

Social Innovation

Unit 2: Theories and frameworks of Social Innovation

This unit is focused on learning about the theories and frameworks of social innovation. To do so, we will look into different theories, frameworks and its use in the field of social innovation.

The objectives of this unit is

- to understand the theories relevant to social innovation
- to be able to integrate these theories into practice
- to understand the frameworks relevant for social innovation
- to be able to integrate these frameworks into practice

Before we begin learning about the theories and frameworks on social innovation we need to understand that social innovation is a vast field and is related and interrelated with several other fields. We therefore, will be focusing on a few theories and frameworks in relation to what we plan to use it for in the long run.

Different theories on Social Innovation

We begin by looking at a research from Greve in 2003 on innovation. The author mentions that research on innovation is mainly based on two theories. These two theories are development (exploration, acquisition, and management of knowledge and people) and decision making (organizational stability, legitimacy and risk aversion).

Further, another theory that can be linked to innovation is actor network theory (ANT). This theory discusses about the involvement of new entities or new combination of entities. ANT passes through four phases namely:

- Problematization

Problematization is the first phase in ANT. It involves understanding or identification of a problem. This is the initial phase because without understanding the problem or identifying a problem it is hard to move ahead.

- Interessement

A simple approach to understanding interessement is to know about yourself from within. Similarly in a new venture or during the process of innovation internal assessment is important.

- Enrollment

There is no organization, system or individual who is able to do all on their own. We all come with limited knowledge, skills and abilities. It is also important to understand that we live in a resource constrained environment. Therefore, knowing what we are good at and identifying individuals or additional resources required is very important.

- Mobilization

Mobilization is the final phase in ANT and also a very important one. It is an integral part because no matter if you have identified the problem, accumulated all the resources required, and in a good state to move ahead, until and unless, you are now able to mobilize it efficiently and effectively it is of no use.

Therefore, after going through these theories, we need to be able to view social innovation from different perspective. The textbook “Theoretical and Practical approaches to Social Innovation” mentions the following perspectives into social innovation.

- Sociological perspective:
- Creativity research perspective:
- Entrepreneurial perspective:
- Welfare economics perspective:
- Practice led perspective:
- Community psychology perspective:
- Territorial development perspective:

The frameworks of Social Innovation

The *social innovation framework* comprises of five different aspects namely: mission, behavior, process, skill and tasks. Within the mission of finding the root cause it states that our behavior should be focused. This is because we intend to find the problem statement. To find the problem statement it is necessary to build empathy. Being empathic means being able to stand in someone else's shoes and actually feel like the other person. Some of the notable tasks during this stage is to conduct research, ask the right people, ask the right questions, and observe the response.

The second mission in the social innovation framework is playing with the insights. The behavior during this steps is dynamic and the process involved is idea generation. Creativity is a skill required and the tasks involved are brainstorming, associating, reframing and idea sharing.

The third and final mission is to actually solve the problem. This involves being rapid in behavior and building prototypes. It is the phase when a social innovator should be disciplined and requires fulfilling tasks such as implementation, measurement, adaptation and repetition.

Amani institute has also proposed a similar framework (<https://amaniinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/ASIF-Infographic-1.pdf>) but involves eight steps. Chronologically this framework begins with understanding the social challenges or opportunity a certain individual cares a lot about. Then, it involves gathering information from different sources as well as the type of information. During the third step the task is to question about the challenge but in a different way or from a different perspective.

Associating is the step that comes next. It is important to learn from different field or sectors. As previously mentioned, social innovators come from different fields and background so this step helps understand the initiative we want to take to the next step. This leads us to the next step, i.e. idea generation. This is the step where we come up with an idea to address the challenge.

Experimenting is the next step as per this framework. During this step, an innovator comes with a prototype. The prototype can be a model, a sketch or a dummy version of an actual product as well. After the prototype is built we move to idea networking. During this stage we get to hear from critics and actual users about the experimentation conducted.

Finally, it is time to change the world. Impacting involves understanding and visioning possibilities of making social impact.

We need to understand at this stage that everything that we discuss in relation to social innovation is up for discussion. It is a subject where there are no rights or wrongs but only positive impact for the society. It is also important to understand that the theories discussed are relevant depending on how you integrate it into practice.

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