Knowledge Management Research and Practice

Call for Papers for a Special Issue on the theme

Organizational learning for the common good: an emerging approach to sustainability and resilience

Guest Editors

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Background

Since Hardin’s (1968) seminal article, theoretical reflections and empirical investigations on the commons’ governance and management have played a pivotal role in sustainability literature. Political scientists such as Elinor Ostrom (who was awarded the Nobel Prize for her studies on the commons) studied small, traditional communities sharing fragile commons, such as fishing areas or grazing lands (Dietz, Ostrom, & Stern, 2003; Ostrom, 1990). These studies showed that many communities have actually proved capable to self-organize, thus preventing the overhanging tragedy of the commons, i.e., the collapse in common resources availability due to users’ opportunistic behavior (such as over-exploitation). This view implies that a specific type of socially constructed learning is crucial to protect common resources: at the heart of a community’s self-organizing capabilities, in fact, lies the development of both an effective, dynamic, reasonably shared understanding of the fragilities threatening the community’s commons and the possible solution(s) to stave these threats off.

The literature stream stemming from Ostrom’s work (Armitage, Marschke, & Plummer, 2008; Berkes, 2009; Plummer et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2004; Wyborn, 2015) suggests that when the community is small and isolated, and the commons is a relatively closed, simple and predictable system, traditional social learning mechanisms (such as democratic participation, ethically engaged leadership, face-to-face discussion, conformism) may be sufficient to develop effective knowledge for sustainability. However, in most cases the community sharing the commons is actually vast, open, divided into different sub-communities and competing leaderships, and the fragile commons itself is embedded in a wider, complex, turbulent eco-socio-technical system. In these cases, traditional social learning mechanisms (Coudel, Tonneau, & Rey-Valette, 2011) are likely to prove insufficient: a system of organizational learning activities is also needed.

Examples of these complex, evolutionary learning activities at the organizational and organizational field levels (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015; Fjeldstad, Snow, Raymond, & Lettl, 2012; Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006; Huang, 2013) include (but are not limited to):

- distributed experimentation through (non-hierarchical) actor-to-actor relationships,
- (participative) system-level feedback collection and evaluation,
• (collective) sensemaking activities on system resilience and sustainability,
• (multi-stakeholder) co-creation of knowledge, relationships and/or rules,
• hybrid (re)organizing in fragmented organizational fields with competing institutional logics.

If a commons is at stake, these learning activities are particularly challenging and critical, because they must dynamically address the continuously evolving paradoxical tensions between cognitive issues, power games, the techno-institutional environment, and the social dilemmas posed by common resources’ fragilities.

In this perspective, specific organizational learning theories would be very useful to address the complex knowledge and learning issues raised by the need to protect and develop the common good (see for example Labedz, Cavaleri, & Berry, 2011; Sherif, 2006). Nevertheless, since the literature on the commons is rooted in political science, community studies, and ecological studies, scholars studying the commons tend to overlook the organizational learning literature, and rather refer to social learning approaches. On the other hand, organizational learning scholars tend to leverage theories that are native to business, organization and management literature (Baskerville & Dulipovici, 2006; M. M. Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999; M. Crossan, Maurer, & White, 2011; Lam, 2000; Lichtenthaler, 2009; Vergne & Durand, 2011), and rarely consider the potential explanatory and normative power of the theories on the commons (Cantino, Devalle, Cortese, Ricciardi, & Longo, 2017). In order to bridge this gap, novel and also non-conventional and creative approaches to management (e.g. Schiuma, 2011) could be particularly fruitful.

This special issue aims to encourage research bridging these two research streams, i.e., (1) organizational learning, and (2) sustainability-oriented management of the common good in complex eco-socio-technical systems.

Topical areas include, but are not limited to the following research questions:

• How do the knowledge dynamics around the common good intertwine with new forms of organizing and/or new forms of monitoring?
• What are the implications of organizational learning for the common good in terms of knowledge management?
• What are the implications of organizational learning for the common good in terms of intellectual capital?
• How can we measure system-level resilience as a key expected outcome of organizational learning?
• How does organizational learning co-evolve with business model innovation for sustainability?
• How does organizational learning for the common good co-evolve with the institutional environment (e.g. in terms of institutional logics, or through processes of institutional entrepreneurship)?
• What is the role of technologies in organizational learning for the common good?
• What is the role of art and creativity in organizational learning for the common good?

Coverage and Audience

This special issue seeks to compile a set of high-quality research papers that address the aforementioned and further topics from theoretical and empirical (both qualitative and quantitative) perspectives. The aim is to compile the current state of the art and practice, to explore productive
paths of research and to show theoretical and methodological approaches to further develop both the literature on Organisational Learning and the literature on Sustainability through the bridging concept of common good.

This call is also trying to recognize and identify previous related literature in order to provide a background for extending our theoretical understanding of this complex issue. Authors submitting manuscripts to this call are strongly encouraged to consider utilizing any and all appropriate journal citations, including those related to articles in recent issues of Knowledge Management Research and Practice.

This Call for Papers invites manuscripts providing novel insights and inspiration for research in organizational learning for the common good and should also highlight implications for practitioners – for-profit entrepreneurs and managers, social / institutional entrepreneurs, but also NGOs, international organizations and government managers. We also welcome joint papers by academics and practitioners.

Submission procedure

- All submissions must follow the editorial guidelines of KMRP which can be obtained from the journal website (http://www.springer.com/business+%26+management/operations+research/journal/41275).
  Papers should not exceed 8000 words including references, figures and tables.
- Papers should be submitted via the electronic manuscript submission system under https://kmrp.msubmit.net/cgi-bin/main.plex.

Publication plan

Submission deadline: 31st March  
Planned publication period: November 2018

Editors and contact information

The editors invite preliminary discussions from potential authors. Please contact one, or all, of the editors:

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References


