



**Elevating the Human Experience (HX) Through Service  
Research Collaborations:  
Introducing ServCollab**

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## **Elevating the Human Experience (HX) Through Service Research Collaborations: Introducing ServCollab**

### **Abstract**

#### **Purpose:**

Elevating the human experience (HX) through research collaborations is the purpose of this article. ServCollab facilitates and supports service research collaborations that seek to reduce human suffering and improve human wellbeing.

#### **Design/methodology/approach:**

To catalyze this initiative, we introduce ServCollab's three human rights goals (serve, enable, and transform), standards of justice for serving humanity (distributive, procedural, and interactional justice), and research approaches for serving humanity (service design and community action research).

#### **Research implications:**

ServCollab seeks to advance the service research field via large-scale service research projects that pursue theory-building, research, and action. Service inclusion is the first focus of ServCollab and is illustrated through two projects (transformative refugee services and virtual assistants in social care). This paper seeks to encourage collaboration in more large-scale service research projects that elevate the Human Experience (HX).

#### **Practical implications:**

ServCollab seeks to raise the aspirations of service researchers, expand the skills of service research teams, and build mutually collaborative service research approaches that transform human lives.

**Originality/value:**

ServCollab is a unique organization within the burgeoning service research community. By collaborating with service researchers, with service research centers, with universities, with nonprofit agencies, and with foundations, ServCollab will build research capacity to address large-scale human service system problems. ServCollab takes a broad perspective for serving humanity by focusing on the human experience (HX). Current business research focuses on the interactive roles of customer experience and employee experience. From the perspective of HX, such role labels are insufficient concepts for the full spectrum of human life.

**Keywords:** Wellbeing, human experience, service design, transformative service research, vulnerable consumers, service inclusion, collaboration

**Paper type:** Viewpoint

## Elevating the Human Experience (HX) Through Service Research Collaborations: Introducing ServCollab

### Introduction

As the service research field has evolved, our understanding of the nature of service has shifted from being peripheral to human experience to becoming central to human experience. One aspect of this new centrality of service has been the expansion of research topics beyond dyadic service encounters (Bitner *et al.*, 1990) to service systems (Maglio *et al.*, 2009) and then to service ecosystems (Akaka and Vargo, 2015). A second aspect is the emergence of the Transformative Service Research (TSR) movement, which has raised the aspirations of the service research field to improving human wellbeing (Anderson *et al.*, 2013) and reducing its suffering (Nasr and Fisk, 2019). There is great power and potential in this new understanding of the central role of service in human life. Fundamentally, the centrality of service to human experience means that the greatest potential of the service research field is yet to be explored and discovered. ServCollab was created to enable the service research field to elevate human experience (HX) through service research collaborations.

#### *Why Now? Advancing the Service Research Field*

As scientific inquiry has become increasingly complex, some scientific fields have created what have been called “big science” projects. Such projects began in the physical sciences with projects like the Manhattan Project, which produced the first nuclear weapons. In most cases, such projects have been government funded. In the life sciences, the largest project was the Human Genome Project, which mapped the genes of the human genome. Such big science projects have required large scientific teams, sophisticated technology, and large budgets. For the service research field to make major scientific advances and truly improve

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3 human wellbeing and reduce its suffering, it will require larger service research projects. Such  
4 projects will require that service researchers build large and inclusive project teams, sharpen  
5 their collaboration skills, and hone their research tools for serving humanity. It will also require  
6 that service researchers create and share a service language that improves communication across  
7 the service research community (Fisk and Grove, 2010). Most importantly, it will require that  
8 service researchers develop service standards for properly serving humanity.  
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### 10 *What Is ServCollab?*

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12 ServCollab is a service research organization for diagnosing and treating humanity's  
13 service system problems (poverty, ignorance, disease, etc.). For instance, failure of educational  
14 and healthcare systems, which are some of the biggest service industries in any country, results  
15 in the propagation of poverty, sickness, and decreased quality of life among many other negative  
16 societal implications. As an independent and unfettered entity, ServCollab seeks to transform the  
17 service research community by enabling collaborative solutions to profound human service  
18 system problems. In addition to taking on large scale service research projects, ServCollab will  
19 practice collaboration in its operations, help train others in collaborating on large scale service  
20 research projects, foster best practices for collaborative teams, and serve as a clearinghouse for  
21 collaborative service research resources.  
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42 To serve humanity, ServCollab seeks to elevate the human experience (HX), which is our  
43 holistic concept for the totality of each person's experience with service systems as they seek to  
44 meet their basic human needs across their life journey. HX focuses fully on each person's life  
45 rather than on the various specific service roles they might enact at specific times. Thus, it is  
46 both broader and deeper than the specific role-based concepts of customer experience (CX), user  
47 experience (UX), or employee experience (EX).  
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There are numerous existing academic service organizations that address research. These include service centers at various universities, service conferences, and the American Marketing Service Special Interest Group (SERVSIG). ServCollab will seek collaborative activities with these academic service organizations and their members. With the help of the experience, expertise, and connections of such academic participants, ServCollab can elevate HX.

### *Why Focus on Collaboration?*

As a social species, human interactions are learned behaviors that are essential for human existence. Table 1 shows our conceptualization of four categories of human interaction: conflict, competition, cooperation, and collaboration. Conflict and competition are common interactions that are chronicled widely in human history. Conflict starts as an argument but can escalate into a war. Competition refers to seeking the same resources through a rules-based contest. Both conflict and competition result in winners seeking dominance over the losers. Such dominance is associated with the origination of the word service. Service is derived from the Latin word “*servus*” (Merriam-Webster.com 2020), which means slave or servant.

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Place Table 1 about here

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Cooperation and collaboration have been less prominently chronicled by historians. Cooperation is participatory interaction but not always voluntary interaction. Cooperation can be coerced by law, by bullying, or by physical force. As such, cooperation can lead to unequal and unjust outcomes whereas one party could be benefiting at the expense of the other. Collaboration is distinguished by shared intentionality (Angus and Newton 2015). Collaborative interactions

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3 occur when people eagerly engage in working with each other. Anthropologists (Tomasello *et*  
4 *al.*, 2012) have characterized the evolution of our species in prehistoric times as mutualistic  
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6 collaboration driven by interdependence. Such mutualistic collaboration began with the first  
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8 service systems (families) and continued with the steady evolution in sophistication of human  
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10 service systems from families, to tribes, to villages, to cities, and to nations (Fisk, 2009; Fisk and  
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12 Grove 2010).  
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17 Our species evolved to be great at small-scale collaboration in families, tribes, and  
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19 villages (Tomasello *et al.*, 2012), but we struggle with unfairness problems in the large-scale  
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21 complexity of cities and nations. Complexity makes it more challenging to reach agreement and  
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23 easier to disagree. New human collaboration innovations are needed to overcome the modern  
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25 human challenges of more than 7 billion people competing for resources on Planet Earth.  
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29 Daniel Dennett (1995) proposed the metaphor of a “crane” to explain Darwin’s concept  
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31 of natural selection. He argues that language and culture are cranes that provide the basis for  
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33 structures of greater complexity. “Human culture, as we have already seen, is not just a crane  
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35 composed of cranes, but a crane-making crane.” (Dennett, 1995, Chapter 12-The Cranes of  
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37 Culture). Languages, cultures, arts, education, and science are all collaborative service system  
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39 cranes. Further, collaboration is essential for elevating human experience (HX). ServCollab  
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41 seeks to build a collaborative service research crane to help service researchers elevate HX (see  
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43 Figure 1).  
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ServCollab seeks to practice and propagate collaborative service research. More specifically, ServCollab will seek to practice transformative collaboration (Fisk et al. 2019): “Transformative collaboration occurs when all participants are able to make contributions at their full human potential.” (p. 198). ServCollab will pursue transformative collaboration through service research projects that reduce violations of human rights and enable more sustainable and satisfying HX. We believe that with this elevated HX perspective, those we serve will have better human experiences in their specific service roles as parents, citizens, customers, employees, etc.

#### *ServCollab’s Mission*

ServCollab’s mission is “to serve humanity through service research collaborations that catalyze reducing human suffering and improving human wellbeing.” These service research collaborations will elevate HX by pursuing ServCollab’s three human rights goals: serve, enable, and transform.

#### *ServCollab’s Human Rights Goals*

To develop ServCollab’s goals, we adopt a process view starting with the need to “serve,” followed by “enabling,” with the ultimate goal of “transforming”:

1. *Serve* – ServCollab seeks to serve all humans with research that respects their dignity and supports their rights. This includes advocating for fair and inclusive service experiences starting with fair and inclusive access to service, fair and inclusive service encounters, and fair and inclusive ability to exit the service.
2. *Enable* - ServCollab seeks: 1) to enable collaborations among researchers and organizations that span disciplinary and national boundaries in pursuit of diagnosing and treating humanity’s many service system problems, 2) to enable access to the human and financial



resources necessary for the success of such collaborations, 3) to enable a deeper understanding of service systems, and 4) to propagate a humane design science for service systems.

3. *Transform* - ServCollab seeks transformative reductions in human suffering and transformative improvements in human wellbeing. Further, ServCollab seeks: 1) to measure both the quantities and qualities of service systems, 2) to foster standards of service that are adaptable and measurable across different service systems, and 3) to evolve those service standards to better fulfill human potential.

To elaborate on the foundational perspectives and concepts that form the basis for ServCollab, we begin by exploring a broader perspective on serving humanity. The second section proposes standards of justice for serving humanity. The third section considers the role of TSR in raising our aspirations for serving humanity. The fourth section explores powerful research approaches for serving humanity. The fifth section summarizes ServCollab's first projects on service inclusion. The sixth section discusses a call to collaborate on future ServCollab efforts.

### **Human Experience (HX): A Broader Perspective on Serving Humanity**

When Vargo and Lusch (2004) introduced Service-Dominant Logic (S-D logic) it was a key milestone in the broadening of thinking about service. They argued that service is fundamental to all economic and social exchange. This launched many service researchers on a path of rethinking the foundations of the service research field, which included expanding from the original focus on service encounters (Bitner *et al.*, 1990) to service systems (Maglio *et al.*, 2009) and then to service ecosystems (Akaka and Vargo, 2015; Lusch and Vargo 2014).

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ServCollab takes a broader perspective for serving humanity by focusing on the human experience (HX). Current business terminology labels people's primary interactive roles in service systems as customer and employee. From the perspective of HX, such specific interaction role labels are insufficient concepts for the full richness of human life. Customer Experience (CX) and Employee Experience (EX) have been the subjects of considerable research effort but CX and EX are just parts of each person's overall human experience.

HX is broader and deeper, as people seek to gratify their basic human needs. Schneider and Bowen (1995) contrasted the perspective of customer expectations versus customer needs. Customer expectations are concerned with "Desired outcomes from service encounters." In contrast, customer needs are concerned with "Desired outcomes from human existence." Although expectations and needs fall on a continuum, they are very different lenses on human experiences. Additionally, violations of expectations yield disappointment or dissatisfaction, but violation of basic human needs result in anger and outrage. Schneider and Bowen (1995) proposed three basic human needs: security, esteem, and justice, as particularly relevant to server-served exchange. Security and esteem were drawn from a synthesis of needs from Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. They added justice since as long ago as Aristotle it has been recognized that a moral sense is basic to being human, and people hold on to a belief that they should get what they deserve. They believe they should live in a just world. HX should be the focus of future service research. It will require building a new service language for understanding and serving human needs. One challenge will be how to conceptualize and name outcomes at higher levels than service roles such as customer and employee.

The need for justice will be our primary focus in elevating HX through service research collaborations via ServCollab. The need for justice reflects peoples' yearning to feel that they

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3 live in a “just world” (Scheider & Bowen,1995). Living in conditions that violate their need for  
4 security and being treated in demeaning ways that violate their sense of self-esteem certainly  
5 compromise belief that they live in a just world. Next, we describe a framework that can help  
6 guide action and research on how to deliver three types of justice for people.  
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### 14 15 **Standards of Justice for Serving Humanity**

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17 Service systems are created by humans for humans, but they do not always meet human  
18 needs fairly. Rawls conceptualized justice as fairness (1999). Fairness requires just service  
19 systems institutions. The concept of justice refers to peoples’ sense of the moral propriety of how  
20 they are treated. Justice includes the moral obligations that each party has to the other.  
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26 Cropanzano *et al.* (2007) elaborated three types of justice for employees, customers, and people  
27 overall: distributive, procedural, and interactional.  
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#### 31 *Distributive Justice*

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33 Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the *outcomes* received from a  
34 service system. According to Deutsch (1985), distributive justice issues are abundant throughout  
35 society as they exist in all situations where people enter into exchanges, thus it has direct  
36 relevance to service. The concept of distributive justice originates from social exchange theory  
37 (Blau, 1964; Adams, 1965), which emphasizes the role of equity in shaping subsequent  
38 exchanges. Three basic distributive justice principles, or distributive rules, are equity, equality,  
39 and need (see Deutsch, 1985; Tyler, 1994). The outcomes from the service system might be  
40 allocated based on equity (each person’s contributions), equality (each person receives roughly  
41 the same), or need (based on each person’s requirements). Messick and Cook (1983) explain  
42 equity in light of fair exchanges based on one’s contribution to the exchange (Deutsch, 1985).  
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3 Despite the pervasive nature of this approach, (1) individual's needs and (2) equality regardless  
4 of one's contribution have been introduced as essential for distributive justice understanding and  
5 implementation. According to Blodgett *et al.* (1997), most marketing studies have focused  
6 almost solely on equity (i.e. fairness based on contribution) as the appropriate distributive rule.  
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12 ServCollab seek to extend the focus on individual needs and equality beyond individual  
13 contribution given that different people have different needs and resources that they bring to the  
14 exchange. Many of these needs and resources are not proportional to the outcomes they are  
15 seeking and deserve. Within various service systems such as education and healthcare, we  
16 witness the lack of distributive justice. Some recipients require more attention or resources than  
17 the general public to be able to achieve their potential. As such, individual needs and equality  
18 should be emphasized throughout their service experiences.  
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### 20 21 22 *Procedural Justice*

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33 Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness in the allocation *process* (i.e., policies,  
34 procedures, criteria) governing decisions involving treatment and benefits in service systems.  
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36 According to Leventhal *et al.* (1980), fair process should be consistent, unbiased, and impartial;  
37 inclusive of all parties' interests; and based on accurate information and on ethical standards. As  
38 such, when procedural justice occurs, no group is singled out for discrimination or ill-treatment,  
39 decisions are based on accurate information, appeal processes are possible, ethics are not  
40 violated, and the appropriate stakeholders have input into decisions. ServCollab seeks to  
41 highlight the importance of fair service procedures that guarantee procedural justice to all  
42 involved parties.  
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### 51 52 *Interactional Justice*

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Interactional justice refers to the perceived fairness of the *interpersonal treatment* (i.e. respect, courtesy, honesty, empathy) one receives from others during a service encounter. This can take an informational form of sharing relevant information or the interpersonal form of being treated with dignity, courtesy, and respect. Interactional justice focuses on the two-way interactions including the way in which people are treated with respect, interest, friendliness, honesty, and politeness (Lacey and Sneath, 2006). Overall, there are two types of interactional justice (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). First, interpersonal justice relates to the respect and dignity with which one treats another. Second, informational justice means to be truthful and to provide justifications when things go badly. Fairness is achieved when people are treated with dignity, respect and politeness (Kabadayi *et al.*, 2019). While procedural justice focuses on the formal aspect of the service process, interactional justice emphasizes the social aspect of the process (Skarlicki and Folger, 1997). As such, even if an individual perceives the outcomes and procedures of a service as reasonable or satisfactory, they may still feel mistreated if they discern unfair status treatment during a service encounter. ServCollab seeks to highlight the importance of human values such as respect, empathy, compassion, friendliness, honesty, and politeness within services exchanges and to prevent myopic procedures and outcomes.

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Cropanzano *et al.* (2007) note the challenge of maintaining all three types simultaneously and offer that the ill effects of injustice can be reduced if at least one type of justice is maintained. For example, distributive and procedural injustice will have less negative effect if interactional justice is high. ServCollab advocates considering all three types of justice as essential for improving human wellbeing and reducing its suffering.

## 54 **Raising Our Aspirations for Serving Humanity**

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3 The Transformative Service Research (TSR) movement has raised aspirations by  
4 advocating service research that attends to improving human wellbeing. TSR has been defined as  
5 research that focuses on creating “uplifting changes aimed at improving the lives of individuals  
6 (both consumers and employees), families, communities, society, and the ecosystem more  
7 broadly” (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015, p. 243). At its core, TSR focuses research attention on  
8 people (collective and individual) and aspects of service that affect the nature of their experience  
9 as humans in order to reduce human suffering and improve wellbeing.  
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19 As we consider TSR and ServCollab’s large-scale mission of reducing human suffering  
20 and improving wellbeing, it is especially important to build more consideration of macro  
21 elements such as service systems and ecosystems. There have been previous calls for more  
22 transformative service emphasis and recognition of the collective levels of humans and the  
23 structural aspects of services (Anderson and Ostrom, 2015), but the focus on individual  
24 consumers and dyads still overshadows more macro elements.  
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33 Three illustrative conceptual pathways might be helpful in moving Transformative  
34 Service Research and ServCollab projects to macro elements: *capability* (Sen, 1982), *social*  
35 *quality* (Abbott and Wallace, 2012), and *symbolic boundaries* (Lamont *et al.*, 2015). This is far  
36 from a comprehensive list of helpful theories, but each of these theoretical perspectives gives rise  
37 to the gnarly question regarding where the responsibility for defining and accomplishing  
38 wellbeing lies and recognizes the often ignored influence of structures – in particular, the  
39 structures that services in their ubiquity create (Anderson and Ostrom, 2018). Structures are  
40 recurring arrangements that influence and limit the opportunities that are available to social  
41 groups (Barker, 2005).  
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*Capability.* The capability approach was initiated by economist Amartya Sen (1982). It was unique at the time in that it introduced an ethical social justice component. Capability raises the question of the availability of means to and opportunities for a good life and wellbeing. Capabilities are the effective freedoms or valuable opportunities from which humans can choose in terms of different kinds of life that they value and want to experience (Robeyns, 2016). These opportunities are made feasible and constrained by external (social, structural, and environmental) as well as internal factors such as experiences and motivations (Crocker, 2008). Since services are so ubiquitous, the structures that are created by services can both create and restrict capabilities. For example, some housing services for the aging, such as many nursing homes, restrict choices regarding movement, food, schedule, companionship, etc. Whereas other service structures and initiatives such as aging in community efforts seek to increase choices on these aspects (Thomas and Blanchard, 2009). Services define, in part, what human experiences and capabilities are available or absent to humans. This raises important questions for TSR and ServCollab. For example, consider these questions for someone with vision challenges or someone in a refugee camp. What are the ways that service systems structure capabilities? How are capability decisions made in services? How much collaboration is occurring in this structuring? How does this collaboration vary with different groups? When and how is capability restriction most likely to happen? How can these restrictions be avoided? What is critical for service systems to identify in the ways they structure capabilities? How can services help convert capabilities to valued human experience? What capabilities might be systemically limited or privileged for certain groups by service structures?

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*Social Quality.* Social Quality theory digs deeper into which structural aspects maximize collective wellbeing (Abbott and Wallace, 2012) and thus can provide assistance in developing

standards of care for properly serving humanity. The Social Quality model is a multi-dimensional construct where society is envisaged as the results of social and systems integration that then provides the context for human agency (Giddens, 1984). Social Quality forefronts those aspects of social structures that enable humans to flourish. The most well-known model identifies four fields: economic security, social cohesion, social inclusion, and the conditions for social empowerment (Lockwood, 1992). The Social Determinants of Health framework is an example of a social quality model focused specifically on health wellbeing and includes positions on the social gradient, stress, early life, social exclusion, work, unemployment, social support, addiction, food, and transport (Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003). This theory and research suggest wider responsibility for creating healthy societies and suggests that services should take proper account of these dimensions. How can service systems support and grow factors that impact collective wellbeing? Recent work by Waygood *et al.* (2019) highlights not only the wellbeing impact that different types of transportation have on children, but what different types of activities are enabled or restricted by transportation. Research questions can revolve around how these different social qualities are taken into account in and created by service structures.

*Symbolic Boundaries.* ServCollab advocates for fair and inclusive service experiences starting with fair and inclusive access to service, fair and exclusive service encounters as well as fair and inclusive exit from the service. Symbolic Boundaries theory provides a conceptualization useful in realizing this goal. Symbolic Boundaries are conceptual tools that people use to understand the world in terms of the lines that include and define some people, groups, and things while excluding others (Lamont and Molnar 2002). These distinctions can be communicated through taboos, cultural attitudes and practices, and patterns of likes and dislikes (Lamont *et al.*, 2015). Service structures and programs draw boundaries. As Edgell *et al.* (2019)



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3 point out, this is not a benign activity. For example, research has found that programs meant to  
4 facilitate immigrants' entry into a society may actually emphasize the boundaries that separate  
5 them from the national community (Onasch, 2017). It seems that there are overt, planned  
6 boundaries (e.g., a certain age for the purchase of alcohol) and there are more covert boundaries  
7 (e.g., systemic restricted choice of minorities seeking financing (Bone *et al.*, 2014)). Symbolic  
8 Boundaries theory raises TSR questions such as: Can services avoid drawing boundaries? How  
9 do service structures construct and communicate these boundaries? How can service structures  
10 approach boundaries in a way that is not destructive? What trade-offs occur with boundaries in  
11 services? What elements of service structures are most fair and inclusive? With regard to  
12 services and boundaries, what developmental or situational times are most critical in impacting  
13 wellbeing?  
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15 All of these theoretical approaches recognize the impact that service structures and systems may  
16 have on wellbeing. Assuming that an individual is solely responsible for their wellbeing while  
17 ignoring the impact of structures runs the risk of decreasing collective and individual wellbeing,  
18 or at the very least, losing opportunities to transform wellbeing. ServCollab seeks to adopt the  
19 TSR aspirations of moving the focus from micro to macro elements. As such, it seeks to support  
20 research projects that address higher-level questions focused on improving wellbeing and  
21 reducing suffering.  
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### 47 **Research Approaches for Serving Humanity**

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49 In this section, ServCollab advocates two research approaches for serving humanity – service  
50 design and action research.  
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52 *Designing new service solutions to serve humanity*  
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3 Service design can be defined as a human-centered, holistic, creative, and iterative  
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5 approach to service innovation (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011), rooted in design as changing  
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7 existing situations into preferred futures (Simon, 1969). Service design integrates S-D logic with  
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9 design approaches and tools to envision future service systems and new forms of value co-  
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11 creation (Wetter-Edman et al., 2014) that align with the human rights goals of ServCollab. These  
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13 design roots mean that service design is action-oriented towards developing new service  
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15 solutions to meet needs and improve situations (Friedman, 2003).  
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18  
19 Service design research can leverage explanatory research, which focuses on  
20  
21 understanding service systems, by complementing it with action-oriented design research for  
22  
23 system transformation through service (Patrício et al., 2019). To this end, design science offers a  
24  
25 research approach that goes beyond creating concrete new services to developing theoretically  
26  
27 grounded and empirically tested solutions for more general classes of problems (Van Aken,  
28  
29 2004). Design science research can therefore support service design research (Teixeira et al.,  
30  
31 2019), especially in developing new methods and principles that move beyond the design of  
32  
33 dyadic service interactions for the customer experience, to the design of services as  
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35 transformative enablers of value co-creation for wellbeing and the Human Experience as a  
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37 whole. Service design, therefore, offers important tools and opportunities to ServCollab for  
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39 developing solutions for problems to better serve humanity.  
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43 *Designing for and with people to enable balanced and mutual value co-creation.* Addressing key  
44  
45 problems of human service systems such as poverty or chronic diseases requires dealing with a  
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47 high level of complexity given the multitude of actors involved with different perspectives and  
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49 goals, linked by a complex web of co-creating interactions, and enabled and constrained by  
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51 institutions. Service design adopts a participatory, democratic process focused on developing  
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3 knowledge that can improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities (Sangiorgi, 2010).

4 Service design takes a human-centered and participatory approach, designing *for* and *with*  
5  
6 people, and can contribute to creating balanced solutions to uplift human service systems.  
7

8 Designing *for* people involves a sensemaking approach, viewed as a social construction of  
9  
10 meaning focused on understanding how people experience and understand the world around  
11  
12 them, and reflecting this sensemaking in the solutions being developed (Cipolla and Reynoso,  
13  
14 2017). Designing *with* people reflects a participatory approach where people are considered true  
15  
16 experts in domains of experience such as living or working, and as such they are actively  
17  
18 involved as co-creators in the design process, while the designer plays a facilitator role (Sanders,  
19  
20 2008). This participatory approach is particularly important in complex contexts such as  
21  
22 healthcare to understand and bring different actors' perspectives (e.g. patients and healthcare  
23  
24 practitioners) into a collective sensemaking design process, mapping their interactions and  
25  
26 potential conflicts, collaboratively developing balanced service solutions for the different actors,  
27  
28 and for uplifting the service system as a whole (Patrício et al., 2018b).  
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35 *Designing service for transformation.* The action oriented and participatory approach to service  
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37 design can also generate transformative value for uplifting changes in individual and collective  
38  
39 wellbeing (Blocker and Barrios, 2015). This transformative service design approach seeks to  
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41 create, not only new service solutions, but also the platforms and capacities for ongoing and  
42  
43 lasting change (Sangiorgi et al., 2019). Service design can, therefore, promote the change of  
44  
45 ingrained norms, rules, and beliefs of different system actors, such as fostering more human-  
46  
47 centered and participatory approaches in healthcare, and promoting ecosystem innovation  
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49 through institutional change (Vink et al., 2019). For example, by using design methods to stage  
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51 situations and propose environments that question healthcare professionals' assumptions and  
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3 habits, service design can create aesthetic disruptions to change the way they see and interact  
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5 with patients (Wetter-Edman et al., 2018).  
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8 To integrate the transformative practices of service design, Sangiorgi (2010) proposes a  
9  
10 set of transformational principles: 1) *active citizens*: understanding citizens as ‘agents’ and their  
11  
12 active role as co-creators of wellbeing, 2) *Intervention at community scale*: focusing on  
13  
14 communities as the unit of intervention as they have the right size to activate large-scale changes,  
15  
16 3) *Building capacities and research partnerships*: building capacities and partnerships through  
17  
18 on-going dialogues, which requires changes in organizational culture, but also developing the  
19  
20 skills for citizens to participate effectively, 4) *Re-distributing power*: promoting citizen power in  
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22 the design process to enhance their skills and capacities to contribute, 5) *Enhancing imagination*  
23  
24 *and hope*: leveraging design creative process to empower communities to envision new better  
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26 futures, 6) *building infrastructures and enabling platforms* for continuous redesign and co-  
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28 creation, and 7) *Evaluating success and impact*: namely in terms of outcome validity, democratic  
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30 validity, process validity, catalytic validity, and dialogical validity.  
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36 Service design can make key contributions towards more humane service systems and  
37  
38 help ServCollab projects reach their objectives. Its participatory action research and  
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40 transformative approach can support the design of service systems that are more human and  
41  
42 socially inclusive for the common good of humanity (Fisk et al., 2018; Patricio et al., 2018a).  
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#### 44 *Action Research*

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47 Action research seeks transformative change through simultaneously conducting research  
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49 and seeking action. There are different types of action research, but most are enacted through an  
50  
51 explicit set of social values that align with the principles of ServCollab. These values translate  
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53 into a process of inquiry with the following characteristics:  
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- “*Democratic* – enabling the participation of all people.
- *Equitable* – acknowledging people’s equality of worth.
- *Liberating* – providing freedom from oppressive, debilitating conditions.
- *Life enhancing* – enabling the expression of people’s full human potential.” (Stringer, 1999, pp. 9-10).

Critical Participatory Action Research (Critical PAR) is an especially fitting type of action research, which Michelle Fine describes in her appropriately titled book, *Just Research in Contentious Times: Widening the Methodological Imagination* (2018a). Critical PAR is research focused on achieving justice and thus starts with the critical part – situating each of the research problems within an analysis of the dynamics producing the problems: power, privilege, disadvantage, structure, and history. This crucial aspect is what Weis and Fine (2012) call critical bifocality which seeks to make visible the linkages through which structural conditions are encoded in policies as well as woven into communities and lives. They fear that “Isolated studies of individuals, cultures, or community life white out structures, histories, and cumulative state neglect; camouflage circuits of disinvestment; and simultaneously fail to reveal the production and reproduction of privilege” (Weis and Fine, 2012, p. 176). To understand the problem, the bifocal lens brings these structures (to include history) and lived practices to the forefront.

Action research subscribes to all of the rigorous methods and theoretical generalizability of traditional research but adds three additional components. First, the research is collaborative. The perspectives of those most impacted by the research problem are central to shaping the research question, method, and research output. At times, the research is even initiated by this group. For example, the Morris Justice Project of the City University of New York’s was initiated by mothers of the South Bronx who were concerned with how the New York Police

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3 Department (NYPD) treated their sons. Soon, a collaborative research team formed. This team  
4 met weekly on Morris Avenue to brainstorm, design the research, analyze, and plan for action  
5 (Morris Justice). Second, the research results are given back to the community and metabolized  
6 into materials for policy change, popular education, and targeted dispersion. These materials and  
7 communications might take many forms including the public performance of the data. For  
8 example, the same Morris Justice project wrote a letter to the NYPD and projected this letter  
9 onto buildings in the Bronx (Fine, 2018b). Others, such as von Koskull's work with the elderly  
10 uses ethnodrama (von Koskull and Anderson, 2018) to communicate their findings to the public,  
11 policy makers, managers, and the community. And lastly, especially with Critical PAR, radical  
12 alternatives to current practices are generated and action is taken. For example, the Morris  
13 Justice Project involved the community through community safety walls where the community  
14 was asked to discuss what community safety meant to them. Seven categories of thinking arose  
15 from these efforts. This led to support of the Community Safety Act (Goodman, 2013). As  
16 mentioned in previous discussion of action research (Ozanne and Anderson, 2010), academic  
17 researchers have certain expertise and are involved to varying degrees with these different  
18 aspects of the research. Recognizing multiple forms of expertise, the academic researcher is a  
19 humbler part of the action research process than in more traditional research.  
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42 Even in its name, action research explicitly seeks an impact. It has impact on the ground  
43 where collaborative relationships create solidarity in the materials that are developed for popular  
44 and targeted education within the community; in the policy change work done through papers,  
45 videos, meetings, etc.; and in academic publications (Fine, 2018b). And while action research  
46 has so many benefits as far as impact, Critical PAR is not for the faint of heart researcher. It is  
47 complex, requires transparency, and often presents ethical questions that are not clear-cut. Some  
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3 of the ethical questions arise from any type of highly involved research whereas others are  
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5 unique to action research. These are just a few of the ethical dilemmas for Critical PAR:  
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- 8 • *Privacy* – How do you maintain individual privacy when the data is presented back to the  
9 community and the work is collaborative? How do you maintain community privacy  
10 when action (often policy action) is the desired end?  
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- 13 • *Sustainability* – How is the action sustained after the researchers leave the community or  
14 the grant expires? “Helicopter and parachute research refer to the practice of academic  
15 researchers inserting themselves into vulnerable communities to collect data, and  
16 abruptly leaving without returning findings to, or meaningfully impacting the lives of  
17 intended and unintended participants. Mosquito research is a term coined by Indigenous  
18 peoples in North Carolina; it names the tendency of graduate student researchers seeking  
19 to conduct research over the summer months. Researchers are likened to mosquitos, to an  
20 ephemeral, pestering, and disruptive presence—that leaves bites and wounds that take  
21 time to heal.” (Guishard *et al.*, 2018).  
22  
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- 24 • *Presentation* – If presentation of the research results is meant to persuade and are  
25 collaborative, do you change quotes or parts of the communication to be more  
26 “professional”? Which of the collaborators’ voices do you use? (Guishard *et al.*, 2018).  
27  
28
- 29 • *“Damage-centered” research* – Through good intentioned advocating for action,  
30 reallocation, and change, a one-sided view of the community as drained, depleted, and  
31 helpless may be unintentionally presented. This can perpetuate the perception of the  
32 inferiority of the community and reduce perceptions of viable options and actions (Tuck,  
33 2009).  
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- *Vicarious trauma* – Secondary trauma can occur to counselors, service providers, attorneys, researchers, and others who, through engagement with traumatized humans, are repeatedly exposed to suffering (van der Merwe and Hunt, 2019).

Community Advisory Boards (CAB) can provide a moral compass for some of the ethical dilemmas and issues raised by Critical PAR. CABs can be created for specific projects or they can become permanent entities for certain communities. CABs can assess risks and benefits to the community of study participation; power between community, academic, and other collaborators; ownership of data; authorship; transparency; accountability; use of findings and by whom; among other issues (Guishard, 2015).

ServCollab seeks to support projects adopting service design and Critical PAR as research approaches. This support includes sharing expertise, organizing workshops, searching for funding, research access, following responsible research standards, and avoiding research pitfalls.

### **ServCollab Projects**

As mentioned in the research approaches section, ServCollab encourages and supports the formation of large-scale service research projects. The first project area is service inclusion.

#### *Service Inclusion*

Service inclusion is ServCollab's first project area because a lack of inclusion is at the root and core of unjust human service systems. In response to the pervasive unfairness within service interactions (e.g., systemic bias, customer vulnerability, marketplace discrimination, among others), Fisk *et al.* (2018) advance the concept of service inclusion as "an egalitarian system that provides customers with fair access to a service, fair treatment during a service, and



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3 fair opportunity to exit a service.” (p. 835). There is significant evidence that nation states are  
4 more successful when they are more inclusive (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). Hence, humane  
5 service systems should be designed for inclusion (Fisk *et al.*, 2018; Kabadayi *et al.*, 2019). To  
6 clarify, inclusion is the process of lifting the excluded up, not bringing anyone down. Inclusion is  
7 centered around enabling four major pillars of service inclusion (Fisk *et al.*, 2018): enabling  
8 opportunity, offering choice, relieving suffering, and fostering happiness. First, the “Enabling  
9 Opportunity” pillar refers to “empowering people by providing access to services and the ability  
10 to receive and co-create valued services” (p. 843). The “Offering Choice” pillar stresses the right  
11 of people to make a viable choice between different offerings as well as the right to opt out of a  
12 particular service/interaction. The “Relieving Suffering” pillar highlights the importance of  
13 fulfilling basic human needs in diverse service interactions. Finally, “Fostering Happiness”  
14 stresses the importance of pleasure and positive interactions between actors during service  
15 exchanges.

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33 Service inclusion problems are commonplace worldwide and many service research  
34 projects are needed that seek solutions to exclusionary service systems. ServCollab has  
35 encouraged two projects that are service research collaborations on service inclusion: refugee  
36 services and virtual assistants in social care services.

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42 *Transformative Refugee Services.* The first ServCollab service inclusion project calls for  
43 rethinking service provisions for refugees to create more hospitable rather than hostile service  
44 systems and improving the experiences for refugees with both short term and long-term  
45 solutions. Drawing on multidisciplinary expertise that encompasses marketing, sociology, and  
46 service science, the researchers seek to assist service scholars, nonprofit service providers,  
47 private service providers, and policymakers in transforming refugee lives by navigating the  
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3 challenges prior to, during, and after a refugee's journey (Boenigk et al. 2020). The project will  
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5 be useful to identify, evaluate, and implement new service-based solutions for refugees at  
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7 different levels during different phases of refugees' journey.  
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10 What is unique about this project is that it truly embodies the aspirations of ServCollab.  
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12 This project was conducted by an eclectic and multidisciplinary team of academics, research  
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14 associates, and practitioners with training and experience in different disciplines ranging from  
15  
16 public policy, marketing, services, management, and social marketing. In terms of residence, the  
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18 authors in this group live in seven different countries (Australia, Columbia, Germany, New  
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20 Zealand, Switzerland, UK, and USA), and in terms of their origins of nationality they represent  
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22 eight countries (Australia, Brazil, Germany, India, Lebanon, Romania, Turkey, and USA). One  
23  
24 common denominator of this diverse group of individuals is their interest in the global refugee  
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26 crisis and how individuals, organizations, and public policymakers can help alleviate the  
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28 suffering and improve the wellbeing of those refugees. Therefore, this project was a  
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30 collaborative effort of a passionate group of individuals that uniquely integrates their different  
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32 personal backgrounds, professional experiences, and expertise on this very important topic.  
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38 *Virtual Assistants in Social Care.* The second ServCollab service inclusion project  
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40 explores how disabled people can adapt existing everyday technologies, such as virtual  
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42 assistants, to help them meet their complex social care needs. Social care supports people who  
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44 need assistance with their daily living. It consists of a complex system of both private and public  
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46 services and many communities and families also provide unpaid care. Social care includes  
47  
48 several activities across the whole lifecycle: from child protection, helping people with  
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50 disabilities with taking their medicine and with personal hygiene to end-of-life care (Wilson and  
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52 Kenny, 2018).  
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3 This second ServCollab project focuses on existing everyday technologies such as virtual  
4 assistants that are pre-installed in smartphones (e.g., “Siri” on Apple’s iPhone or “Google  
5 Assistant” on Android phones) or are embedded in smart speakers and hubs (e.g., “Alexa” in  
6 Amazon’s Echo (Dot) and Echo Show). Virtual assistants are software programs that listen for  
7 keywords to start them up. These keywords are sent to a server and interpreted as a command.  
8 The server then provides the voice assistant with information to be read back to the user or to  
9 complete requested tasks, such as for example switching on lights or other devices, making  
10 phone calls, reading out emails, etc. (Hoy, 2018). Currently, there is only limited knowledge on  
11 the use of virtual assistants in social care services. To address the surprisingly limited  
12 information on the usage of everyday technologies in social care services, this ServCollab project  
13 investigates how disabled people adapt existing virtual assistants to stay independent, thereby  
14 improving their quality of life and meeting their complex social care needs. The project includes  
15 examining how these new technologies are impacting the social care workforce.

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33 This project is a ServCollab project because: 1) It seeks to help disabled people meet  
34 their complex social care needs. 2) The five collaborating researchers are from different  
35 disciplines (social psychology, information and computer science, sociology of work, and service  
36 management). 3) The research team also collaborates with a social enterprise with significant  
37 experience in social care services. 4) Moreover, as described below, research study participants  
38 will collaborate with the research team, too. It is further planned to train disabled people and care  
39 workers how to use key social science methods and research skills. For example, providing them  
40 with training in interview methods that will allow them to conduct semi-structured interviews  
41 with pairs of disabled people and care workers. Participants will also be provided with  
42 equipment and training on how to make recordings for interactional video analysis. Finally,  
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3 participants will also collaborate with each other to help each other learn how to best use  
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5 technology (via personal meetings and/or sharing experience in online forums).  
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8 To enable collaboration between all parties (i.e., researchers, disabled people, and carers)  
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10 from the beginning, this ServCollab project will use an action research methodology (*as*  
11  
12 *described in the Tools for Serving Humanity section*). It especially means that disabled people  
13  
14 and carers will not be *passive* study participants but will be *active* “co-investigators” by getting  
15  
16 involved in all aspects of the research project. It also means that they will have a say at every  
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18 stage of the research process, starting with the design of the study, followed by data-collection  
19  
20 and analysis, and concluding with the dissemination of the research findings. This project is  
21  
22 currently at the design stage. It is envisaged that qualitative interviews and interactional  
23  
24 video/conversation analysis will be used to understand how disabled people and their carers are  
25  
26 using virtual assistants to improve their quality of life. However, due to the collaborative nature  
27  
28 of the study, the exact research design and the specific research questions will be co-created with  
29  
30 all participants. The research team is currently contacting several disabled people-led  
31  
32 organizations, covering a range of impairments, to find study collaborators. It is planned that  
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34 research findings will be shared with several organizations, including parliamentary groups on  
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36 social care, disability, and AI. It is also envisioned that one way of disseminating the project  
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38 results will include creating a website for sharing tips and tricks among disabled people, which  
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40 could support valuable collaborative learning among the disabled community.  
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#### 46 47 *Possible Future ServCollab Projects*

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49 There are many possible future ServCollab projects. In the service inclusion area, one of  
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51 the greatest service inclusion problems is the widespread neglect and exclusion of women and  
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53 girls in human service systems throughout the world. Since women and girls represent  
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3 approximately half of the human species, ServCollab is especially eager for service inclusion  
4 projects on behalf of women and girls.  
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8 A second possible project area is building service language. Language enables human  
9 interactions. Academic disciplines create their own technical languages that can be impediments  
10 to innovation and progress. To accelerate human wellbeing, new service knowledge needs to be  
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12 openly communicated and shared with the many academic disciplines that are human facing  
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14 (such as the humanities, social sciences, the arts, criminal justice, education, health care,  
15  
16 industrial engineering, and social work). Gorman (2010) argues for trading zones between  
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18 disciplines that are facilitated by a creole (simplified common language). The challenge is to  
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20 create a common language regarding service that improves communication across the developing  
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22 service research community. ServCollab encourages projects that seek to create service language  
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24 that researchers and human populations can use to understand and improve human wellbeing for  
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26 all.  
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33 Third, a profoundly important possible ServCollab project area is climate change. Human  
34 life depends on Planet Earth, so the service research field needs to respond by encouraging  
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36 projects that balance serving human needs now with serving the needs of future generations by  
37  
38 protecting the fragile service ecosystem of Planet Earth. Finally, ServCollab seeks projects that  
39  
40 describe the characteristics of a healthy human ecosystem on Planet Earth. An early effort at  
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42 such an effort proposed broadening the concept of service from human-to-human to a tripartite  
43  
44 perspective of human-to-nature-to-human (Shirahada and Fisk, 2011). The tripartite logic  
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46 transforms the concept of service from human centric value co-creation to tripartite value co-  
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48 creation based on maintaining and enhancing human wellbeing, while maintaining and  
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50 enhancing environmental sustainability (Shirahada and Fisk, 2011).  
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## A Call to Collaborate on Future ServCollab Projects

ServCollab seeks to build a global service research network robust enough to work on big service system problems that seek to elevate the Human Experience (HX). This will require building operational capacity by recruiting, training, and collaborating with scholars from within the service research field and with scholars from other disciplines that are human facing. Funding will be sought for these major service system projects from foundations, government agencies, and universities. ServCollab will also seek to create new service research tools and new measurement systems for these large-scale service system problems. Most importantly, ServCollab will identify project topics, assemble research teams, and support their efforts to collaboratively design or redesign solutions to human service system problems. To succeed, these efforts will require breakthrough collaborations that are truly innovative (Shneiderman, 2016). Innovation is the lifeblood of human progress. As Lusch and Vargo (2014) note "...the more we innovate the more the innovation frontier expands." (p. 205). Transformative collaboration (Fisk *et al.*, 2019) that accelerates human progress is possible.

To get involved with ServCollab, interested service scholars can join ServCollab via our website - <https://www.servcollab.org/>. ServCollab seeks to be a hub of service research collaboration on behalf of humanity. There are many ways to participate: 1) You can learn more about service research collaboration opportunities. 2) You can suggest a service research project. 3) You can recruit other service research collaborators to join ServCollab.

In creating ServCollab, we are well aware of the progressive efforts of many organizations that may become important allies in collaborative pursuit of a better future for our species. The American Marketing Association Service Special Interest Group (SERVSIG) is the

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3 primary organization serving the service research community. Hence, SERVSIG members will  
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5 be encouraged to participate in ServCollab research projects. In addition, there are numerous  
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7 service research conferences that might encourage ServCollab projects. These include well-  
8  
9 known service research conferences: Frontiers in Service Conference, The LaLonde Conference,  
10  
11 the QUIS Conference, and the SERVSIG Research Conference. There are numerous university  
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13 service research centers that may be collaborators including: the Arizona State University Center  
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15 for Service Leadership, USA; the Bocconi University Center for Research on Marketing and  
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17 Services, Italy; the Cornell University Center for Hospitality Research, USA; the Florida Atlantic  
18  
19 University Center for Service Marketing & Management, USA; the Hanken School of  
20  
21 Economics Centre for Relationship Marketing and Service Management, Finland; the Karlstad  
22  
23 University CTF - Service Research Center, Sweden; the Katholische Universität (KU) Research  
24  
25 Institute for Business and Economics in Service of Humanity, Germany; the Loughborough  
26  
27 University Centre for Service Management, UK; the Maastricht University Service Science  
28  
29 Factory, the Netherlands; the Singapore Management University Institute for Service Excellence,  
30  
31 Singapore; the University of Edinburgh Centre for Service Excellence, UK; and the University of  
32  
33 Maryland Center for Excellence in Service, USA. In addition, there is a new organization called  
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35 the Responsible Research in Business and Management (RRBM) “dedicated to inspiring,  
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37 encouraging, and supporting credible and useful research in the business and management  
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39 disciplines. (RRBM, 2019). While RRBM focuses on improving business disciplines, like  
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41 ServCollab, it shares an interest in improving human society through research.  
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## 51 **Conclusion**

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This article began by explaining why ServCollab takes a broader perspective for serving humanity by seeking to elevate the Human Experience (HX). Second, standards of justice for serving humanity were proposed. Third, transformative service research's role in raising the service research community's aspirations for serving humanity was described. Fourth, service design and community action research were explored as powerful research approaches for serving humanity. Fifth, ServCollab's first projects were summarized. Finally, the article discussed a call to collaborate on future ServCollab efforts.

Service research has evolved to study the profound role that service plays in human lives. In doing so, the service research field is moving from the perimeter of human experience to the center of human experience. To elevate HX, service researchers need to spread the news that service is central to the human experience.

Transformative Service Research (TSR) has become an influential service research subtopic that challenges service researchers to aspire to conducting research that improves human wellbeing through service (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). Improving wellbeing through transformative service is a major service research priority (Ostrom *et al.*, 2015). ServCollab seeks to make TSR a major service research practice.

The first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were remarkably turbulent. A large number of democracies have experienced high levels of economic inequality, extreme political polarization, and structural fragility that threatens their future. Meanwhile Planet Earth is experiencing an unprecedented human refugee crisis and an accelerating climate change crisis. In these troubled and turbulent times, the worst human instincts of fear and hatred are causing conflict and competition between nations and peoples. These combative instincts led to two world wars in the twentieth century. The nuclear arms race that occurred after World War II was a dangerous relic



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3 of those times. Before it is too late, our species needs to find a path to transformative  
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5 collaboration that protects our species and our planet.  
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8 To improve wellbeing for all, ServCollab will focus on transformative service research  
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10 collaborations that seek to reduce global service system injustices and elevate human experience.  
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12 Through our research, we seek to help our species find the means to live in harmony with each  
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14 other and with the earth. The only way to make Planet Earth a healthy ecosystem again is to find  
15  
16 the means to rise above our primitive instincts and create collaborative solutions to human needs.  
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18 The human service systems we live in should serve all human needs and they should protect the  
19  
20 environment for future generations. Please help us serve humanity through service research  
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22 collaborations that reduce human suffering and improve human wellbeing.  
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Journal of Service Management

<b>Names</b>	<b>Conflict</b>	<b>Competition</b>	<b>Cooperation</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
<b>Labels</b>	War	Economic	Social	Just Society
<b>Games</b>	Win – Lose	Win – Lose	Win – Win Mostly	Win – Win
<b>Outcomes</b>	Victory/Suffering	Success/Suffering	Attenuated Wellbeing	Transformative Wellbeing
<b>Patterns</b>	Dominance/Submission	Dominance/Submission	Dominance/Submission Possible	Mutual

Table 1: Categories of Human Interaction

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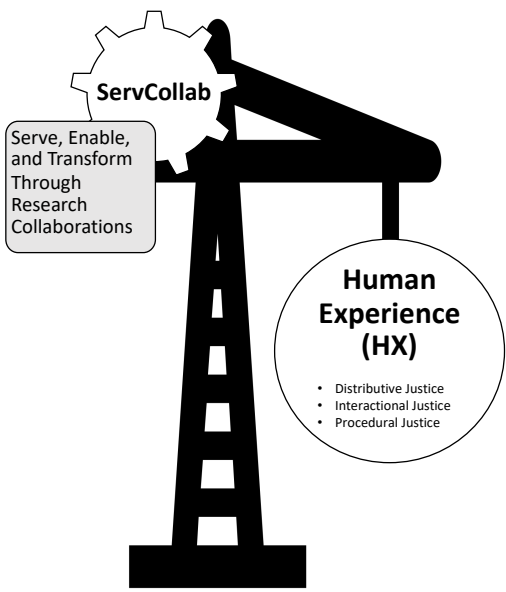


Figure 1: Metaphor of ServCollab as a Crane Elevating Human Experience