

*Ryan Hammond*  
*MIT, Sloan School of Management*

## **Social Movements, Human Capital, and the Construction of Occupational Community in Emerging Fields**

### **Overview**

What are the consequences for occupations which emerge in the context of a market deeply affected by social movement activism and resource mobilization? Using the context of the recent mobilization around the creation of “green jobs” in the emerging sector for residential energy efficiency services, this paper seeks to illuminate and test the hypothesis that influence on the composition and structure of occupational communities is an important pathway through which social movements affect the institutional structure of new markets they help create.

Residential energy auditing is among one of the fastest emerging occupations (Dierdorf et al., 2009). Despite long sustained efforts to grow this field, it is has only been in recent years that successful mobilization of utility, state, and federal resources have been achieved. Central to this change were environmental activists which culminated in their influential framing of residential energy efficiency as a solution to both environmental and job creation problems in the US.

Drawing on theories of occupational commitment, analysis demonstrates that alignment with the social movement frame transfer to high rates of normative occupational commitment among residential energy auditors which is associated with higher levels of participation in their emerging occupational communities. By contrast, other recognized of forms of occupational commitment, limited alternative and investment commitment are not associated with higher levels participation in occupational communities.

## **Emerging Occupational Communities in New Markets**

Efforts to understand the emergence of new markets and organizational fields have increasingly turned to the actions of social movements to explain these dynamics (Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey 2010; Sine and Lee, 2009; Lounsbury, Ventresca, and Hirsch, 2003). New markets and organizational forms face difficult obstacles in mobilizing and organizing the diverse set of necessary resources to create a sustainable niche. Resources such as financial and human capital must be persuaded to invest in an uncertain endeavor. Customers must be persuaded as to the legitimacy of the product and the viability of the producer. In many instances, this requires subverting the offerings and activities of established, competing organizations and markets. Social movements which seek to change existing institutional arrangements often play a key role in helping to create political opportunities, mobilize resources, and construct new frames which directly facilitate the emergence of new markets and activities.

It has long been a core tenant of neoinstitutional theory that professions and occupations play a central role in both the reproduction (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983; Sine and Strang, 2002) and significant transformation of markets and institutions (Rao, Monin and Deruand, 2003; Lounsbury, 2004; Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002; Scott and Ruef, 2000). Professional groups and occupational communities are important sites for doing the institutional work of theorizing, frame construction, and the creation and diffusion of new practices (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lousbury and Kaghan, 2001; Lousbury, 2007). Given the central role which professions and occupations play in shaping institutional arrangements their emergence and development should be among the central concerns of scholars interested in the development of new market activities (Dimaggio, 1991; Lousbury, 2001; Lousbury and Kagan, 2001, Weber, Heinz and DeSoucey, 2008).

However, while there is a significant and growing body of work of analyzing established professions as social movement-like collective actors (Bucher and Strauss, 1961, Zald and Berger, 1978; Roa, 1998, Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings, 2002; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2008), research which investigates the impact of exogenous social movements directly on the structure of emerging occupations is far less developed (Lounsbury, 2001). Indeed more general research on the cultural dynamics of occupational emergence is also scarce (Nelson and Barley, 1997; Sherman, 2010), despite its roots in early modern sociology (Hughes, 1958; Abbott, 1988). The purpose of this study is to help fill both these gaps by articulating and testing a specific mechanism through which social movements come to impact the nascent occupational communities which arise in tandem with new markets. This at once sheds light on a concrete way in which diffuse macro-level social movements impact micro-levels actions and beliefs as well as explicates an important context and dynamic in which new occupations emerge.

### **Social Movements and New Occupations**

The most incisive studies of an exogenous social movement directly impacting the occupational infrastructure come from Lounsbury's research on the emergence of recycling in the US. Specifically, he shows how the direct actions of a specific social movement lead to the formation of the new job of recycling coordinator at some universities while those lacking the presence of the social movement simply attached recycling duties to existing maintenance staff. In this case, qualitative research revealed that the social movement organization acted to create a forum for creating the new job specific skills as well as avenue of social pressure which influenced the decision to create a new independent position and give these jobs to former activists. A broader quantitative survey of practices across universities provided multivariate validation of the link between the presence of a social movement organization and the creation of

new, independent roles for recycling coordinators. In a companion paper Lounsbury and Kaghan (2001) show qualitatively how these job incumbents drew on both the frames and norms of the social movement in developing organizational practices and the related emergent occupational roles. They also describe how the members of the emerging occupation used the network built through their prior social movement activities to begin the construction of an occupational community around recycling.

### **Relating Social Movement Frames with Occupational Commitment and Community**

I propose a complimentary but unique mechanism by which social movements help construct new occupations, through the translation of cognitive frames propagated by the social movement into normative occupational commitment of those entering new activities which is then associated with higher levels of participation in occupational communities (Barley and Van Maanen, 1984). To test this mechanism, the paper relies on a unique nationwide survey of over 800 individuals seeking certification as residential energy auditors in 2010. The survey collects data on the respondent commitment to the occupation using well-established scales which measure four types of occupational commitment – affective commitment (I like my occupation), normative commitment (I feel morally obligated to my occupation), accumulated costs (sunk cost of training and experience) and limited alternatives (perceived lack of occupational alternatives) (Carsen, Carsen, and Bedian, 1995; Blau, 2003). Data was also collected on their views regarding environmental protection, past and current participation in environmental movements as well as a scale of items measuring their activity level in the occupational community.

Controlling for a vast array of personal characteristics, as well as macro-level variables tied to the respondent's zipcode, the analysis shows that environmental beliefs, motivations and

activism are associated with higher levels of normative and affective occupational commitment. These in turn are associated with increased levels of participation in the occupational community while accumulated cost and limited alternative-base commitment are not. Further analysis goes on to test the moderating effect of macro-level factors associated with social movements such as the level of resource mobilization and the legitimacy of environmental claims in an individual's proximal geography.

### ***References***

- Abbott, Andrew. 1988. *The System of Professions: an Essay on the Division of Expert Labor*. University of Chicago Press.
- Blau, G. 2003. "Testing for a four-dimensional structure of occupational commitment." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 76:469–488.
- Bucher, R., and A. Strauss. 1961. "Professions in process." *American journal of sociology* 66:325–334.
- Carson, K. D, P. P Carson, and A. G Bedeian. 1995. "Development and construct validation of a career entrenchment measure." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 68:301–320.
- Dierdorff, E. C et al. 2009. "Greening of the World of Work: Implications for O\* NET®-SOC and New and Emerging Occupations." *Raleigh, NC: National Center for O\* NET Development*. Retrieved July 30:2009.
- DiMaggio, P. J, and W. W Powell. 1983. "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields." *American sociological review* 48:147–160.
- Greenwood, R., R. Suddaby, and C. R Hinings. 2002. "Theorizing change: The role of professional associations in the transformation of institutionalized fields." *Academy of management journal* 45:58–80.
- Hughes, E. C. 1984. *The sociological eye: Selected papers*. Transaction Publishers.
- Lawrence, T. B, and R. Suddaby. 2006. "Institutions and institutional work." *Handbook of organization studies* 2:215–254.

- Lounsbury, M. 2001. "Institutional sources of practice variation: Staffing college and university recycling programs." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46:29–56.
- Lounsbury, M., and E. T Crumley. 2007. "New practice creation: An institutional perspective on innovation." *Organization studies* 28:993.
- Lounsbury, M., and W. N Kaghan. 2001. "Organizations, occupations and the structuration of work."
- Lounsbury, M., M. Ventresca, and P. M Hirsch. 2003. "Social movements, field frames and industry emergence: a cultural–political perspective on US recycling." *Socio-Economic Review* 1:71.
- Nelsen, B. J, and S. R Barley. 1997. "For Love or Money? Commodification and the Construction of an Occupational Mandate.." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42.
- Rao, H., P. Monin, and R. Durand. 2003. "Institutional change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle cuisine as an identity movement in French gastronomy." *American Journal of Sociology* 108:795–843.
- Schneiberg, M., and M. Lounsbury. 2008. "Social movements and institutional analysis." *The Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* 648–70.
- Scott, W. R. 2000. *Institutional change and healthcare organizations: From professional dominance to managed care*. University of Chicago Press.
- Sherman, R. 2010. "'Time Is Our Commodity': Gender and the Struggle for Occupational Legitimacy Among Personal Concierges." *Work and Occupations* 37:81.
- Strang, D., and W. D Sine. 2002. "Interorganizational institutions." *Companion to organizations* 497–519.
- Van Maanen, J., and S. R Barley. 1984. "Occupational communities: Culture and control in organizations." *Research in organizational behavior* 6:287–365.
- Weber, K., K. L Heinze, and M. DeSoucey. 2008. "Forage for thought: Mobilizing codes in the movement for grass-fed meat and dairy products." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 53:529–567.
- Zald, M. N, and M. A Berger. 1978. "Social movements in organizations: Coup d'etat, insurgency, and mass movements." *American Journal of Sociology* 83:823–861.