

Call for Papers: Special Issue of Business & Society

Social Innovation: Insights from Institutional Theory

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Social innovation refers to the process of developing and implementing novel solutions to social problems, often involving re-negotiations of settled institutions among diverse actors with conflicting logics. As such, social innovation entails institutional change. Social innovations are urgently needed as we confront “wicked problems” (Rittel and Weber, 1973), such as climate change, poverty alleviation, income inequality and persistent societal conflicts. Such problems feature substantial interdependencies among multiple systems and actors, and have redistributive implications for entrenched interests (Rayner, 2006).

Societal problems provide both threats and opportunities for business and entrepreneurs (e.g. Howard-Grenville, Buckle, Hoskins & George, 2014), and in turn businesses themselves can have both positive and negative effects on social and environmental outcomes (Okereke, Wittneben & Bowen, 2012; Porter & Kramer, 2006; Schrempf, 2014). Businesses, through operational externalities and efforts to increase profits, both cause societal harms and sometimes contribute significantly to the maintenance or even worsening of arrangements which perpetuate those harms, often through subtle or overt exercise of market or political power (Barley, 2007; Levy & Kaplan, 2008). Yet businesses can also ameliorate societal harms by changing practices or contributing to solutions through corporate social responsibility, opportunity-driven innovation and philanthropy (Egri & Ralston, 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005; O’Toole & Vogel, 2011; Reficco & Marquez, 2012; Spar & La Mure, 2003). In addition, market logics are being embraced to advance social welfare goals in arenas such as healthcare, education and poverty alleviation (see, e.g., Mair, Marti & Ventresca, 2012; Reay & Hinings, 2005; 2009), with the expectation that hybrid organizational models that balance social and economic logics (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Battilana & Lee, 2014), will enable social innovators to meet societal needs effectively.

Institutional research has played a significant role in the study of efforts to alleviate social problems (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Dorado, 2013; Hallett, 2010; Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) and is well positioned to contribute to an improved understanding of social innovation. Other research fields (stakeholder management, corporate social responsibility, and cross-sector partnerships, for example), have advanced management knowledge on the interface between business and society (De Bakker, Groenewegen & Den Hond, 2005). Yet, studies in these fields frequently take the perspective of businesses attempting to gain benefits or reduce risk by acting on societal problems (Vock, van Dolen & Kolk, 2014; Griffin & Prakash, 2014), without focusing on the views of other actors. Shallow “benign” business interventions deflect attention, often maintain existing power structures and they may even reinforce ‘darker’ aspects of wicked problems (Foucault, 1995; Khan, Munir & Willmott, 2007).

Institutional theory instead starts at a macro-level, assessing the positions and interdependent actions of the multiple constituents of issue-focused fields (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), and

considering seriously the idea that rules, norms and beliefs are socially constituted, negotiated orders (Martí, Courpasson & Barbosa, 2013; Strauss, 1978), which can be renegotiated in socially innovative ways (e.g. Van Wijk, Stam, Elfring, Zietsma & den Hond, 2013). The study of institutional work emphasizes the creation, disruption and maintenance of the institutionalized social structures that govern behavior (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006), and thus speaks to how entrenched practices and ideas get held in place, and how they may be replaced with more socially beneficial arrangements. Furthermore, the burgeoning institutional complexity perspective, with its focus on how actors respond to multiple, sometimes competing logics (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta & Lounsbury, 2011), applies well to the context of wicked societal problems.

Taking an institutional perspective on social innovation suggests several topics and a range of interesting questions. We list below some that are in line with our theme.

Negotiations among diverse actors in social innovation:

- How do negotiation spaces for institutional change such as “relational spaces” (Kellogg, 2009) and “field-configuring events” (Lampel & Meyer, 2008) emerge and affect social innovation? How is experimentation facilitated in such spaces (van Wijk, van der Duim, Lamers & Sumba, 2014)?
- What characteristics and processes affect negotiation spaces for institutional change?
- What role does identity and identification play in social innovation?
- How do emotional investments in institutions affect negotiations for institutional change and engagement in social innovation?
- How are marginalized actors, who are often the ones that suffer most directly from wicked problems, silenced or given voice in negotiations (Sassen, 2014)?
- How do incumbents “fight back”? What systems, structures and processes are activated to defend entrenched interests (Bourdieu, 2005)?

The role of hybrid forms and boundary objects in social innovation:

- How do diverse actors surface conflicts and compatibilities among different institutional logics and negotiate hybrid arrangements or boundary objects within or across institutional fields?
- How are arrangements involving hybrid institutional logics maintained or adapted over time?
- Can such arrangements be scaled up (expanded in impact) or scaled out (diffused to other settings), and what are the factors that affect such scaling?

The influence of institutional voids in social innovation:

- What role do institutional voids (policy, market, social) play in social innovation processes?
- How do actors signal and exploit voids for social innovation (Mair & Martí, 2009)? How does their institutional work ameliorate voids?
- Do different institutional orders substitute for each other when voids exist (e.g., are market voids filled by social structures? Policy voids filled by market structures)? What are the implications of such substitution?

Other relevant questions:

- What alternative institutional arrangements are emerging in response to the social problems associated with capitalism, such as the sharing economy, user networks and community-based and cooperative models? How do these arrangements emerge and evolve and how are they governed?
- What role do communication technologies including social media, collaboration technologies and e-governance technologies play in institutional change for social innovation?
- What are the impacts of or on informal institutions when regulative or coercive power is used to effect social innovation?

These topics are meant to be generative rather than exhaustive. We encourage authors to think broadly about this topic and contact a member of the editorial team if they wish to explore the fit of their research to the special issue theme. We are open to theoretical and empirical papers, using a variety of methodologies.

Submission process and schedule

- Authors should submit their full manuscripts through ScholarOne Manuscripts by December 1st, 2015 to <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bas>.
- Be sure to specify in the cover letter document that the manuscript is for the special issue on “Social Innovation: Insights from Institutional Theory”.
- Manuscripts should be prepared following the Business & Society author guidelines: <http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200878/manuscriptSubmission>.
- All articles will be double-blind peer reviewed by a minimum of two anonymous referees.
- Authors of papers selected for publication will be invited for a manuscript development workshop (expected timing and location: May, 2016, EM Lyon, France) before the final submission is due.

About the journal

Business & Society is one of the leading journals at the intersection of business and issues of social responsibility, ethics and governance. It is published by SAGE and its current two-year Citation Impact Factor is 1.936 (2012). It was ranked 31 out of 116 journals in the Business category of the 2012 Thomson Reuters Journals Citation Report (ISI). For further details see <http://bas.sagepub.com>.

About the guest editors

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