

QUASI Seminar Series: December 11, 2020

Topic: **Is the firm a meaningful unit of analysis for social innovation?**

Yes: [Johanna Mair](#) & [Marc Ventresca](#); No: [Irene Henriques](#) & [Tyler Wry](#); Moderator: [Christine Beckman](#)

- 11:29:45 From Nicola Dragonetti : @Mike Barnett what is the proper etiquette? Video on or video off?
- 11:30:11 From Mike Barnett : Totally your call. Video on makes it more of an interactive feel, so you are encouraged to show your pretty faces.
- 11:38:25 From Mike Barnett : Hi folks. Though it gets complicated to attend to the presentation and the chat simultaneously, please do feel free to add your comments and questions here. We'll draw from these chat comments for the Q&A, and we'll provide a transcript of it on our website for later review.
- 11:55:05 From Paolo Quattrone : But SDGs and the like use the same positivist idea of measurement that originates problems (e.g. externalities, overflows) when measuring corporate profits. Can we try something different to be coherent with Einstein's opening quote? And view, for instance, calculative practices as platforms for dialogue, inquiry (of purpose, for instance) and rationalities?
- 11:56:12 From Mike Barnett : Thanks, Paolo. Are there any links/refs you can provide to the crowd to pursue this line of thought?
- 11:56:55 From Paolo Quattrone : @Mike, a part from self-reference? (-:
- 11:57:14 From Mike Barnett : Self references are welcome. So we'll all email you ;)
- 11:57:48 From Paolo Quattrone : Quattrone, 2015 in ASQ on Jesuit accounting. (-;
- 11:58:14 From Mike Barnett : Nothing in a real journal?? ;)
- 11:58:16 From David A. Kirsch : +1 Love that paper
- 11:58:19 From Jeana Wirtenberg : Love the systems approach and great examples. Also tie to SDGs is excellent. I would also focus on the Tragedy of the Commons and how this approach can help overcome the pitfalls of that.
- 11:58:38 From Jerry Davis : Mike B. is cancelled
- 11:58:48 From Mike Barnett : About time!
- 11:59:24 From Paolo Quattrone : @David, thanks!
- 11:59:53 From Jeana Wirtenberg : I would like to know more about how Irene defines the boundaries of the "ecosystem" from a local, regional, national, and global perspective.
- 12:00:41 From Mike Barnett : Good point, Jeana. Need to sort out how broadly to approach this.
- 12:02:38 From Sarah Kaplan (she/her) : @Mark: agree about this issue of time. In the long run, everything is material (per the Cree quote from Irene).

- 12:03:49 From Irene M Henriques : @Jeana Great question! The social innovation/issue helps me define the boundaries
- 12:04:03 From Jeana Wirtenberg : Is there a way to take a "Both/and" perspective where we look at the firm/organization in the context of Science based goals and the system(s) in which it operates?
- 12:05:46 From Naomi Gardberg : Given how large and complex some organizations are, the unit could be at the subsidiary or even facility level.
- 12:06:10 From Irene M Henriques : Certainly - the organization establishes its contribution and aspires to do more by bringing others along - mimetic efforts at work
- 12:06:13 From Mike Barnett : Or maybe even the individual -- if you want to go all Gandhi
- 12:08:06 From Robert Tomasko : What if the unit of analysis was the beneficiary of the social innovation?
- 12:11:11 From Jeana Wirtenberg : What about a demographic group, such as black lives saved as the dependent variable, e.g., in studies around intervening about the social determinants of health?
- 12:11:15 From Marc Ventresca : Really appreciate the range of questions in the chat. Thanks to all for these observations
- 12:12:24 From Marc Ventresca : Appreciate the range of conjectures and proposals for outcome variables of interest and also the 'connect' to questions of policy and practice. Here I don't argue for these only and instead for 'and' these speculations.
- 12:12:40 From Sandra Waddock : What if (system level) wellbeing was the unit of analysis. E.g., [https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/gross-domestic-wellbeing-gdwe-an-alternative-measure-of-social-progress/#:~:text=Gross%20Domestic%20Wellbeing%20\(GDWe\)%E2%84%A2,a%20measure%20of%20social%20progress.&text=The%20recommendations%20show%20that%20though,wellbeing%2C%20there%20are%20significant%20gaps](https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/gross-domestic-wellbeing-gdwe-an-alternative-measure-of-social-progress/#:~:text=Gross%20Domestic%20Wellbeing%20(GDWe)%E2%84%A2,a%20measure%20of%20social%20progress.&text=The%20recommendations%20show%20that%20though,wellbeing%2C%20there%20are%20significant%20gaps)
- 12:14:31 From Marc Ventresca : Agree and appreciate the mention of Ostrom @Jeana and @Irene in the imagery of the ecosystem. We can find a lot of value to speak to Tyler's current question in the body of work on Ostrom/governance of the commons. Refreshes many of our core questions.
- 12:14:57 From Marc Ventresca : Thanks @Sarah, yes, agree about plural time clocks and your link with @Irena's Cree quote
- 12:15:31 From Mike Barnett : No fair using their own words against them, Tyler!
- 12:16:19 From Marc Ventresca : with @Sandra on these alternative outcomes. A useful debate for us might be the struggles as GDP/GNP gives ways to alternative (subjective) approaches to [collective] happiness.
- 12:18:01 From Marc Ventresca : Hey @Mike. We are in each, many! Right on @Tyler

12:18:29 From Mike Barnett : Indeed @Marc!

12:21:41 From Mike Barnett : Irene can speak to that logic model progress!

12:22:44 From Alan Brejnholt : also because outcome and impact seems much more difficult to measure - and we all know we love that latter concept

12:22:49 From Zoom user : seems too Linear as a model?

12:23:05 From Marc Ventresca : Curious and welcome guidance from all about 'theory of change' literature. I am only now discovering these issues (in the project with Skoll Foundation and trying to make sense of the accounts from the ventures in the study). Esp curious why it is called the 'logical framework' in nearby fields like development.

12:23:28 From Mike Barnett : @Marc: check out our 2020 JOM (Barnett, Henriques & Husted)

12:24:13 From Marc Ventresca : Agree @Alan these transitions are the critical spaces for conceptual and empirical 'scaffolding' in the words of @Johanna.

12:24:56 From Jonathan Doh : @Tyler Agree completely on the need to aggregate up, but the higher you go, the more difficult it is to establish valid attribution to inputs.

12:25:04 From johanna mair : on theory of change check our the lovely piece Maoz Brown from Wharton has published with us at SSIR
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/unpacking_the_theory_of_change

12:25:17 From johanna mair : meant theory of change :)

12:25:37 From Marc Ventresca : thanks @ Mike and @Johanna

12:26:20 From Irene M Henriques : Love hearing these panelists!

12:26:25 From Tyler Wry : Johanna +1. Maoz's paper is terrific!

12:29:40 From Sandra Waddock : Couple of papers on transformational system change:
Waddock, S., Meszoely, G. M., Waddell, S., & Dentoni, D. (2015). The complexity of wicked problems in large scale change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*.
and Waddock, S. (2020). Thinking Transformational System Change. *Journal of Change Management*, 1-13.
Waddock, S. (2020). Achieving sustainability requires systemic business transformation. *Global Sustainability*, 3.

12:30:41 From johanna mair : Thanks Sandra. you certainly pioneered work that is only starting to emerge.

12:31:02 From Irene M Henriques : Sandra is a powerhouse

12:31:11 From Frank de Bakker : Agree Johanna

12:31:15 From Marc Ventresca : Great @Sandra. Thank you for this rich portfolio

12:31:22 From Sandra Waddock : I wish... ;-)

12:35:48 From Sandra Waddock : Thanks @Marc. It's not either/or but both/and. Individual, firm, and system level.

12:37:58 From Marc Ventresca : Helpful and on point comments, @Christine

12:41:59 From Howard Aldrich : In the UK, the US, India, and elsewhere, governments failed. It was the nonprofit sector that stepped up.

12:42:45 From AARUSHI : Agree @Howard

12:44:46 From Gerard Farias : May be I missed this...but I did not hear a reference to organizations that are founded to focus on a social objective (I prefer not to use innovation because that is not always the case)

12:45:09 From Rohit Agarwal : @howard @AARushi One can't group the actions taken by govt. in US or UK with the actions taken by Indian Govt. latter were proactive, former were under oblivion.

12:45:17 From Jerry Davis : The right unit also depends very heavily on national institutional context. Organization, network, field...it will be contingent on the enabling conditions at the national level.

12:46:14 From Alan Brejnholt : yep, agree on jerry there, unit of analysis is embedded in variations in social structures

12:46:18 From Christine Beckman : @Jerry, yes, and @Tyler spoke to this point well I thought on the importance of the institutional context

12:46:58 From Marc Ventresca : Agree this core institutional insight @Jerry. Pace Weber, social activity and social action are always embedded. That architecture shapes who and what 'counts' and what authority and action potential is assigned

12:50:13 From Thomaz Teodorovicz : Thanks @Johanna and @Tyler for sharing your thoughts on measurement and thanks to all the panelists for the interesting presentations

12:50:27 From Matthew Lee : This (now dated) report by Melinda Tuan, a consultant for the Gates Foundation, was foundational to my understanding of quantifying "impact" in financial terms. She reviews and compares 8 methodologies used by funders.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59495cd5a5790ae33a1fdd00/t/596e70bee4fcb5c6fca81beb/1500410047554/Measuring+and-or+Estimating+Social+Value+Creation.pdf>

12:50:45 From Thomaz Teodorovicz : Thanks @Matthew

12:51:24 From Matthew Lee : I should add: Melinda is good about taking an even-handed approach that acknowledges the limitations of these approaches.

12:52:02 From Naomi Gardberg : @Matthew, thank you for the reference

12:52:06 From Marc Ventresca : On impact: Long history of efforts in rankings, system indicators, program evaluation, and now social innovation. We recognize there are

always plural dimensions and the best models recognize plural, per @Paolo, rather than optimizing on any one

- 12:53:27 From Sandra Waddock : Check out Blue Marble Evaluation:
<https://bluemarbleeval.org/>
- 12:53:33 From Zoom user : RCTs are being used when they should not be - becoming a new orthodoxy for publication.
- 12:54:20 From Marc Ventresca : thank you @Thomaz for good and provoking question
- 12:54:22 From Thomaz Teodorovicz : A shameless self-promotion: Sergio Lazzarini and coauthors (including me) are working on a paper about the limits of using RCTs in a cross-sector contracts: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3603045
- 12:54:36 From Thomaz Teodorovicz : In cross sector contracts*
- 12:55:07 From Marc Ventresca : Good to know @Thomaz and @zom
- 12:56:54 From Paolo Quattrone : @Tyler and Irene, I agree but then policy is more about reducing complexity to one single standardised set of measures that eventually lead to compliance. A solution would be to design a system of measurement where metrics are intentionally put in tension (e.g. speed and safety, if I look at projects for instance) so to open a space of debate where ambiguity is interrogated and different views are not reduced to one single notion of efficiency but a com-promise is reached
- 12:57:06 From Sarah Kaplan (she/her) : What's the Peer Fiss citation? That sounds fascinating.
- 12:58:15 From Marc Ventresca : Don't know if @PeerFiss is a paper yet. He has shared this research at a couple of small conferences. @Sarah I can ask him and cc: you. But this is one of the promising uses of QCA for policy impact
- 12:58:16 From Sandra Waddock : Per @Paolo. putting everything in monetary terms buys into the logic that the only thing that matters is financial. Yes, other metrics are more complex, but...you get what you measure as was said earlier.
- 12:59:36 From Sandra Waddock : Thank you all for a terrific discussion.
- 12:59:56 From Sandra Waddock : And Mike for putting it all together.
- 13:00:48 From Naomi Gardberg : Thank you for stimulating conversation
- 13:01:02 From Paolo Quattrone : @Sandra yes, but there is a risk with SDG and the like that these measures move too far away from what corporates care (i.e. money) leading to a PR exercise. Better to use financial measures (what can be counted) to interrogate what cannot be counted (e.g. impact)
- 13:01:50 From Ed Carberry : Thanks Mike! And thanks to all the presenters!
- 13:01:51 From Deborah Flamengo : <https://business.rutgers.edu/ricsi>
- 13:02:02 From Tyler Wry : Thanks, Mike et al.. Great session!

13:02:06 From Keyvan Maleki : Thank you so very much Deb for organizing

13:02:28 From Howard Aldrich : great job!

13:02:42 From Paolo Quattrone : Thanks again for a great session!

13:02:47 From Vrinda Khattar : Thank you! An energizing debate

13:02:49 From Nicola Dragonetti : thanks all

13:02:57 From Brian Kelleher Richter : Thanks for a great session everyone

13:03:07 From Adele Santana : Great Session. Thanks!

13:03:12 From Bryan Husted : Thanks everyone!

13:04:20 From Keyvan Maleki : What's Johanna's concern about Logic Model ?

13:15:30 From Mike Barnett : Please send your slides to me/Deborah.

13:17:20 From Seth Warren : Thank you!