

Innovations in Social Innovation Research: Towards Structuring Innovation Dynamics

By: Angie Fuessel¹, Wray Irwin²

¹NovoVigeo Consulting

²Irwin Associates

Keywords: social innovation, structural change, qualitative research, multi-level methodology, strong structuration theory, interactive dynamics

Abstract

Despite social innovation being a complex and dynamic process that unfolds amongst multiple actors over time, research methods have often overprivileged individual social innovators and not adequately considered structural and situational context, the full range of actors, or time. Responding to the field's call for innovative research methodologies, the writers independently sought to bridge this gap. This article introduces their respective case studies, which both employed Strong Structuration Theory as part of theoretical and methodological bricolage to understand better the dynamic interactions and processes across social structures and levels of analysis. After exploring each case's research questions, methodologies, and findings, this cross-case comparison finds three shared insights: the importance of individual structures, the role of power, and the fluid nature of external structures. The article closes with key applications for changemaker educators and social innovation practitioners, funders, and policymakers, revealing how they can foster interactive dynamics that enable social innovation and structural change.

Introduction

The intractable nature of the problems social innovation is used to solve requires multiple organizations and individuals to collaborate over long periods – all of which are also situated in specific geographic, political, and institutional contexts. Empirical research, especially longitudinal research, is limited with research questions and methodologies over privileging individual social innovators. Academic literature has called for more robust research approaches that consider the context and complexity of social innovation.¹ Without this deeper understanding, policies, practices, and education fail to account for the dynamic processes involved and are less likely to foster social innovation.

This paper presents two independent case studies and argues that Strong Structuration Theory is a unique methodological approach that informs changemaker education and social innovation practice, funding, and policymaking.

Research Needs

Social innovation's lack of definitional certainty poses methodological challenges for anyone researching this complex phenomenon. Early in the research design, decisions need to be made to define *social innovation* for a study. In our respective case studies, we applied a social

structure change lens to social innovation. In doing so, we acknowledged the multi-level interactions that often catalyze change across systems and institutions. While the cases used different definitions of social innovation, this cross-study analysis adopts Edwards-Schachter and Wallace's definition arrived at after their literature review of 252 definitions, which suggests social innovation is "a collective process of learning involving the distinctive participation of civil society actors aimed to solve a societal need through change in social practices that produce change in social relationships, systems, and structures, contributing to larger socio-technical change."²

Analyzing complex social change requires rigorous methodologies that consider at least two dimensions: time and levels of analysis. First, it is important to understand social innovation longitudinally, recognizing that change takes time, is not linear, and requires proactive engagement over prolonged periods. Second, social change happens across the micro (individual), macro (institutional or policy), and meso (organizational) levels, where action and policy interact to shape each other.

Previous studies exploring social innovation have adopted literature reviews, taxonomies, case studies, and theoretical explorations to define or explain social innovation. While these are important foundations, few examples exist of methodologies applied to understand the dynamic processes of social change over time and at multiple levels of analysis.³

The field of social innovation research, therefore, requires methodological innovation and experimentation to explore this complex phenomenon more deeply and expand researchers' ability to inform policy, practice, and education. The studies examined in this paper sought to do just that by employing Strong Structuration Theory.

The Case for Strong Structuration

In *The Constitution of Society*,⁴ Giddens proposed Structuration as a social theory that explains the reaction and reproduction of social systems. Over the years, many have criticized his theory for its contradictory overemphasis on details while being ambiguous and abstract.^{5,6}

Stones⁷ challenges Giddens' critics by suggesting a form of Structuration Theory he calls Strong Structuration (SST). SST recognizes the existence of social structures as "material or physical conditions or levers" and "memory traces" within agents themselves, asserting that external structures exist as both internal and external phenomena.⁸ This assertion enables researchers to bracket the context of their research within an organization, community, or any in-situ location, allowing a detailed exploration of change across multiple levels of analysis.

Stones' SST defines four components through which change happens.⁹ These are described below and illustrated in Figure 1.

- **External structures** exist autonomously from the agent, including "the network of others that surround the agent-in-focus."¹⁰
- **Internal structures** reside in human agents and are embedded and operate in specific contexts.¹¹ These internal structures include:
 - **General dispositions**, or habitus,¹² including taken-for-granted skills, worldviews, cultural references, habits of speech, and gestures

- **Conjunctionally-specific knowledge**, which is an actor’s knowledge and understanding of their immediate and wider context¹³
- **Active Agency** is how agents draw upon internal structures routinely, pre-reflectively, strategically, or critically when taking action¹⁴
- **Outcomes** include the effects of “actions and interactions on both external and internal structures and other kinds of outcome”¹⁵

Applying SST allows researchers to analyze and understand individual actors’ internal structures and their experiences within a specific social change context. Identifying the external social structures regulating a specific situation provides an opportunity to understand the actions of those involved, the extent to which these structures influence change and are themselves modified or endured through action, and how change happens.

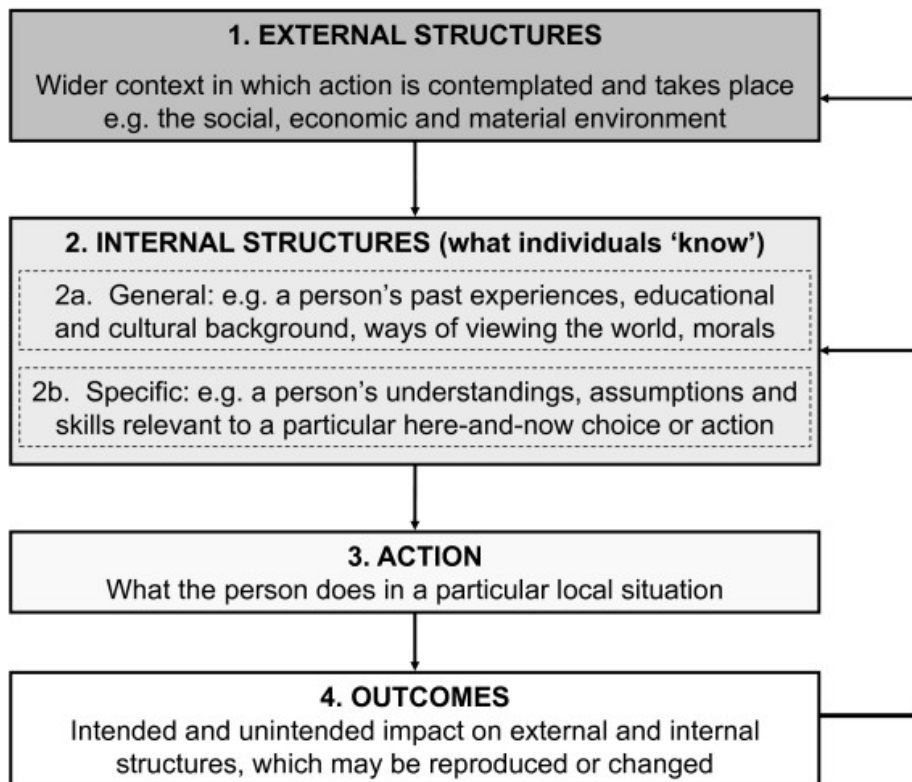


Figure 1. Stones Strong Structuration Model¹⁶

Introduction to the Research Cases

This paper introduces two qualitative case studies that independently used Strong Structuration Theory as part of their conceptual frameworks and research approaches, but in different ways. The cases are introduced in Figure 2 and described below.







	Case 1	Case 2
	Sector Nongovernmental	Higher Education
	Location United States	United Kingdom
	Research Site Truckers Against Trafficking	University of Willowick
	Site Type Social Entrepreneurial Nonprofit	Higher Education Institution
	Social Innovation Mobilizing the trucking industry to combat domestic sex trafficking	Improving student outcomes by addressing equality, diversity, and inclusion
	Purpose Explore how dynamic interactions across levels of analysis shape structural social change	To explore how social innovations are simultaneously both good for society and enhance societies capacity to act

Figure 2. Case Introduction

The first case¹⁷ was a social entrepreneurial effort based in the United States. Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT), cofounded by an Ashoka Fellow, seeks to mobilize the trucking industry to combat domestic sex trafficking. The research explored the first five years of TAT’s efforts and sought to understand how structural change occurred—that is, how the paradigms, practices, and use of resources across the trucking industry transformed—by exploring the interactions across levels of analysis (e.g., individuals, organizations, and societal regulations and institutions).

A few years later, the second case¹⁸ study was independently conducted at a university in the United Kingdom. The university’s social innovation was improving student outcomes by addressing equality, diversity, and inclusion. The research was designed to explore how social innovations simultaneously benefit society and enhance its ability to act. The study examined 18 months within a key department seeking to facilitate this social innovation.

We did not plan these studies together or with the specific intention of comparing them. Serendipitously, the studies share several important similarities despite occurring a few years apart on different continents in different organizational and cultural contexts. Both:

- Conceived of social innovation as a complex, collaborative, multi-level transformation
- Conducted longitudinal analysis, with Case 1 exploring the first five years of Truckers Against Trafficking and Case 2 researching 18 months within a department of the University of Willowick

- Used Strong Structuration Theory to research internal and external structures and how they changed over time
- Identified and examined game-changing actions or key events that were critical in (re)shaping structural relations and shaping social change (Case 1 identified three over five years, and Case 2 explored four over 18 months)

Such unique characteristics offered an opportunity to uncover shared insights that advance understanding of and inform practices for leading complex social change. Conversely, the fact that they occurred in different sectors and countries demonstrates that Strong Structuration Theory can be successfully employed in different contexts. Furthermore, the case on TAT reveals how it can be operationalized across organizations, while the case on UoW shows how it can be used within and across departments in a single organization.

Case Study 1: Truckers Against Trafficking

Case Context

Truckers Against Trafficking (TAT) was founded in 2009. During the research period, the executive director was an Ashoka Fellow. TAT sought to mobilize the US trucking industry to combat domestic sex trafficking. Fundamental to this was reframing the problem from *prostitution* to *trafficking* and helping the industry realize that truckers could look out for and report potential signs of sex trafficking.

As a nonprofit, TAT experienced a unique outsider-insider perspective that set it apart, all while it became increasingly more embedded in the trucking industry as its programs were created and spread. Whether TAT was partnering with trucking and logistics companies, law enforcement, or industry associations, it brought anti-sex trafficking expertise and educational resources to bear. Meanwhile, TAT's partners brought transportation, trucking, and law enforcement expertise, workforce, social networks/influence, and financial resources. Key programs TAT and its partners innovated and spread include, e.g., training trucking and truck stop employees on the signs of and how to report trafficking; training state motor vehicle enforcement staff how to increase awareness of, spot, and address trafficking; and creating unique partnerships across state trucking associations, attorney generals' offices, law enforcement groups, and the trucking industry.

Research Question

The principal research question sought to understand how structural change occurred in the anti-sex trafficking efforts in the US trucking industry by exploring how individuals, organizations, and macro-level societal structures interacted. There was an appreciation that throughout the five-year study, there were many moving parts, people, and events that likely interacted to mobilize the trucking industry to combat sex trafficking with changes in language, use of resources, powers, and norms. For example: How did the social innovator, specific trucking and law enforcement leaders, their organizations, and/or state and federal regulations and norms interact to foster social change? While much of previous research would have zoomed in to

explore the leadership skills, traits, or actions of the principal social innovator, this research methodology zoomed out to explore multiple levels of analysis and their interactions.

Research Approach

Informant interviews were conducted with TAT’s executive director to understand the organization and case context as well as to identify three game-changing events — or those that catalyzed a change in how the trucking industry perceived and acted towards the issue of domestic sex trafficking. Focus groups and participant interviews were conducted with key actors in each event. As illustrated in Figure 3, this data was then analyzed to identify the nature of the actions, the structures before and after the actions, and how each interacted.

The research approach in Figure 3 itself represents a kind of social innovator’s bricolage drawing from Structuration Theory;¹⁹ Strong Structuration Theory;²⁰ General Theory of Action (informed by multiple writers);²¹ and the concept of Interactions (informed by multiple authors).²² Grounding the research in these concepts and theories provided key dimensions for analysis and comparison. Structuration and Strong Structuration Theories have already been introduced above, with the former informing the units of analysis for external structures and the latter for internal structures. Schwandt’s suggestion that actions have situations, ends, norms, and meanings was used to analyze the game-changing actions.²³ Interactions, or exchanges, were explored between structures and actions and between stakeholders involved in the actions.²⁴

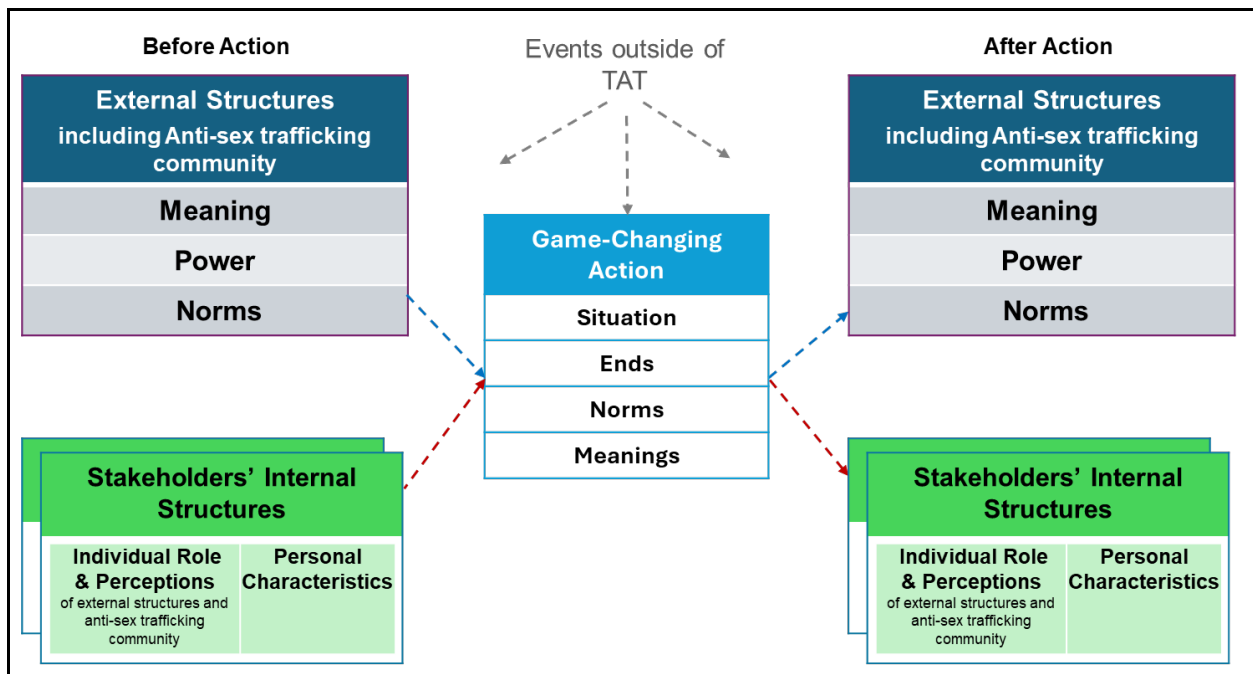


Figure 3. Case 1 Research Methodology, adapted from dissertation²⁵

Research Insights

The social innovator identified three game-changing actions, each occurring one year apart. The first two were characterized by engagement with key leaders that resulted in the creation of models for new practices in trucking and logistic companies and departments of transportation, respectively. The third expanded an existing coalition-building model, TAT's approach to forming partnerships across the trucking industry and law enforcement.

Across the three game-changing actions, it was clear that internal structures were incredibly important in catalyzing a domino effect of change. In the first two actions, key leaders drew upon their own value systems (general dispositions) while experiencing an expanded sense of what they and their organizations could do (conjecturally specific knowledge) to combat sex trafficking. Their positional power and influence enabled them to leverage their organizations' resources to create new practices for addressing trafficking. The social innovator then had the foresight to package these as "models" that could be held up as examples across the industry while the leaders themselves championed the change amongst industry peers. In the third action, TAT had even greater legitimacy and was more embedded in the industry, enabling it to set new expectations for its coalition-build model.

Some of the research insights were:

- Exploring the dynamic interactions across levels of analysis is indeed critical to understanding the process of structural social change.
- Internal structures, especially those in positions of power and influence, are critical for catalyzing change.
- Wide-scale structural change can be set off by a domino effect of individual change leading to organizational change and ultimately to industry-level change.
- External structures can be enabling and constraining, depending upon who is considering them and when.

Case Study 2: University of Willowick

Case Context

The research for the second case was conducted within a UK higher education institution (HEI) undergoing a major structural transformation, requiring a redesign of all systems and processes. At the time, the newly formed UK higher education regulator was introducing new regulations that imposed complex success measures that higher education leaders were expected to balance and deliver if they were to retain their status as a university. The introduction of tuition fees funded through government-backed student loans had driven competition across the sector, turning students into customers with high expectations of quality, experience, and value for money now that they were paying for their education. The University of Willowick (UoW) embarked on a major redevelopment and upgrade by building a new campus four miles across town to compete in this market.

In addition to this state-of-the-art development, UoW sought to improve graduate employability, a proxy measure for student value adopted by the newly formed regulator. While the future job prospects of graduates were of prime importance, ensuring graduates enter well-paid graduate roles would also ensure they would repay their student debt and ensure the government's policy of higher education would be sustainable. Across the sector, UK HEIs were increasingly adopting strategies to improve levels of graduate employability and address inequality within outcomes for graduates with protected characteristics.

Research Question

The research was interested in understanding how social innovation, as a collective intentional act that fosters social impact, is simultaneously good for society and enhances society's capacity to act. Despite the fragmented nature of the social innovation literature and lack of definitional clarity, there was some consensus that delivering this dual outcome made an innovation a social innovation. However, there needed to be an explanation of how this was achieved. As Ayob et al.²⁶ identified, the literature indicated the opposite: the outcome of social innovation is either a societal good for the benefit of the majority or an enhanced capacity to act by creating new power relationships. The implication is that the required dual outcome of social innovation would be achieved by bridging the gap at the empowerment stage of the process, something unexplained and under-researched (Figure 4).

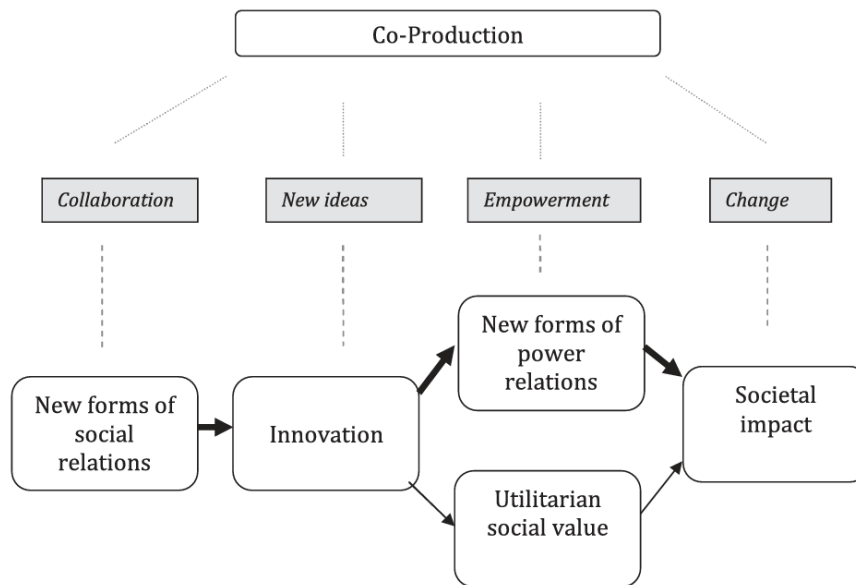


Figure 4. Models of Social Innovation taken from Ayob et al., 2016²⁷

While this was the overarching aim of the research, the study followed Carspecken’s counsel against setting one research question at the beginning of the research but allowing the data to guide the study and for research questions to emerge.²⁸ However, the researcher needed to start somewhere to shape the approach and listed 25 possible questions, which coalesced into three areas of interest as follows:

- How can social innovation produce the dual outcomes of being good for society and enhancing society’s capacity to act?
- Within a complex system such as a university, which external structures constrain or facilitate social innovation?
- What is the role of organizational social entrepreneurship in delivering social innovation within a university?

Research Approach

To understand the *how* of social innovation as defined, the study needed to capture and understand the lived experiences of those involved. In this way, the structures that constrain and facilitate social innovation could be identified through the stories of those involved and experiencing the change. A hybrid participatory research methodology was required, allowing for units of analysis at the micro (person), meso (organizational), and macro (in this case, organizational) policy levels. Carspecken’s²⁹ five-stage Critical Ethnography in Educational Research methodology was the underpinning approach adopted, modified to incorporate Coghlan and Brannick’s³⁰ participatory action research model for conducting insider organizational research and Strong Structuration Theory³¹ to analyze the data, conceptualize the system, and understand the *how* in social innovation.

Creating this hybrid methodology allowed for exploring the social innovation process across several research cycles, facilitating an increasingly deeper dive into the insights as they emerged. The research cycles enabled by the adoption of this methodology are presented in Figure 5 below.

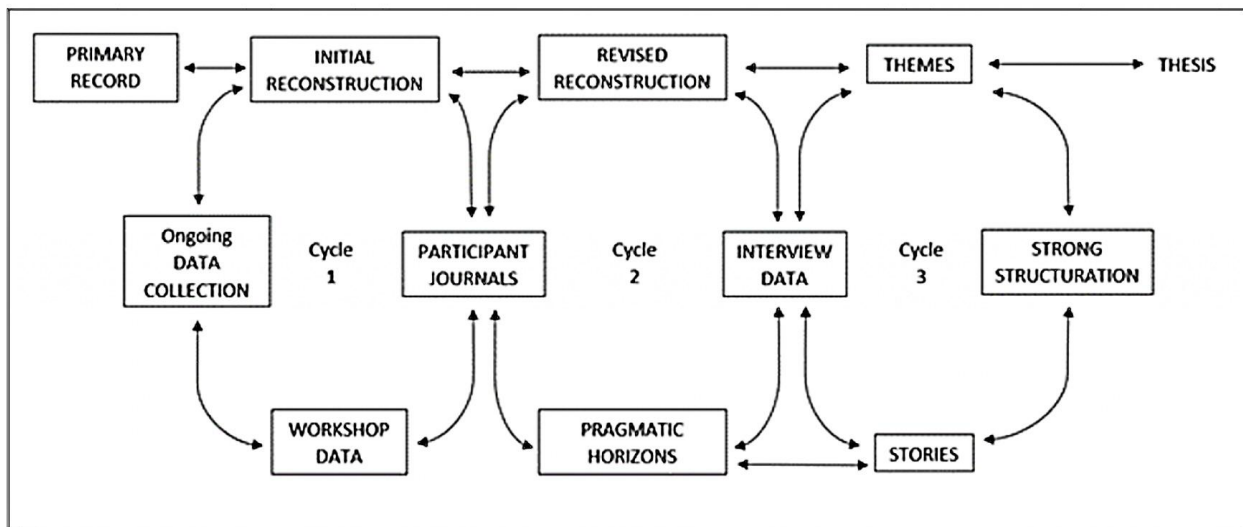


Figure 5. The Research Cycles Undertaken in the Study³²

In cycle one, the nine participants maintained a daily journal, supported the analysis of organizational data, and delivered workshops as part of the action research to create a contextual understanding of the university. The data generated was then analyzed to create the stories of

those involved, revise the knowledge of the context, and inform the interviews carried out as part of the third cycle. SST was applied in cycle three to frame the themes emerging from the two previous cycles, validate findings back to theory, and substantiate the final thesis. The cycles were not linear, requiring constantly revisiting data, methods, and findings across all three cycles as new data and insights emerged.

Research Insights

The study identified four game-changing events impacting those involved. The first was at the initial meeting of the team drawn together to design the change intervention. The second meeting was the next event, which resulted in team members becoming tribal, using their power and position to frame the group's work in a way that promoted vested interests. This caused conflict and fractures across the team, which were reinforced once the notes from the meeting were circulated, suggesting agreement had been reached on a course of action that had been rejected in the meeting, game-changing event three. The final event was the intervention of the head of the department following a confrontation with a team member.

Changes in internal and external structures were examined across these four events, suggesting several insights into how social innovation produces dual outcomes that simultaneously benefit society and enhance society's (in this case, a university) capacity to act as follows.

Some of the research insights were:

- Any individual or group can exhibit organizational social innovation, and these individuals have the power to effect change.
- These individuals require support from senior leaders and must be appropriately rewarded so that such behaviors are mainstreamed.
- Creating an enabling environment is important and should include a strategic commitment to change through social innovation, a policy framework supporting social innovation, and an agile approach to resource allocation to support the dynamic nature of change.
- It is essential to apply a leadership approach that leverages resources beyond existing boundaries and effects change across multiple levels of analysis by empowering those involved in the change.

Discussion

While the studies were set in different contexts, using various methodologies, this cross-case analysis revealed three shared insights and applications, as illustrated in Figure 6. First, we discovered empirical evidence of the criticality of individual actors—and not just the traditional sole social innovator—in shaping change. Second, leveraging and lending power was key for enabling individuals to shape change. And finally, these two insights together indicate the relatively fluid nature of external structures. That is, the internal structures of a given actor and the extent to which they have access to power—whether theirs or someone else's—influence the extent to which they perceive an external structure as something that can be changed.

Meanwhile, the dynamic interactions across structures can lead to material change in external structures.

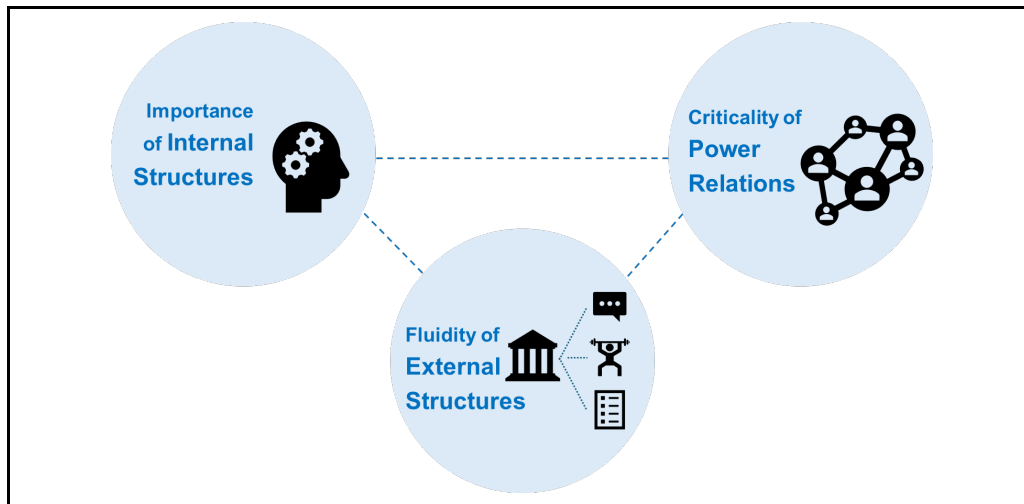


Figure 6. Three Shared Insights Across Cases

First, we both observed the importance of individual actors in shaping change—but not in the traditional ‘social innovator as hero’ way that has been featured traditionally in social innovation literature. Instead, our research illustrates how individuals are shaped by—and in turn shape—other actors, organizations, and institutions. This provides a foundation for developing practical strategies for various stakeholders seeking to proactively shape social change, which we address in the Applications section below.

Second, we observed the importance of power in shaping structural change. Here, we differentiate between power and empowerment as done in the TAT case study. Namely, as suggested by Strong Structuration Theory, power or domination at the organizational and societal levels can be operationalized in the forms of “resources, authority, and influence.”³³ Meanwhile, we use empowerment as the more individual-level phenomenon of personal agency. The studies found that personal empowerment and belief in what is possible can grow within individuals as their perceptions of other potential partners’ and their organizations’ power and resources grow. This leveraging and lending of one another’s resources, influence, and networks can fuel an actor’s own field of action. As people feel more empowered and leverage or lend others’ power, their actions can restructure power relations structurally in and amongst organizations and institutions.

Third, in acknowledging the importance of individual actors in shaping change and the importance of power to do so, external structures are far more fluid than we often give them credit. That is, they can be perceived as constraining or enabling, depending upon who is looking, under what circumstances, and when. To illustrate, we offer examples from each of the cases.

In the TAT case study's first game-changing action, a transportation and logistics company Executive (TLE) met the social innovator at a conference where he learned about the phenomenon of trafficking and how traffickers targeted the trucking industry. Once he experienced this meaning change, it felt like an affront to his own personal values and that of his company, and he went on to champion training within his organization. The social innovator's sense of what was possible grew, and she codified the company's approach as a model and worked with the TLE to promote it across the industry. The company ended up financially supporting TAT, and both the executive and his company championed new practices across the industry.

The TLE's personal values and belief in his company's values were critical in catalyzing the game-changing action, but only after his own internal meanings and understandings of *prostitution* and the phenomenon of *trafficking* changed. His advocacy and leadership influenced change in the company's training and its role across the industry. Meanwhile, once the social innovator realized what the TLE and his company could do, she gained an even greater appreciation for her own field of action, and her internal structures changed, motivating her to create and spread the model.

Thus, we see how critical internal structures were in catalyzing a series of actions that led to the innovation of practices, organizational action, and, ultimately, structural change across the industry as the model was replicated. Meanwhile, these innovations might only have occurred with the role of power. The TLE's positional power enabled him to influence organizational action, and the social innovator was buoyed by a newfound sense of what was possible, growing her own agency. This was important because, in fact, an employee at a lower level at the same company had been previously interested in TAT, but nothing had occurred yet. Had a different trucking and logistics individual without positional power or internal convictions and belief in their organization encountered TAT at the conference that day, the external structures of trafficking may have been overwhelming, causing paralysis and/or the external structure of the leader's organization may have been perceived as unchangeable. Thus, we see the relatively fluid nature of external structures, depending on context and actors.

In the TAT study's second game-changing action, the social innovator met leaders in a state's attorney general's office and motor vehicle enforcement agency. Like the first action, as the social innovator and the leader of a motor vehicle enforcement organization (LMVE) learned about each other's organizations and what might be possible, they experienced internal structural changes (i.e., expanded beliefs in what was possible). An appreciation for each other's legitimacy, power, resources, and influence unleashed a further sense of their own agency. The LMVE mobilized his organization to create new anti-trafficking outreach, training, and practices, while the social innovator partnered with him to document and advocate for this model, with it being adopted by many other states.

In these respective actions, the TLE believed in his company's values, and the LMVE believed in his organization's mandate and ability to address trafficking. Contributing factors were likely their personal dispositions of optimism and their own positional power within the organizations. Meanwhile, someone lower in the organization with less visibility into organizational resources or influence would likely have seen their structures as constraining and thought, 'We've not fully

recognized or done anything about this issue before, so why would we now?' We see examples of small actions like introducing training within one's organizations, leading to greater anti-trafficking organizational meaning, power, and norms, ultimately leading to greater macro or industry advocacy. So, here we see that even on some of the more significant societal issues, such as trafficking, external structures are malleable and can change due to micro-interactions at an individual and organizational level. As we'll discuss under Applications, the key is to strategically foster emergent situations such that conditions are ripe to create a domino effect.

In the UoW study, at the first game-changing event, a working group was formed from a cross-section of representatives from the various departmental teams. This was an experience free from the hierarchical pressures outside the group, creating a sense of possibility. This sense of optimism tapped into the enthusiasm of individuals who previously felt ignored and had prior knowledge of being overlooked and locked out of decisions. These internal structures created a reluctance amongst the group as they went through the motions of delivering what was already preordained. The potential of individuals to see themselves as change agents was hindered as external structures such as job descriptions and others' professional qualifications and superior positioning constrained them further.

The trigger point came at the fourth game-changing event when the department head (DH) was confronted by a working group member who was frustrated that their skills and abilities were being ignored and that any prospect of affecting change was remote. Rather than intervene in the process, the DH exercised their formal leadership and authority to reframe the general disposition of all those involved. This reframing redefined external structures the team had perceived as barriers to facilitators and validated the views of all involved. The DH's formal authority was devolved to subordinate change agents within the working group who became empowered to deliver change. This repositioned how all individuals viewed change and each person's role in effecting that change. The vested interests of all teams within the department were acknowledged and accommodated. At the same time, individuals were valued for their contribution to effecting change rather than the assumed responsibility as defined in their job descriptions. This giving up of power to facilitate change to benefit all enabled the creation of new power relationships across the department, reconfiguring the system to be more responsive and practical while delivering change.

The emergence of change agents did not align with existing external structures. However, the DH's ability to reframe individuals' prior knowledge and assumptions about what was happening was instrumental in reframing internal structures across the department and repositioning general dispositions and specific knowledge. This repositioning facilitated the delivery of the dual outcomes required for social innovation, emphasizing the practice of leadership in facilitating change. This leadership practice can also be seen in the actions of the team member who confronted the head of the department and repositioned his general and specific knowledge. This individual prompted the DH to lend their power and authority to the individuals in the group who wanted change. The power of the DH was flexed as change emerged, and the need to reallocate this resource to support the actions of different groups in the department arose.

Furthermore, the DH reached out across the university to advocate for their team's work, unlock additional resources, and gain additional personal authority to maintain a safe space for

innovation for all those involved. This was made possible by the work they had previously undertaken to create networks and connect the department as part of the wider university ecosystem. The integrated nature of the department established the importance of the work the team did and a realization of their pivotal role in supporting the work of other departments and academic schools. The DH's ability to draw upon this reserve of resources, usually beyond their control and influence, to support the team when needed underscores resource management's importance in facilitating change. The study concluded that leveraging external resources in this way represents a form of organizational social extrapreneurship, essential in expanding the change agents' ability to effect change beyond the confines of the resources they were aware of and their belief in their success.

Applications

These studies help us better understand theoretical claims and intuitive beliefs that many individuals are critical in shaping social change, interactions are critical in creating the conditions for change and framing and reframing issues and options can be the secret sauce of social innovation leading to structural change. Based on these common findings, we offer the following applications for changemaker educators in honor of this special issue, followed by those for social innovation practitioners, funders, and policymakers.

Changemaking Educators and Collaborators

Changemaking education already includes many of the ingredients needed for equipping students in social change, such as gaining knowledge, exposure, and experience with the topic, exploring root causes, mapping systems, and cultivating skills of empathy, design thinking, and collaboration. The findings here suggest that we can complement these pragmatically by:

- **Preparing Partner Organizations:** Organizations partnering with educators as a research or project site for course assignments must be adequately prepared for their engagement. They must understand they are not simply a 'recipient' of a student group's ideas or recommendations. They are fundamental informants and collaborators in a dynamic process of social innovation. Set clear expectations of their roles in helping students learn about the problem, using their networks to create necessary introductions, inviting other key players into the project, and collaborating as part of an emergent project and process.
- **Teach Multi-Level Change:** Introduce the term "social structures" and help students better understand that change happens at and between levels of analysis: social issues and institutions, networks, organizations, and individual stakeholders. Most importantly, discuss how interactive dynamics across levels foster change and are a key ingredient to catalyzing change.
- **Introduce Structure Mapping Exercises:** Guide students in collaboratively mapping the desired end state for the social issue. For example, discuss what social issues would look like in terms of meanings, values, and language; power, resources, and influence; and policies, norms, and behaviors. This can be a powerful visionary step before they consider theories, levers, and strategies for change.
- **Coach on Emergence and Structure:** Help students understand that even though it is

important to start with the end in mind by mapping desired structures, social change is largely emergent. Coach them on concepts of complexity and how to foster situations that allow for emergence.

- **Frame What it Means to be a Changemaker.** Most importantly, drive home the point that while everyone can cultivate changemaking skills and identify as a changemaker, there is no one person or institution that fosters social change single-handedly. Help them step into practical exercises and interactions with partnering organizations with confidence that they will learn and contribute to success if they have an open, curious, and opportunistic approach. Diffuse any pressure they feel or false notions they may have of ‘solving’ something through their own insight or in a time-bound project. Paint a picture for them of a lifelong journey in changemaking and social innovation in and with others.

Practitioners

For practitioners, the familiar adage that “we must be the change we want to see” is applicable here. Before we can begin thinking about changing others, organizations, or social practices and institutions at large, we must understand our own internal structures and relationships to the issues and structures we seek to change. To do that, we propose:

- **Be the Change:** Remember you are part of, or related to, the structures you seek to change. Consider how you need to change, what you can influence and control, and what game-changing events you can catalyze.
- **Reimagine the Power of Structures:** Recognize the influence of external structures on your perceptions of what is possible, reframe how they can be leveraged to support the change you seek and tap your own agency. Seek appropriate opportunities to leverage or combine power with others.
- **Cultivate Reflexive Habits:** Given the dynamic and fluid nature of internal and external structures, develop habits of reflection to assess your position, power, and agency continuously. Mentally prepare for an interaction by considering how you want to show up and take a few minutes afterward to journal or process how you interacted with others and with the ideas discussed and why.
- **Active Other’s Values and Beliefs:** Seek to understand others’ values, paradigms, and perceptions of what is possible and consider how you might help reframe an issue or opportunity so that it resonates with their internal structures and moves them to action.
- **Give Power:** Share and/or lend your position, power, and resources with other potential agents of innovation to create aha moments, unleash exponential empowerment, fuel new senses of agency, and drive innovative action.

Funders

Funders can ensure that efforts they fund draw from theoretical explanations of external structures (e.g., meanings/values, power/resources, and norms/policies) as they shape analysis, strategy, and change interventions.³⁴ Some ideas for funders include:

- **Evaluate for Power:** Seek and evaluate proposals considering their potential to effect

changes in power dynamics to unleash significant innovation and structural change.

Design requests for proposals and incorporate evaluation criteria that:

- understand relevant external structures and how they can change;
- propose a credible delivery mode for those participating in changing power and
- demonstrate a clear understanding of their role and power in the system.
- **Require Reflection to Reinvest:** Before reinvesting in a subsequent phase of a social innovation effort, require and participate in a reflective exercise that goes beyond ‘lessons learned’ to analyze the structural change created. Identify structural opportunities and challenges as they relate to catalyzing and sustaining the desired social innovation.

Policymakers

Meanwhile, these constructs are useful for analyzing the social issues in which a government or state actor is seeking to foster improvement and thus should be part of every policymaker’s toolkit. Ultimately, policymaking must be as dynamic as the nature of social issues, and policymakers must be equipped to interpret social structures and evolve policy accordingly.

- **Analyze Structures:** Use these concepts to analyze structures and develop comprehensive policy and social change strategies. Without adequate training, capacity building, and resources, a new law will struggle to foster social innovation and change. Similarly, informational campaigns with tax incentives or regulations may be able to thrive. Thinking ‘structurally’ helps create reinforcing strategies rather than using one lever alone.
- **Monitor & Adapt Dynamically:** Identify targeted milestones and conduct frequent check-ins to monitor not only planned and unplanned outcomes but also the nature of the interactions across levels of analysis and how different structures are changing. Monitor these dynamics to help others reframe an issue, lend or extend resources, empower key influencers, and iterate guidelines.

Conclusion

Drawing from the two cases, we have demonstrated that even social innovation research requires bricolage and innovation. The case studies revealed the importance of a) individual actors’ dispositions and what they perceive as possible; b) lending, borrowing, unlocking, and reconfiguring power; and c) the influence, fluidity, and malleability of organizations and institutions.

We have also suggested how changemaker educators and social practitioners, funders, and policymakers can leverage Strong Structuration Theory concepts to shape and foster social innovation and change analysis, strategy, intervention, and assessment.

In conclusion, below are a few general takeaways this cross-study analysis reveals for all:

- **Structuration and Strong Structuration concepts are important complements to existing mapping and strategy tools.** Tools typically employed in social innovation

analysis and planning, like ecosystem maps, stakeholder maps, and process maps, are beneficial in understanding the relationship of institutions, organizations, and individuals that comprise a social issue. Using Structuration concepts (meaning, power, and norms) to map social issues at given points in time allows us to better analyze what structural social change we seek to make and if there has been evidence of structural social change. Mapping and analyzing game-changing actions enables us to explore the dynamic interactions that have led to structural changes. Likewise, incorporating concepts from Strong Structuration Theory, such as perceptions of the social issue and action horizons, complements our understanding of stakeholders. It equips us to understand micro-level change dynamics better.

- **Everyone has a role to play.** Social innovation thrives when diverse actors come together, bringing unique perspectives, resources, and know-how because it's a breeding ground for unlocking mindset change, creating mutual empowerment, and sparking new practices. For example, too often, policymakers and funders act transactionally (e.g., set policy or give money and wait for metrics and new funding cycles). However, they are part of the change and must leverage soft power, policy, and money.
- **Social innovators and changemakers need to foster interactions and take advantage of emergence.** On the one hand, it is important to develop theories of change and identify activities, outputs, and desired long and short-term outcomes. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that innovation and structural change are largely emergent, even though fostering the conditions and guiding its development are possible. Taking a Structuration and Strong Structuration lens enables us to reconsider 'constraints,' open our minds to opportunities, create dynamic spaces and practices for game-changing actions to emerge, and then put structure to and scale innovations when they do manifest.
- **We need to revolutionize how we measure and evaluate.** While accountability is essential, prescriptive metrics run the risk of stifling innovation. Meanwhile, if we are not careful, it could be possible to hit outcome metrics that do not achieve lasting structural change. So, we recommend not only monitoring and evaluating relevant program outcomes, but also the structuration process (e.g., the power dynamics and structural interactions and changes) and structural changes, while adapting metrics along the way. Developmental evaluation—which is based on, amongst others, principles of innovation, complexity, and systems thinking—encourages learning and adaptation³⁵ and can be a source of inspiration.

References

- ¹ Tina Beckman, Hamid Aslam, and Elaine Shaw, "Understanding the social innovation trap: Fragmentation and the call for integrated research," *Journal of Social Innovation Studies*, 45,1 (2023): 75-94.
- ² Mónica Edwards-Schachter and Matthew L. Wallace, "'Shaken, but not stirred': Sixty years of defining social innovation." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 119 (2017): 26, <https://digital.csic.es/bitstream/10261/161713/1/ShakenSixty.pdf>.
- ³ Giovany Cajas-Santana. "Social innovation: Moving the field forward. A conceptual framework." *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 82, (2014): 42-51.
- ⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984).
- ⁵ M.S. Archer, *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- ⁶ John. B. Thompson, "The Theory of Structuration," in *Social Theory of Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and his Critics*, ed. D. Held and J.B. Thompson (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 56-76.
- ⁷ Rob Stones, *Structuration theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- ⁸ Stones, *Structuration theory*, 22.
- ⁹ Stones, *Structuration theory*, 84.
- ¹⁰ Lyn Daff and Lee D. Parker, "A conceptual model of accountants' communication inside not-for-profit organisations." *The British Accounting Review* 53, no. 3 (2021): 5.
- ¹¹ Rob Stones and Lisa Jack, "The bridge between ontological concepts and empirical evidence: An interview with Rob Stones," *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal* 29, no. 7 (2016): 1145-115.
- ¹² Aileen Kennedy, Colm O'gorman, and Kenneth Lee, "Have your cake and eat it? Combining structure and agency in management research," *European Management Review* 18, no. 4 (2021): 438.
- ¹³ Paul Upham and Lea Gathen, "Actors in transitions: narratives of roles and change in the German e-mobility transition," *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* 40 (2021): 450-460.
- ¹⁴ Stones, *Structuration theory*, 85.
- ¹⁵ Stones, *Structuration theory*, 85.
- ¹⁶ Susan Hinder and Trisha Greenhalgh, "'This does my head in'. Ethnographic study of self-management by people with diabetes," *BMC Health Services Research* 12, 83 (2012): 3.
- ¹⁷ Angie Kay Fuessel, "Exploring the Dynamic Human Interactions that Shape Social Change: A Case Study of an Antitrafficking Social Entrepreneurial Effort" (EdD diss., The George Washington University, 2015).
- ¹⁸ Wray Irwin, "Social Innovation in Higher Education: The Application of Carspecken's Critical Qualitative Research Methodology to Understand Social Innovation as Systems Change in a University Context" (PhD thesis, University of Northampton, May 2022).

- ¹⁹ Giddens, *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*.
- ²⁰ Stones, *Structuration theory*.
- ²¹ Talcott Parsons, *The social system* (New York: Free Press, 1951); Guy Rocher, *Talcott Parsons and American sociology* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1974); and David R. Schwandt, "Individual and collective coevolution: Leadership as emergent social structuring," in *Complexity leadership*, eds. Mary Uhl-Bien and Russ Marion (New York: Information Age, 2007), 101-128.
- ²² Johannes Han-Yin Chang, "Mead's theory of emergence as a framework for multilevel sociological inquiry," *Symbolic Interaction* 27, no. 3 (2004): 405-427; Talcott Parsons, *The social system* (New York: Free Press, 1951); and Guy Rocher, *Talcott Parsons and American sociology* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1974).
- ²³ David R. Schwandt, "Individual and collective coevolution: Leadership as emergent social structuring," in *Complexity leadership*, eds. Mary Uhl-Bien and Russ Marion (New York: Information Age, 2007) 101-128.
- ²⁴ Angie Kay Fuessel, "Exploring the Dynamic Human Interactions that Shape Social Change: A Case Study of an Antitrafficking Social Entrepreneurial Effort" (EdD diss., The George Washington University, 2015), 54.
- ²⁵ Angie Kay Fuessel, "Exploring the Dynamic Human Interactions that Shape Social Change: A Case Study of an Antitrafficking Social Entrepreneurial Effort" (EdD diss., The George Washington University, 2015), 94.
- ²⁶ Noorseha Ayob, Simon Teasdale, and Kylie Fagan, "How social innovation 'came to be': Tracing the evolution of a contested concept," *Journal of Social Policy* 45, no. 4 (2016): 635-653.
- ²⁷ Noorseha Ayob, Simon Teasdale, and Kylie Fagan, "How social innovation 'came to be': Tracing the evolution of a contested concept," *Journal of Social Policy* 45, no. 4 (2016): 649
- ²⁸ Phil Francis Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography in Education Research* (New York: Routledge, 1996): 28-30.
- ²⁹ Phil Francis Carspecken, *Critical Ethnography in Education Research* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- ³⁰ David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick. *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 4th edition. (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014).
- ³¹ Stones, *Structuration Theory*.
- ³² Wray Irwin, "Social Innovation in Higher Education: The Application of Carspecken's Critical Qualitative Research Methodology to Understand Social Innovation as Systems Change in a University Context" (PhD thesis, University of Northampton, May 2022), 128.
- ³³ Angie Kay Fuessel, "Exploring the Dynamic Human Interactions that Shape Social Change: A Case Study of an Antitrafficking Social Entrepreneurial Effort" (EdD diss., The George Washington University, 2015), 62.
- ³⁴ Angie Kay Fuessel, "Exploring the Dynamic Human Interactions that Shape Social Change: A Case Study of an Antitrafficking Social Entrepreneurial Effort" (EdD diss., The George Washington University, 2015), 308.
- ³⁵ Michael Quinn Patton, "State of the Art and Practice of Developmental Evaluation," in *Developmental Evaluation Exemplars*, ed. Michael Quinn Patton, Kate Mckegg, and Nan Wehipeihana (The Guilford Press, 2016), 1-24.