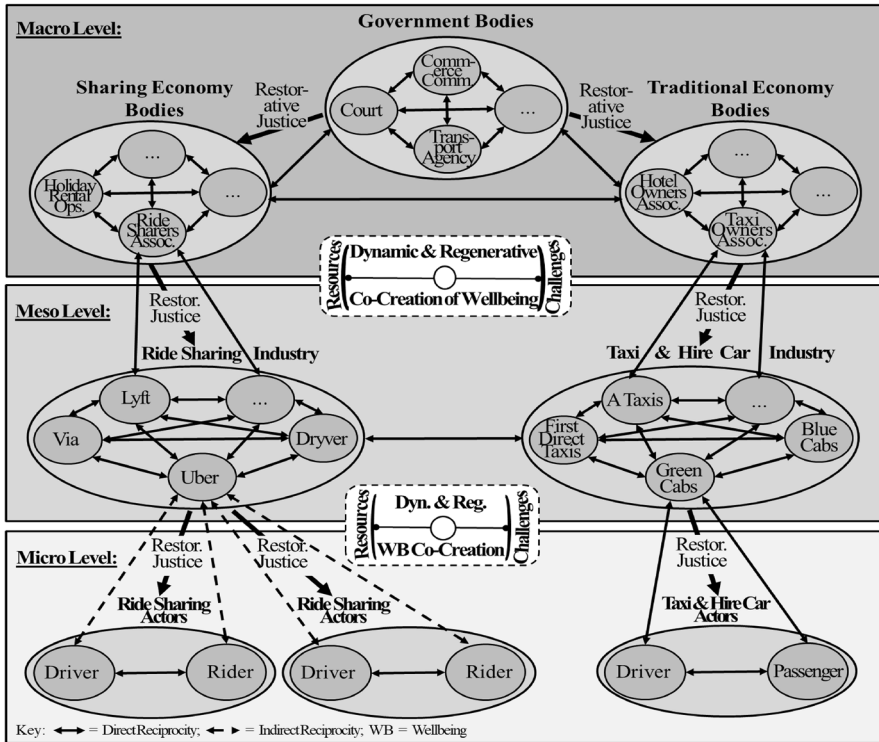
Fig. 5 Framework applied to sharing economy

more ceremonial and social exchanges (Firth 2011; Malinowski 1922; 1926; Park et al. 2018) occur when riders and drivers give one another "good gifts" (Metge 2002) and create a positive cycle of exchange. "After every trip, drivers and riders rate each other on a five-star scale and give feedback on how the trip went. This two-way system holds everyone accountable for their own behaviour" (Uber 2020). Failure to adhere to such process as devised by online platforms might leave one party short changed, for example, when a buyer who has rated a seller does not receive any rating from the seller in return and this might lower their ability to continue to trade (see, for example, Trademe 2021a). This indicates that there is a certain code of conduct to remain a member of such community. Such behaviour reflects elements of reciprocity from traditional tribal behaviour. To belong to and participate in such a community (Mahrous and Abdelmaaboud 2017) involves safeguarding an ideal of reciprocity, in which to serve others is to serve oneself (Marsden 2003) in order to maintain wellbeing of the community and enable regenerative cycles of reciprocity over time which keep the system alive.

Ratings are being motivated by the logic of reciprocity and by upholding values as they create "a solidarity among those mutually oriented to the common values. Voluntarism in regard to adhering to such values is important for the survival and

functioning of such reciprocal systems. The actors concerned will be said to constitute, within the area of relevance of these values, a *collectivity*" (Parsons 1951, p. 26, emphasis in original). However, Weiner (1980) points out that one of the main problems in a purely transactional orientation is that it is ego-centred, and tends to comprehend individuals as voluntarily engaged in, but relatively uninhibited by, their social systems, connections, as well as settings. That is why there is a need to give precedence to a space–time framework that is designed around the regenerative cycles that are culturally and symbolicaIly demarcated (Weiner 1980). By doing so, a transactional orientation is merged with a societal context for the individual and society not to be viewed as dichotomies (Weiner 1980). Moreover, individual ownership over system wellbeing and not just over own wellbeing is required (Chen et al. 2021; Finsterwalder and Kuppelwieser 2020) to facilitate community and generalised reciprocity. Such notions resonate with a Māori approach and should be reflected in how service ecosystems are designed. A more normative approach is often required to implement such conduct. Hence, for example, rating one another might have to be formalised in Uber's norm of reciprocity, that is the automated mechanism requesting both driver and rider to rate one another after the ride is complete. For tribal systems, Mauss (1966, p. 40) put this so pointedly: "Failure to give [rate] or receive [accept rating], like failure to make return gifts [counter-rate], means a loss of dignity [potential drop in ranking and *mana* (status)]". Obligations and responsibilities represent the values and norms in an online community and these create stability in such social system (Gouldner 1960). However, for users not to become "gift-giving calculators" (Marcoux 2009, p. 673) based on a "calculus of reciprocity" (Schwab 1995, p. 7), the long-term regenerative perspective is vital.

In terms of indirect reciprocity, it occurs when other members, such as the communities of riders and drivers alike benefit from ratings. This is important as each group is in need of its members' activities. In Fig. 5 at *micro level* this is indicated by the dotted arrows which indicate group-generalised reciprocity (Ekeh 1974) as pooling of value propositions via the Uber platform. If a group neglects its duties each community of riders and drivers has a means for the enforcement of its rights, i.e. reciprocity (Malinowski 1926).

Further, positive reciprocity, for example, drivers providing free water or mints might create an disequilibrium and riders in return might tip the drivers or rate them higher. Rating scores not only determine the *mana* (status) of the individual actors/users (Yagil and Medler-Liraz 2019) within the community and enable their continuance in the system, they also influence the reputation of the provider at meso level, for example, Airbnb's brand image as it attracts new users to the platform.

Negative reciprocity in form of retaliation eventuates, for example, where Uber drivers and riders get into a brawl, such as when a "[p]assenger lashes out at the driver who retaliates by violently swinging a weapon" (Burford 2017). Some sharing economy providers clearly state in their code of conduct for both parties that they should "not engage in retaliatory feedback or behaviour" (Trademe 2021b). At a *micro level* restorative justice comes into play when due to such or similar events, for example, both rider and driver are penalised by Uber located at *meso level*. For the drivers and depending on the severity of the transgression (service failure vs serious

offence), Uber can either have them retrained and hence can also provide a benefit to the offender (Bazemore 1998) or exclude them permanently from driving for Uber. Uber can employ this top down restorative justice approach to remove potential disequilibrium between riders and drivers. To not let micro level negative reciprocity emerge measures can be put in place so that riders and drivers can report any issues, such as harsh braking or inappropriate remarks. However, drivers fear that this might create a mechanism of retaliation (negative reciprocity) for riders and impact drivers' ratings (Kerr 2020). Ratings are prominently visible not only for the drivers but also for the riders to remind them that they are being rated, so that they behave more appropriately (Leff 2017). This is critical in peer-to-peer environments, as users (for example, drivers, hosts) integrate their private resources (for example, apartment, car) to co-create the service and want these to be treated with respect and care by the users (riders, guests). Moreover, sharing economy shows elements of delayed non-simultaneous reciprocity (Firth 2011; Walker 1990). There is potential for disequilibrium due to riders and drivers having to rate one another, usually within a certain timeframe. If a rider sees their rating go down before they rate, they might downrate the driver, i.e. reciprocate in kind by retaliating (Wilson 2016). Moreover, riders appear to be able to change their driver rating, even months later (Wheeler 2020). Proper service ecosystem and platform design has to account for such loop holes.

Due to the fact that to attack one is to assault the community (Best 1934), at Airbnb (2021) for all members the norm of reciprocity was reinforced "to fight bias and discrimination [offence; potential start of negative cycle between users] in the Airbnb community" by members having to "agree to treat everyone in the Airbnb community (…) with respect, and without judgement or bias". Declining to accept this commitment leads to not being able to host or book using Airbnb. Without members' proper conduct and contributions the platform would likely cease to exist.

At *meso level*, for example, ride sharing providers interact with one another, either directly or indirectly. A negative cycle of exchange (Metge 2002) between Lyft and Uber occurred in San Franscisco, when Uber started aggressively poaching Lyft drivers with the prospect of huge bonuses, and Lyft retaliated by fighting back with similar offers (Huett 2014). It has also been reported that Uber employees committed offences by deliberately ordering rides from other ride sharing operators, including Lyft, only to cancel them later (Khaw 2014). Equally, "wars" (negative reciprocity) between ride sharing industry actors and taxi and care hire industry actors have emerged (Calvo 2019). To restore conflicts between the parties, government bodies, such as transport agencies, at *macro level* aim at providing equal regulations for either industry (Plumb 2016). Further, sharing economy associations, such as ride share drivers' organisations (for example, RSDAA 2020) at macro level aim at imposing restorative justice with providers of online platforms in regard to protecting drivers but also riders. This is to hold platforms to account for their conduct (Wilkins 2016) and it is vital for platform providers to best deal with the regulators (Uberworld 2016), such as government. At macro level as such, organisations like ride sharing associations then liaise with and build a mutually reverential and amiable relationship (RSDAA 2020) with government bodies to develop and improve rideshare regulations. Government bodies liaise with traditional economy

bodies in regard to rules and regulations. The intra- and intralevel mechanisms of reciprocity show the relational and regenerative nature of such an approach.

7 Implications, future research directions and conclusion

An integrative and dynamic view of the Māori concept of *utu* and *muru* as one single mechanism provides insights into the processes, within and across social structures, which facilitate individual, community and societal wellbeing. The approach can be applied to service ecosystems research and practice.

In terms of *practical implications*, institutions and groupings, such as government bodies, platform providers and individual actors should consider the implications of causing disequilibria within service exchanges through negative cycles of reciprocity. Whereas positive reciprocity can establish loyalty between partners, retaliation might be satisfactory in the short term but affect actors' as well as the service ecosystem's wellbeing. Restorative justice needs to be in place to maintain service ecosystem wellbeing and help to police offenders. Offences might have to be escalated to higher levels of the system for resolution. In terms of service design, service ecosystems can only be self-adjusting (Vargo and Lusch 2016) when norms and rules guided by values are in place which allow the system to self-regulate. Especially with newer forms of collaboration, rulebooks to regulate behaviour of actors in the system could still be missing or might not have been (fully) established yet, for example, by platform providers, such as Lyft, Uber or Didi. Providers might try and work around existing regulations or rules might be broken. In such cases, restorative justice (macro level top down) will either regulate the service provider/platform or the latter will have to regulate their users (meso level top down). The definition of rules for each system level are crucial for the functioning of the entire service ecosystem when (re-)designing such systems. However, rules can be defined and devised, values cannot. Restorative justice is based on such values which in turn enable the co-creation of value for all actors in the sharing economy. That is, when starting new ventures providers need to be consistent in applying the norm of reciprocity for overall regenerative system wellbeing that incorporates reciprocal behaviour of all members engaged in co-creating the service (and thus also wellbeing). For example, notions that "leaving feedback is completely voluntary" (Ebay 2021) might have to be reformulated—more normatively—to create a stronger appeal for participants to take ownership and enable such reciprocity to be in place by setting clearer expectations in terms of their behaviour. Collectivity on platforms has to be facilitated by providers to create social cohesion and obligations as present in traditional tribal associations (Firth 2011; Parsons 1951).

In regard to the *theoretical implications*, this work has extended the notion of reciprocity emerging in service research by introducing (a) a *single mechanism* entailing an *integrated, dynamic and time-spanning perspective of reciprocity and restorative justice* (b) a *novel conceptualisation of the nature of service ecosystem wellbeing* by highlighting its *relational and regenerative aspects*, and (c) the notion of *ownership over reciprocal and system wellbeing co-creation* and (d) the *interplay between the individual and the collective*. Future research can expand on such

conceptualisations and qualitatively and quantitatively investigate the interrelated concepts of repayment, retaliation and restorative justice as one mechanism in the new service marketplace. Moreover, analysing the impact of the length of reciprocal relationships on the type of reciprocal exchange and regenerative cycles would be beneficial. Investigating the duration of repayment and retaliation sequences in newer vs traditional forms of collaboration and related wellbeing implications might also be fruitful. Further, reciprocity and service experience among actors with one or more actors not being human (e.g. self-driving taxis) could be examined.

In summary, service scholars researching service ecosystems should consider the tribal conception of reciprocity, as it goes well beyond a simple tit-for-tat reciprocity of dyadic exchanges, but relates to obligations in networks. Considering a longer timeframe with regenerative cyles for wellbeing, co-creation by defocusing on discrete exchange is critical. Newer approaches to service, markets and marketing (Vargo and Lusch 2016) and service exchange should benefit from such novel infusion to better understand the bigger picture of a "reciprocity of services" (Malinowski 1926, p. 23).

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