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Scaling Social Impact through Field-level Logic Hybridization Process

Case study from Community Ophthalmology Field

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Organizations addressing social issues such as inequality, lack of access to healthcare, education and sanitation etc. focus on driving coordinated and continual efforts among disparate partakers– policy makers, activists, and corporates. Institutional norms and logics shape how these partakers think of the issue, whether they involve, and how they act. Two key challenges such organizations face: First, navigating through the institutional norms that would have caused persistence of the social issue. Second, managing stakeholders embedded on disparate logics which lead to diverging (often rival) interpretations of the issue and appropriate means to address it. In light of these complexities, such organizations provide an interesting context to study how institutional logics shape organizational behaviors; and how organizations shape these logics (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi, & Tihanyi, 2016).

Literature on field-level logics change highlights – either dominance of different logics at different time periods, geographical spaces and professional communities or moderate compliance of multiple logics (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Both these variants assume logics have irreconcilable differences which get redefined during field-configuring events. In contrast, institutional pluralism researchers highlight that organizations navigate through logic incompatibility by way of localized adaptations in organizational configurations (Battilana & Lee, 2014) and interactions and negotiations with stakeholders embedded in diverging logics. However, these studies fail to highlight how these localized responses can have significant feedback effects on field-level norms and logics. Despite significant research on institutional change at field-level and institutional pluralism at organizational level, the “black box” of micro-level institutional processes (Cloutier & Langley, 2013) leading to logic hybridization at field-level (York, Hargrave, & Pacheco,

2016) remains un-opened. Bridging this gap, in this study we address the question: “*How do micro-processes lead to logic hybridization at field level?*”

This study focuses on one such context; the community ophthalmology field which observed significant changes in field-level norm, funding policies and organizational practices during 1985-2002. During this period, diverging interpretations of field-level norm stirred debate among actors and the initial attempts of few actors to reform the norm were refuted by institutional guardians. Despite initial failures and resistance, new hybrid organizational configurations emerged and led to change in field-level norm. The study finds that paradoxical frame, perceived value-conflict and multiple embeddedness cause persistence in institutional change efforts. These acted as an impetus for the field-level logic hybridization through a repertoire of mechanisms, namely: *framing, collective reflexivity, collective experimentation* and *practice authentication*.

This study makes three significant contributions: First, it highlights how organizations addressing grand challenges can strive and navigate through the normative barrier which undermines the proposed social change. Second, it highlights the emergent mechanisms that help actors to navigate through failures and unintended consequences during institutional change process. Third, it sheds light on actors’ legitimacy struggles and notes how the moral dimensions impact actors’ assessment of “appropriateness” of practices. Thereby the study addresses the “blind spot” (Cloutier & Langley, 2013) in institutional logics research, which has typically associated the legitimacy struggles with self-interest and has neglected the role of values in shaping them.

Keywords: Institutional change, social issue, process, paradox, appropriate technology