

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

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QUASI Seminar Series


Disclaimers

- Resist a microeconomic concept of the firm ... use organization instead
- Favor a concept of the organization as a political arena - site of multiple agendas, motives and goals
- Image of the organization as a force of positive change

- Social innovation broadly defined as a process to address social problems or societal challenges in new ways

The organization as the ideal site for research on social innovation

**Persistent Category Ambiguity:
The case of social entrepreneurship**

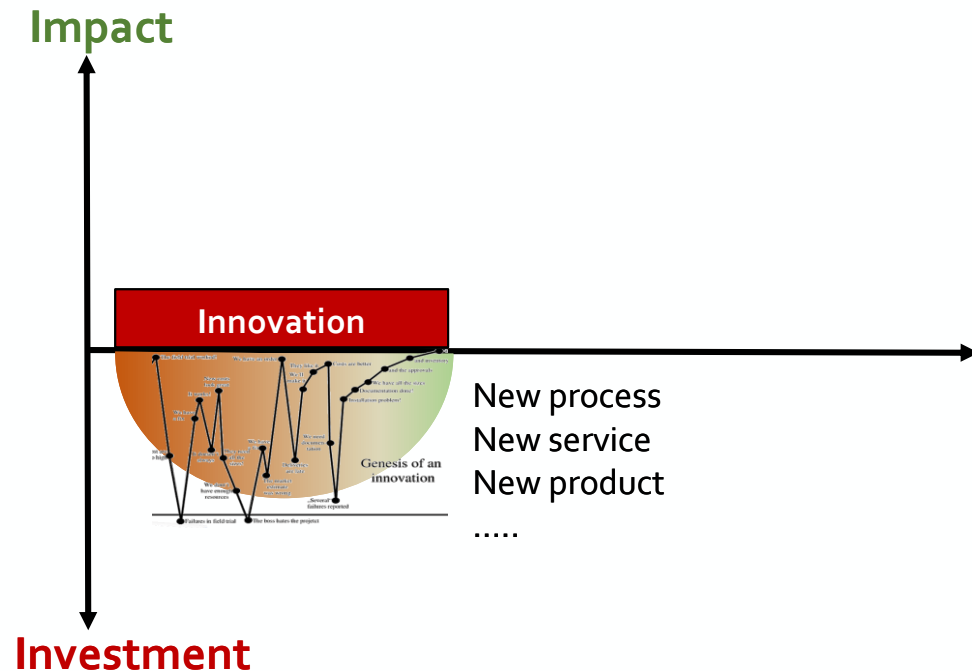
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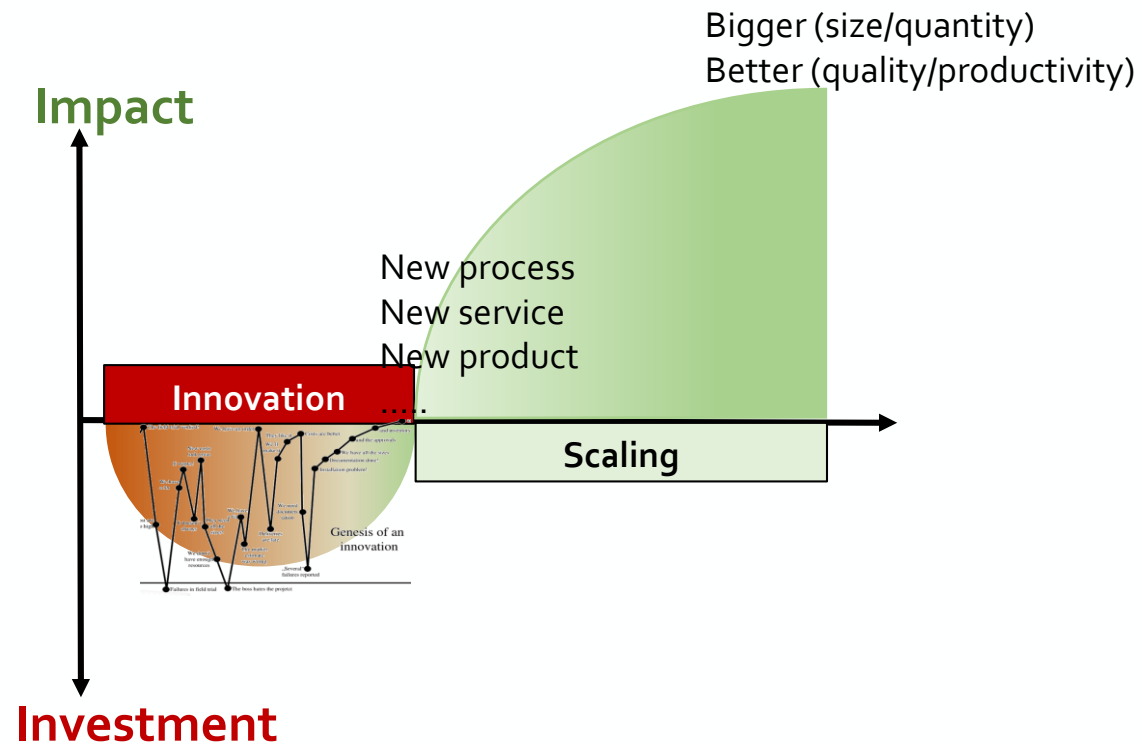
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1. Understand Innovation *and* Scaling



Innovation does not create impact...

1. Understand Innovation *and* Scaling



Opening up a spectrum of questions:

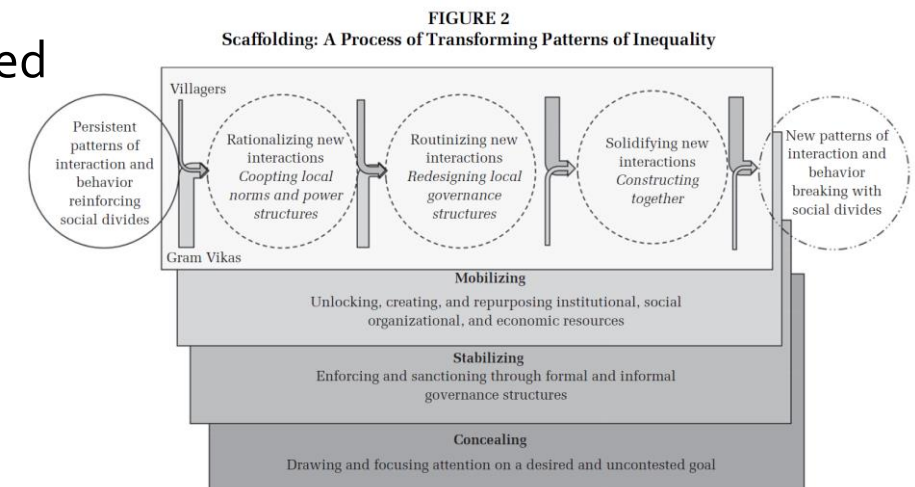
- What are pathologies that derail organizations from a productive path to impact?
- How do organizations suppress or remove such pathologies?
- What are different archetypes of how innovation and scaling hang together?
- ...

2. Understand transformation processes

- How can one organization make a difference?
- Use programs organizations design and implement as empirical windows to understand transformation process on the ground
- Studying how organizations intervene in social systems requires deep engagement with the organization, the problem, the people and communities affected and take stock of existing knowledge
- Opportunity for us as community of scholars: mechanism based inquiry to develop a repertoire of transformation processes

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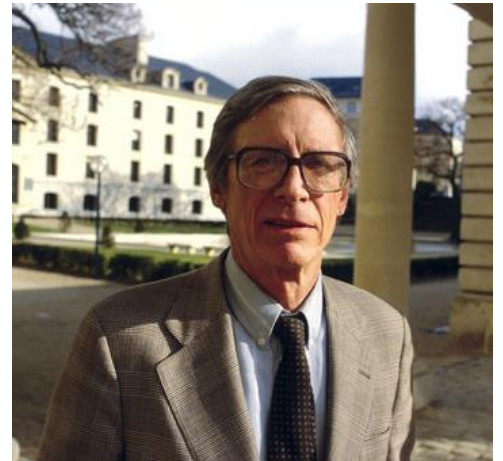
SCAFFOLDING: A PROCESS OF TRANSFORMING PATTERNS OF INEQUALITY IN SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES



3. Interrogate the mandate of organizations

- How do we justify and appraise organizations doing social innovation?
- Most of our research is not clear about normative claims but is based on normative assumptions
- *Common good anarchism vs societal division of labor*

- How do organizations complement and supplement the ideal societal division of labor and facilitate transition to a more just society?
- Should social innovation carried out by organizations proliferate? if so how?





We ought to

- **Stop** asking how organizations cope with conflicting logics
- **Start** asking how they make progress on social problems and societal challenges and what is their mandate to do so

My own hope and wish for research on social innovation

- *as disciplined imagination and disciplined exploration*
- based on conceptual clarity, empirical rigor and practical usefulness