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Mobilizing crisis management networks – Entrepreneurial behavior in turbulent contexts

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ABSTRACT

Severe socio-economic issues that threaten peace, life or wellbeing of humans in specific regions of the world cannot be solved by any single actor. Wide networks of political, business, governmental, non-profit and humanitarian organizations are to be involved to change existing practices. Despite conflicting interests and competing behavior, involved organizations need to act collectively to initiate the change of commonly accepted practices, i.e. institutions. This is the space in the present study for examining network mobilization as a collective means to change institutions. Our aim is to answer the question: How are networks mobilized in crisis management to initiate institutional change processes in socio-economically turbulent contexts? We provide a framework of network mobilization for institutional change built on the IMP rooted network mobilization research and institutional entrepreneurship discussion. The framework is reflected upon by means of insights from an interview-based case study with representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in worldwide humanitarian peace-building. We identify, firstly, incentivizing, reticent and adaptational behaviors of network mobilizers to utilize legitimacy and relationship sediments as mobilization enablers. Secondly, these behaviors help network mobilizers to overcome actor visibility and unpredictability as mobilization obstacles in turbulent contexts.

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1. Introduction

Operating in present day international markets is a question of acting in wide networks with both economic and socio-political actors (Hadjikhani & Lee, 2006; Hadjikhani & Thilenius, 2009; Welch & Wilkinson, 2005). The relationships between corporate and political actors and the relationships' political embeddedness influence the efforts of firms in mobilizing (Ritvala & Salmi, 2010) and managing (Ritter, Wilkinson, & Johnston, 2004; Welch & Wilkinson, 2004) business networks. At the same time, business matters may be connected with the resolution of societal and environmental issues in local contexts through changing institutionalized practices (Ritvala & Salmi, 2009; Ritvala & Salmi, 2010). Resolving these socio-economic issues is unlikely without the involvement of private sector actors (Ritvala & Salmi, 2011; Tobias, Mair, & Barbosa-Leiker, 2013). In turn, operating in local markets is impossible without the involvement in socio-political networks (Hadjikhani, Lee, & Ghauri, 2008; Hadjikhani et al., 2008). These networks have been studied, in particular, from the viewpoint of business actors.

The present study examines networks from the viewpoint of so-called institutional entrepreneurs that aim to mobilize others for

fundamental change toward resolving severe socio-economic issues. It is imperative for institutional entrepreneurs, i.e. agents of change, to mobilize allies from corporate, other private, public and third sectors (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Fligstein, 1997). The change of institutionalized practices, i.e. existing norms, beliefs or policies (Dahan, Doh, & Guay, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), is rather a large-scale endeavor, which relies on allies' collaboration. Creating collaboration among these actors, however, is a challenging task; actors possess differing goals and have potentially conflicting interests, making the networks inherently heterogeneous (Brito, 2001). Moreover, the turbulent context of societal conflicts, i.e. socially, politically and economically volatile and drastically fluctuating developments due to both external and internal tensions (Rubin & Jones, 2007), adds to the difficulty of mobilizing networks for changing institutional practices. Hence, change in these networks, i.e. breaking with existing patterns of relationships and establishing new ones, is complex and difficult to anticipate and plan (cf. Lundgren, 1992).

This case-based study focuses on the mobilization process of humanitarian peace-building communities, which aim at initiating change of institutionalized practices in turbulent contexts. Turbulence denotes the complexity and unpredictability of crisis situations due to the high likelihood of sudden endogenous and exogenous changes in the political, social and economic environments. In response to the calls for further research on institutionally rooted change processes in networks (Brito, 2001) and on entrepreneurial activities in the political

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sector (Jennings, Royston, Lounsbury, & Suddaby, 2013), this study focuses on the entrepreneurial behavior of change initiating network mobilizers as promoters of change intent among mobilization targets in crisis contexts. Hence, this study asks: How are networks mobilized in crisis management to initiate institutional change processes in socio-economically turbulent contexts?

The present study starts off with the view that entrepreneurial actors, who collectively aim at fostering sustainable social and economic systems, can influence institutional settings (Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009). Entrepreneurial behavior in network mobilizing has up to now received only little attention. Existing research has focused primarily on the process of network mobilization, i.e. different stages of mobilizing a network (Mouzas & Naudé, 2007) and enabling factors (Ritvala & Salmi, 2009; 2010; 2011). While special attention was given to the characteristics of network mobilizing individuals, their behavior has remained mostly implicit.

This study builds primarily on the industrial marketing and purchasing (IMP) rooted network mobilization research and complements it with institutional entrepreneurship research. The theory of business networks consisting of actors that perform activities involving respective resources (Håkansson, 1989; Håkansson & Snehota, 1995) allows for multi-level and multi-actor analyses in complex environments. It caters for not only an individual or firm level but also a more aggregated view on network dynamics (Mouzas & Naudé, 2007). The study also builds on the notion that individuals' past and present knowledge and experience as well as their future intentions and strategies act as driving forces for change in networks (Halinen & Törnroos, 1998). The institutional entrepreneurship research allows for grasping the initiation and implementation of profound, nation-level changes. Existing institutions are to be developed further or replaced with entirely new ones and then should also become institutionalized (Battilana et al., 2009). This is seen to require entrepreneurial behavior in particular (Möllering, 2007; Rindova et al., 2009; Steyaert, 2007).

The initial conceptual framework is elaborated through a case study with interviews of representatives of non-governmental and governmental organizations involved in humanitarian peace-building activities. This global community of actors forms the case of this study. The interviewees were selected to open up the scene in these special kinds of business networks because of their role and activities as peace-building network mobilizers. They were expected to act, in particular, in this role due to their primarily humanitarian motives in being involved in peace-building. The data analysis focuses on the behavior of entrepreneurially acting network mobilizers in a complex and unpredictable context.

In the following section, an initial conceptual framework of network mobilization for institutional change is derived from network mobilization and institutional entrepreneurship literatures. The framework depicts different prerequisites and activities for mobilizing networks. In the subsequent sections methods of data collection and analysis are described. Thereafter, an international peace-building network focusing on humanitarian crises worldwide is described and its enabling and hindering factors are depicted. In the findings section we discuss network mobilizers' behaviors regarding enablers and obstacles in the process of mobilizing a peace-building network. We conclude with discussing the theoretical and managerial implications, an evaluation of our study and suggestions for future research.

2. Mobilizing networks for institutional change

Institutional change starts at the level of individual relationships (Havila & Salmi, 2000). The activities within a network of relationships cause changes in immediate relationships which may lead to changes spread further in the network, eventually resulting in broader, institutional changes (Havila & Salmi, 2000; Ritvala & Salmi, 2009). Hence, network mobilization needs to be seen as the carrier of institutional change or vehicle of institutional entrepreneurship (Hargrave & van de Ven,

2006; Möllering, 2007). In the following we first examine network mobilization mechanisms from the perspective of the network mobilizer and then discuss change of institutional practices according to the existing institutional entrepreneurship literature. This results in a process framework of network mobilization for change of institutionalized practices.

2.1. Mobilizing networks

The process of network mobilization begins with individual network mobilizers and spreads from the individual to the organizational and eventually the whole network level (Ritvala & Salmi, 2010). Network mobilizers are "the initial champions for institutional change" (Ritvala & Salmi, 2009: 412) who are in charge of promoting the change intent among mobilization targets. Network mobilization is based on the changes of a network's structure (Lundgren, 1992). Fundamental changes in a network have been attributed to changes of relationships between the network's actors (Håkansson & Snehota, 1995; Mouzas & Naudé, 2007; Ritvala & Salmi, 2012). These relationships consist not only of formal deals but also their sustainability depends significantly on concurring, informal interests. According to Mouzas and Naudé (2007), the mobilization of a network is mainly an outcome of shaping and developing the rules, which constitute and govern relationships between actors. Thereby, relationships are determined through agreement and disagreement between the relationship partners over the function of a relationship. Also, relationships are conditioned by the interdependency of the relationship partners, created through complementary resources and activities (Araujo & Mouzas, 1994). The quest for complementary resources and activities is thus one of the main influencing factors of network mobilization.

Similarly important is the acknowledgement of interdependency in networks. Interdependency is created through the complementarity of actors' resources and activities and presupposes the need for mutuality and collaboration (Mouzas & Naudé, 2007). Collaboration depends on the ability to aggregate and mobilize convergent interests (Araujo & Brito, 1998). Network mobilization is thereby confronted with historically situated practices and institutionalized processes of the mobilization's target actors (Mouzas & Naudé, 2007). Prior to aligning interests, network mobilizing actors need to collectively interpret issues and in order to achieve sustainable mobilization of a network, adversaries' interventions need to be interrupted (Brito, 2001).

Besides power struggles over actors' resources and activities and their consequences, overcoming collective inaction exacerbates network mobilization processes (cf. Oliver, 1993). Clarifying positive or negative monetary and social consequences plays thereby an important role in motivating actors to join in for achieving a collective goal (Olson, 1965; Ritvala & Salmi, 2010). For instance, other group members can criticize or exert pressure on a mobilization target actor to join the common efforts (Olson, 1965) or emphasize community spirit and group solidarity as positive motivational factors (Posner, 1996). Based on Olson's (1965) seminal work on collective action and inaction, Brito (2001) concludes that especially small groups of actors are successful in mobilizing the interests of others, which leads to individuals and organizations contributing to collective actions. Brito (2001) explains this size-dependence through perceptibility of individual contributions to a collective effort, the unlikelihood of free-riding and low costs of maintaining and organizing the networks with only few actors involved. Also Ritvala and Salmi (2012) arrived at the conclusion that strongly committed actors in long-term relationships are developed predominantly and exclusively with few actors only. This so-called exclusive mobilization (Ritvala & Salmi, 2012) is based on negotiated common goals between mobilizer and target organizations. On the contrary, inclusive, i.e. wide and public-including, mobilizing is open to everyone, but has less clear defined goals and rewards of participation and the relationships set up are rather short-lasting (Ritvala & Salmi, 2012).

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