

Chapter 29

Social Innovation: A Theoretical Approach in Intertwining Climate Change with Social Innovation

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ABSTRACT

In this paper an attempt has been made to link the understanding relating to innovation in organisations with that of societal innovation at large which was later on extended to summarise the literature of social innovation and climate change. The organisation forms part of (and exists in) the social system. From the view point of organisational studies the social system may be seen as consisting of two levels while the immediate vicinity of the organisation encompasses the various organisational stakeholders and correlates the second level pertains to society in general. According to Savvides (1979), the second level encompasses the first which in turn encompasses the organisation. In this paper a comprehensive review has been presented for a better understanding of social innovation its correlation with climate change through the concepts used to understand organisational innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Social Change and Innovation

Changes in the structure and functioning of either level, but especially in level one constitute social change. (Rogers 1969) defined social change as “the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system”. Social changes may create performance gaps as in, International Sector, Education Sector, Competitors, Suppliers Customers Unions, Technology Govt, Agencies, which can collectively affect the Or-

ganisation Society in general thereby orchestrating changes in the immediate external environment of the Organisation (Savvides, 1979).

Performance gaps are discrepancies between what the society could do by virtue of a goal-related opportunity in its environment and what it actually does in terms of exploiting that opportunity. The performance gap may be characterised by resources not getting fully exploited brought about by changes among the patterns of consumption, or by loss of previous opportunities because of new competition, or by any other change in the environment. A performance gap may also come

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about by changes within the society, such as when a key societal player leaves the societal milieu.

Innovation in society is mostly administrative in nature. This essay examines first how effective innovation is basically a effective synergy of both organisation and society in general involving stakeholders from both organisations and society at large and later addresses the complex aspect of climate change for a better understanding of the role of various stakeholders as per Savvides (1979). A thorough review of the literature is undertaken and an evaluation of the state of the art is made, the issue then becomes, if it is not possible or practical to change the functioning of the organisation to accommodate change as situations warrant it as per the alternatives opened to society at large and how can it be provided that the conditions for facilitating innovation in the society are adequately catered for (Savvides, 1979). It is from this perspective that the author has tried to understand the various endeavours relating to social innovation in different areas namely climate change, agriculture and inequality.

In every instance the author has tried to substantiate the importance of different stakeholders as per Savvides (1979) in implementing optimal grass root social innovation.

INNOVATION AND THE INNOVATIVE PROCESS

What is Innovation?

The definition of innovation is not of great practical importance. What is more important is the changes that are needed in an organisation to close or minimise its performance gap. It is only because, as it happens, the vast majority of organisational changes needed in such situations involve novel solutions and new approaches that the subject of innovation becomes important. (Savvides, 1979)

There are basically three ways that innovation has been defined. First, there is the school of thought that, strictly speaking, avoids defining innovation objectively by leaving it on the subjective judgement or perception of the adopting unit to decide what is new (e.g. Rogers and Shoe-maker 1974). Zaltman, Duncan, Holbek (1973), Ben-net (1969). Second, there is the school of thought that does not concern itself with that innovation means and concentrates on specifying different aspects and stages of the innovative process. An example of these is the one offered by V.A. Thompson (1969) which states “innovation is the generation, acceptance and implementation of new ideas, processes and products or services”. Similar definitions are those by Steiner (1965) and National Academic Sciences (1969). Thirdly, there is the school of thought that attempts to emphasise objectively measurable qualitative differences. An example is the one by Barnett (1953) “... any thought, behaviour or thing that is new because it is qualitatively different from existing forms.”

The emphasis on different stages of the innovation process in defining innovation shows that there is more disagreement among academics as to where the innovation begins and ends rather than on the substance or essence of the word itself. Perhaps the most practical definition of innovation for our purposes is the one put forward by Zaltman, Duncan and Holbek (1973) which states that innovation is “any idea, practice, or material artefact perceived to be new by the relevant unit of adoption”. Thus we can postulate that understanding social innovation becomes all the more easier or logical by taking the second or third view relating to innovation as Social innovation in the context of climate change often entails the fact that social innovation processes often becomes very difficult to segregate as it involves complex intertwining between the different stakeholders thereby making the contribution of individual contributors often blurred.

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