

Is the “firm” a meaningful unit of analysis for social innovation?

Christine Beckman

University of Southern California

Price School of Public Policy & Marshall School of Business

Moderator

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Defining Social Innovation

- “A novel *solution* to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals” (Phills, Deiglmeier & Miller, SSIR, 2008)
- “The *process* of inventing, securing support for, and implementing novel solutions to social needs and problems.” (Editor’s Note, SSIR, 2003)

Social innovation paradigms

- Technocratic Paradigm – *Amenable to firm as unit of analysis*
 - ▣ Expert Knowledge in entrepreneurs
 - ▣ Market and competition focused
 - ▣ Focus on more efficient public services and scaling up
 - ▣ Aligned with neoliberalism
 - ▣ Citizens as consumers
- Democratic Paradigm – *Not as amenable to the firm as unit of analysis*
 - ▣ Knowledge from community engagement
 - ▣ Politics and mobilization focused
 - ▣ Social justice to accomplish a re-distribution of power
 - ▣ Continuous Community engagement

(Montgomery, 2016)

Who are the alternative actors to the firm?

- Individuals
 - Organizational actors
 - Grass-roots organizing
- Other Organizations
 - Non-profits
 - New organizational forms
- Governments
- Communities
- Ecosystems

Research Questions

- When does (and how) social innovation re-distribute power and achieve more equitable solutions?
- What is the impact beyond the firm? What are other outcomes to consider (well-being; systems-level)?
- What are the processes , systems and institutional contexts for social innovation?
- When to bring normative models to assess accounts of subjects?
- Research Design: In and Over Time

Social Innovation as a Process

- Social innovation as an iterative, inclusive *process* using innovation frameworks to achieve more effective and just solutions to address complex social problems (USC Center for Social Innovation)
- “Social innovation refers to innovative *activities and services* that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly diffused through organizations whose primary purposes are social” (Mulgan, 2006)

SOCIAL INNOVATION PROCESS

