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Innovation in institutional collaboration
The role of interlocutors

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Abstract

The world is said to be confronted with complex issues working against the long term well-being of people and planet that can only be effectively addressed through (hyper) collective effort. How necessary collaboration comes about and progresses shows numerous approaches, professional specialisations, studies and examples. However, there is little in the way of a comprehensive, comparative perspective examining the instigator(s) of diverse collective action objectives and participants in co-creative relationships for societal change that are maintained over time and brought to fruition. More critically, organisational innovations suggest that what currently exists to tackle intractable problems by getting institutions and their organisational actors to cooperate needs updating. Past approaches to collaboration are not good enough for operating in tomorrow's conditions. Drawing on Actor Network Theory, this paper therefore explores a category of actant – an interlocutor – as potentially crucial in committing to, arranging and holding together complex collective action engagements. From multiple angles and using examples of organisational innovation, the analysis considers the interplay between interlocutor attributes and interlocution processes. A preliminary conclusion is that a combination of characteristics exhibited by an interlocutor offers a helpful category to explain and bring about multi-institutional problem solving. As importantly, increasing the number and variety of interlocutors across the world may be an agenda worth pursuing.

Keywords

Interlocutor, institutions, innovation, collective action, actor networks.

Innovation in institutional collaboration[1]
The role of interlocutors

1 Introduction

By their nature, intractable social problems contain interdependencies that span many types and scales of institutional life. And many social issues – such as corruption, inequality, global warming, poverty, food insecurity and many others (e.g., Rischard, 2002; Stiglitz, 2012; UN, 2004) - stem from frictions between institutions as they seek to gain an upper hand in how society works for whose benefit over different time frames.[2] While competitive interdependent interactions often energise innovation, they simultaneously create risks and dilemmas for society today and tomorrow that cannot be resolved by any one type of institution acting alone. Consequently, there seems little alternative to improving and expanding collaboration if the world is to work sustainably for the benefit of all who live in it today and tomorrow.

This co-creation conclusion is far from new. But there is increasing evidence – seen for example, in the recent creation of multi-disciplinary, social innovation design laboratories (Torjman, 2012) - that societies do not have adequate ability to bring about the sorts of collaborative effort that will make the systemic changes needed. This paper therefore explores existing ways of bringing about multi-institutional collaboration as a 'baseline' to argue that emerging forms of organising with this intention point to new types of role players, i.e. interlocutors, potentially better able to bring such arrangements about and to fruition.

In doing so, analysis makes use of Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005) to include purposeful collaboration between human actors, such as individuals, activists, entrepreneurs, corporations and public bodies as well as the technologies they rely on. For example, the mass public activism associated with the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement cannot be explained without including the communication technologies which enabled fast self-mobilization at multiple locations. Social media as an economic entity with political and commercial effects cannot function outside of the technologies its human users rely on. Commuter behaviour is mediated by the modes of transport they use. The advent of electric bicycles may alter patterns of travel requiring adaptations to physical infrastructures while increasing the mobility of aging populations with unknown outcomes. The general point is to factor-in technologies as actors in analysis of human systems. The term 'actant' is used as an umbrella term for both human and non-human role players.

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[1] I am grateful for members of CIRI for their advice on drafts of this paper and their dedication to inter-disciplinary dialogue and collective effort.

[2] Institutions are understood as socially stabilizing but inherently conflicted and dynamic patterns of collective human behaviour that are guided by emergent rules, norms, beliefs and configurations of power operating in actor relations. Institutions can be formal or informal in nature, operate at multiple scales and can be changed by people's agency.

A principle query driving this paper is the why, when and how collective action processes with institutional consequences comes about and proceeds? Obviously, a similar concern can apply to smaller scales of change found within communities, localities and the nitty gritty of day to day life that can aggregate with significant impacts. But problem solving at scale by intention and design brings more stringent demands on collaborationism that are a better test of a working proposition that a new actant is needed and is already appearing, an idea stimulated by action-research in Africa led by Fletcher Tembo (2013). This multi-country study tried to understand how to enhance social accountability; that is to make those who govern more answerable to those who are governed. This work identified a category of actant - an interlocutor - that would, at first sight, offer a useful addition to our analytic repertoire with, potentially, a wider practical application than micro-governance.

Such anticipation was reinforced by presentations and discussions at a conference organised by the Graduate School of Business of the University of Cape Town.[3] The conference sub-title was 'Co-innovation to Address Wicked Problems'. This framing pointed towards the notion of involving multiple actants in complexity-informed problem-solving endeavours. As will be described below, the fields of business and corporate social responsibility are already replete with multi-actant allusions exhibited, for example, in cross-sector partnerships between nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and corporations described by Seitanidi and Ryan (2007). Reflecting their underlying rationale, in the words of one business leader:

> The issues we face are so big and the targets so challenging that we cannot do it alone. When you look at any issue, such as water or food scarcity, it is very clear that no individual institution or company can provide the solution. (Pol Polman, CEO, Unilever, quoted in NBS, 2013: 2)

This quotation is contained in the executive summary of a study by Gray and Stites (2013) which analyses 275 reports and academic research to tease out practical lessons for businesses on how to engage in problem-solving involving collective action across diverse organisational players. The authors avoid the complicated issues associated with the label 'partnership' - which is often used to camouflage structural power asymmetries in, for example, international aid (Hauk and Land, 2000). Gray and Stites do so by stressing that the relational issue is one of *collaboration*, disaggregated into four types: Reactive, Transactional, Integrative and Transformative. While these types are illustrated in cases, the comparative study did not systematically examine the (diversity of) 'who' is bringing about different types of collaboration and guiding them to completion.

In investigating 'who', the notion of interlocutor and processes of interlocution may assist in examining in more detail what collaboration-supporting competencies are brought to bear by whom under what conditions.

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[3] The Business of Social and Environmental Innovation 2013: Co-Innovation to Address Wicked Problems, 25-26 November 2013.

To be of substantial value, such purview cannot be limited to an economic focus. Fully exploring and testing the robustness of the concept requires inclusion of many realms for collective action called for to deal with the dysfunctions that modernity generates in creating wealth as well as risk (Beck, 1999). Such deepening and broadening can be treated as criteria against which to test the extent to which the concept and category of an interlocutor and interlocution processes merit further exploration. With a discursive scene setting, this paper 'probes' towards such an emergent role and player.

The exploration relies on three additional working propositions. First, new actant types signal an opening in organisational ecology for 'interlocutor' role players. Second, the robustness of an interlocutor as category will depend on the diversity of the instances where it makes sense, empirically and intuitively. Third, an interlocutor is likely to be a composite of existing types of 'inter-mediating' functionalities, but in arrangements with emergent properties (Johnson, 2001) that are better attuned to complex collaborations under evolving global conditions and its independencies.

Exploration of the notion of an interlocutor starts with a brief discussion on social dilemmas as a 'natural' outcome of competing interests that call for collective remedy. Over time, a socio-economic response has been to build up skills, competencies, professions and services to bring about inter-organisational and multi-institutional arrangements to tackle issues of shared concern. The major types of actant in this field are briefly described, discussed and summarized. Then, by analysing four examples of organisational innovations designed to bring about complex collaboration at scale, the subsequent section tries to identify common attributes of an interlocutor as a role player as well as characteristics of interlocution processes. The concluding section considers where effort is needed in testing the value of an interlocutor in theory and practice.

2 Collective action and intractable problems

It is argued that today's world economy evolve from interactions that relied on cooperation across time and space (Axelrod, 1984; Seabright, 2004). Ways of doing so become embedded in a society's institutions, be they formal or informal in nature. Somehow or other people have learned to live and work together, creating relationships, rules and norms of the group bonding 'civility' necessary to do so (Anheier, 2007; Dekker, 2009). It is argued that Western nation states - as a conflict-formed 'sovereign' geo-political entities and their prosperous, modernizing economic model(s) (Bates, 2001; Coates, 2000) - are the outcome of the long term evolution of a capitalist market system. This combination is most efficient with a tri-sector institutionalised division of labour based on comparative advantages of each: governments regulate, markets generate wealth and civic society ensures public articulation of preferences towards societal imagined futures that are selected through democratic means (Alford and Friedland, 1985). Together, over long historical time, these emergent arrangements minimize costs of provision, policing and compliance required to improve human well-being, eventually for all

(Beinhocker, 2006). This Western experience is assumed to have universal application (Wallerstein, 2006).[4]

At the same time, social units, such as organisations, through which actants cooperate towards a shared goal, have aggregated to co-form institutions which operate with logics, interests and types of power and influence that compete for ascendency which create socially energising frictions. This condition can keep apart the efforts needed to tackle societal dysfunctions created at home and intruding from abroad (e.g., Group of Lisbon, 1995). Different parts of society experience negative 'externalities' in the ways that interests are pursued, leading to disputes, for example, about the social contract, taxation and the allocation of responsibility for the collective good between the public and the private realms, i.e., there is an essentially normative conflict over how societies should work for whom. Today's intractable social problems – perceived or real – are located in such a contestation. Their lack of resolution demonstrates that institutional structures do not 'automatically' or organically align themselves towards an uncontested future as conceived by the political left or right (Trägårdh, Witosezek and Taylor, 2013). Collective action of a societal order has to be consciously constructed.

Human actants behave in accordance with their inter-institutional logics and interests, which may or may not be rationally optimizing. Altering this predisposition means, according to Nobel Laureate Eleanor Ostrom, fostering collective action by addressing the causes of 'social dilemmas' which she defines as settings in which individuals make action choices in interdependent situations (Ostrom, 2005) with sub-optimal outcomes for the whole.

> If each individual in such situations selects strategies based on a calculus that maximizes short-term benefits to self, individuals will take actions that generate lower joint outcomes than could have been achieved. In other words, a social dilemma can be analyzed as a game where the Nash equilibrium for a single iteration of the game yields less than the socially optimal outcome. The socially optimal outcome could be achieved if those involved "cooperated" by selecting strategies other than those prescribed by the Nash equilibrium. Since the suboptimal joint outcome is an equilibrium, no one is independently motivated to change their choice, given the predicted choices of all others.
>
> The reason that such situations are dilemmas is that at least one outcome yields higher returns for all participants, but rational participants making independent choices are not predicted to achieve this outcome. Social dilemmas thus involve a conflict between individual rationality and optimal outcomes for a group …. Even if some individuals cooperate, the others are predicted to "free-ride" on the contributions of the cooperators. (Ostrom, 2005: 3-5)

It is such conditions that those dedicated to instigating collective action processes and gaining results for participating actants must overcome. But in doing so, it is important to recognise that power asymmetries between actants and associated institutions are in play, for example in terms of relative access to

[4] The Chinese model is bringing this assumption into question.

information, types of knowledge, capacity and mandate to act. In addition, in bringing about institutional change there are multiple types and sites of authority that have to be taken into account. They are seen, for example, in the subsidiarity principle of the European Union, in federated forms of government (e.g., McGinnis, 2005) and of international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) (Costa, et al, 2012) and in configurations of transnational firms (Roberts, 2004).

Role players in multi-actant arrangements and processes

Against this backdrop, a critical issue is what type of actant is best placed and equipped to bring necessary collective action into being and to a mutually beneficial result? This question is far from new. The organisational landscape is populated with many labels for actants that ostensibly fulfil this requirement. Common examples are generic, such as: (multi-stakeholder) Facilitator, Intermediary, Mediator, Convenor, Broker, Change Agent, Orchestrator and Activator. A short summary illustrates their roles, tasks and 'blurry' overlaps which establishes a sort of baseline against which new actants can be compared. Of particular comparative importance is the extent to which an actant is fully implicated in the collaborative outcome or is separate from it, for example as a temporary service provider.

Facilitator: This actant and associated process of facilitation have many definitions. In the context of international development, a Guide produced by a leading organisation in the field voices the following (Thaw and Banks, 2007: 6):

> Facilitation is a process and professional practice (as opposed to a tool or method):
>
> - for reaching an agreed outcome:
> - through a communication and awareness-raising process
> - which is led by a facilitator
> - with involved stakeholders.

Facilitators are seldom long-term players, nor are they party to the eventual outcomes, which belong to the participants.

Intermediary: Invokes the idea of an actant fulfilling a communication role between parties by transferring information between them without adding anything in their own right. Intermediaries are often selected for their 'neutrality'. Their work can pave the way for collective arrangements to be negotiated and formed, but may not necessarily continue in the processes involved. An intermediary function can be to network participants together, for example, in a systemic approach to leveraging support for disadvantaged groups.[5] In these and other examples, a key function is one of forming connections and establishing communication channels. Results of intermediation processes rest with the parties concerned.

[5] http://www.intermediarynetwork.org/tools.html (Accessed, 25 February, 2014)

Mediator: This type of actant is often found in alternative dispute resolution (ADR) settings. Mediators can add value by actively contributing to establishing joint positions or agreements. Their process often involves preparing conditions for face to face interaction between actants that are overtly or covertly hostile towards each other. Overcoming antipathy would be a pre-condition for any collective action process to be undertaken. They can help parties reach resolution of differences that typically requires skill in negotiation. By inference, this role occurs at a stage where multi-actor processes have already been in play but have led to relational difficulties that any pre-agreements on resolving differences cannot settle. For example, the Scaling Up Nutrition Initiative (SUN) anticipated that conflicting interests would arise between its several hundred supporters and assorted members – governments, scientists, business, civic society organizations, activists and others. In recognising the potential weakness of collective action that would result, The Global Social Observatory (GSO) was commissioned to consult and craft a Working Paper to Prevent and Manage Conflicts of Interest which, when in-house processes do not succeed, envisages the possible use of external mediation services (GSO, 2013: 19).[6]

Convenor: Involves bringing parties together and providing the setting through which they can interact. The function can be passive – renting out facilities for free, at cost or for a profit – or active by purposefully seeking out actants related to an issue of concern for the convenor itself. The Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Centre is a physical expression and example of an active approach.

> The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center's mission is to promote innovation and identify impact-oriented solutions to critical global problems.[7]

As the Center's primary role and process (Flower and Muoio, 2013: 4):

> Convenings are:
> Composed of diverse stakeholders who represent a range of perspectives on a topic, often from different organizations
> For accomplishing a clear purpose (e.g., drive toward decision-making or alignment) and intended outcomes
> Designed to draw on all participants to generate insight and action beyond what any single actor could achieve on his or her own.

This is probably an extreme proactive example. More common as 'convenings' are events that bring people together as part of larger processes seen in United Nations consultations on climate change, financing of international development, anticorruption and topics of international concern. This function is simply a tool to fulfil a (global) mandate. A similar example is seen in periodic forums to debate issues of worldwide concern, such as social resilience and inclusion.[8]

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[6] The title is misleading as the paper deals with conflicting interests with and between actants.

[7] http://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/bellagio-center (Accessed, 15 January, 2014)

[8] www.oecd.org/forum/

Broker: Typically brings together a buyer and a seller. In the context of multiple actants seeking a collective action solution to a problem, brokering relies on intelligence about and relations with the actants who (should) have an interest in being involved. Rather than acting as an agent for any party in a commercial transaction, brokering towards collective action arrangements and processes requires a high degree of trust in the competencies and *bona fides* of the organisation or individual who is trying to get actants together. An example of establishing such credentials is the Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme.

> In recognition of the complexity of brokering partnerships, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and The Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) have launched a professional Partnership Brokers Accreditation Scheme (PBAS).
>
> The Scheme includes skills development during a one-week residential course; submission of a detailed Logbook capturing experiences from a three-month period of professional practice; and a Final Project looking in detail at a specific aspect of the partnership brokering process. … Those who successfully complete both parts of the programme and all elements of assessed work are awarded accreditation to the Scheme. [9]

This broker role rests on an eventual separation from the intended outcome of the processes involved. In other words, a trusted broker is not party to the organisational commitments required to implement the (organisational) changes needed to generate the collectively desired results. To be otherwise, would infer a less than independent position.

Change Agent: With value chains as common setting, this broad label is associated with forming relations between commercial and related entities that seek mutually beneficial gains by better aligning their internal capabilities towards each other and collaborating in terms of transacting with their external environments. A useful distinction is made between internal and external change agents: the former as organisational champions, motivators and owners of change processes, the latter as a catalytic third party. In an example provided by the *Salinga* value chain for wood products, staff of collaborating firms were the internal change agents, while the third party role was played by action-researchers from different universities.

> The combination of external intermediaries and internal change agents from within the value chain (manufacturers) was critical in arranging the first *Saligna* workshop. As much as an external agent was required to overcome trust barriers, the support of key internal agents lent credibility to the process, encouraging stakeholders to see the proposed workshop as offering a viable possibility of delivering real benefits. (Bessant and Tidd, 2011: 4)

The combination of internal and external change agents combines the 'presence' required for organisational commitment to an enduring solution,

[9] http://commdev.org/partnership-brokers-accreditation-scheme-pbas (Accessed, 9 March, 2013)

allied to an outside knowledge resource with mediating contribution in a trust-building process. This dualism is seen as an important feature of a networked-learning approach to effective collaboration (Bessant, Kaplinsky and Morris, 2003: 35-36), particularly in managing power over decisions and inter-organisational conflict.

Orchestrator: Conjures up an image of an ensemble of musicians under the direction of conductor with the 'authority' to require compliance in his or her interpretation of a score – a pre-conceived plan so to speak. In international multi-actant processes it is often argued that this role needs to be played by up-skilled multi-lateral, governmental entities.

> The challenge of hypercollective action and the stakes linked to its success will push national and regional political authorities to set their violins aside to reposition themselves as the conductors of a grand polyphonic symphony. As trustees of the public good, their collective task is to structure global hypercollective action into relevant, coherent and effective global public policies to deal with the most crucial threats to global prosperity. (Severino and Ray, 2010: 32)[10]

The presence and authority of public bodies in collaborative efforts can alter the dynamics involved, but is invariably necessary when scale, institutional and systemic change are involved. Here, the collaborative issue becomes one of avoiding an application of coercive power implicit in a regulatory function.

Activator:[11] This label lies behind actants that promote and cause multi-actor civic activism. They can instigate local disruptions – such as community protests about poor service delivery in South Africa – to national civic unrest and regime overthrows in North Africa. They can be seen as promoters of international mass action in the Occupy and *Indigandos* protests about economic inequalities, the application of austerity measure to cut back government debt and youth unemployment. The point about these expressions of collective action is that they can bring to the streets people from all walks of life, where communication technology is a critical actant. The civic energy involved is informed, for example, by wide-spread disillusionment with the promise of today's economic model and disaffection with the monetization and hollowing out of citizenship in representative party political systems (Biekart and Fowler, 2013; Marquand, 2004). Activators can also challenge the way that 'leadership' is understood as a collective embodiment and not an individual figure or 'charismatic' style (Pleyers, 2010). The notion of multi-sector collaboration might not be visible on the streets but may do so when those who are employed return and agitate in their places of work. Such multi-sector effects can arise when activators gain support for their 'cause' from people who become activists within their organisations, the feminist movement

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[10] An increase in the number of actors and the scattering of donor activity in international cooperation is a driver from collective to hypercollective action seen in the Paris Declaration's efforts to harness and harmonize donor priorities and practices.

[11] I am grateful to Cristina Temmink for pointing out this less used label associated with activism.

being one instance of multi-institutional activation (e.g. Eyben and Turquet, 2013).

Discussion

These examples have commonalities and differences, summarised in Table 1. Firstly, their business models differ. States and philanthropic foundations are self-financed, while others typically rely on contracts or public subsidies. In some cases, actant and process, such as mediators and mediating, are inextricably linked. Who they are is what they do and vice versa. Third, some actant types are approached to take on a prescribed role by (one of the) parties interested in the outcome. They do not instigate collective action themselves. In addition, few have a statutory authority or scope of jurisdiction to compel a collective action effort beyond a country's boundary. In some cases, like adherence to business standards in value chains, compulsory collective action involving non-state actants is antithetical to what is needed to co-create shared value and fairness. Whatever the participants' underlying motives, it is precisely an element of self-willed 'voluntarism' with scale that brings a qualitative difference to the processes involved.

TABLE 1
Collaborative action – Repertoire of role players

ACTANT	TYPICAL ATTRIBUTES
Facilitator	Practitioner skilled in bringing about processes to reach an agreed outcome between parties. Neutral, temporary presence.
Intermediary	A go-between opening up channels for communication to explore and pave the way for new relations and opportunities. Neutral, temporary presence.
Mediator	Skilled in overcoming antipathy to enable dialogue and negotiation to proceed. Neutral, temporary presence.
Convenor	Provides a trusted space and setting for the coming together of diverse actants towards accomplishing a clear purpose. Temporary or continued presence.
Broker	Professional dedicated to establishing and guiding transactions between parties. Neutral, temporary presence.
Change agent	An actant committed to bringing about and owning change in his or her collaborative organisational setting, with external parties providing catalytic functions as needs be. Temporary or continued presence.
Orchestrator	An actant in their own right in forming and guiding collective action with a recognised role/authority to do so. Ongoing, ascribed presence.
Activator	Initiator of collective actions that invoke self-formed/self-propagating initiatives, typically energised by dissatisfactions with prevailing conditions. Embedded, ongoing presence.

Perhaps a significant differentiator is maintaining, or not, a 'neutral', time-bound non-partisan role, remaining outside of the fray, so to speak.[12] The

[12] Moreno (2004) argues that there is no such thing as 'neutrality' in mediating. All humans have pre-dispositional biases which make their objectivity an illusion. http://www.mediate.com/articles/morenoE1.cfm> (Accessed, 21 March, 2013)

alternative is being wilfully implicated in the cause(s) of a problem or (co-) responsible / accountable for the 'living' the solution. This means being a *presence* in the interaction in the way voiced by Senge, et al, (2004: 13) as a capacity for deep attachment to the issue and process at hand, described as a …'letting come' of consciously participating in a larger field for change".

And it is a larger field of change that complex, intractable problems both define and occupy. What, then, might an interlocutor add to understanding and practice of bringing about and guiding collective action? A probe to finding an answer is provided by examples of organisational innovations with this objective.

3 What is an interlocutor?

Reflecting Ostrom's analysis of social dilemmas, the action research on social accountability in Africa referred to previously, reached the following definition of interlocutor as actant and the interlocution process involved (Tembo, 2013: 7-8, emphasis in original).[13]

> It is the process of changing the 'rules of the game' (involving the changing of incentive structures of various actors) towards maximising actor inputs, in order to address or find solutions to their collective-action challenge or problem, that we refer to as '*interlocution*'. By implication, '*Interlocution processes*' are the processes involved in identifying the collective action problem(s) or challenge(s), the various actor interactions involved, and engaging the actions and actors that are working to find solutions to the specific collective-action problems in question. '*Interlocutors*' are the organisations or individuals with those necessary 'game-changing' characteristics for addressing, or contributing to addressing, a specific collective-action problem. With this understanding, the kind of collective-action problem determines what can be called a 'game changing' characteristic, and hence we cannot categorise any organisation as an interlocutor away from the action and context.

Following Ostrom's perspective, the task of an interlocutor is to help bring about solutions to collective action problems that are optimised in terms of specific actant-goal combinations. Consequently,

> ... the pre-occupation of 'interlocutors' ... is to facilitate processes of coming up with new relationships, and rules that can reduce problems such as 'free riding'.
>
> With this understanding, the kind of collective-action problem determines what can be called a 'game changing' characteristic, and *hence we cannot categorise any organisation as an interlocutor away from the action and context*. (Tembo, 2013:8, emphasis added)

Obviously, the very notion of game and game-changing is open to debate. In this research case, the 'game' was narrowly famed as social accountability. In the much bigger frame of the world's intractable problems, the nature of game

[13] The illustration provided is of a local radio station as actant bringing politicians and constituencies together in public dialogue and negotiation.

itself is under dispute. Debate seems to pivot on conjecture about the need or not to alter the rules of the world's current institutionalised paternalism and economic model, or game, to make it more inclusive, just and less threatening to the planet's ecology or to transform to a different game: as yet a poorly specified alternative.[14]

Crudely speaking is the meta perspective on collective action towards intractable problems one of 'moralising' market relations (e.g., Sandel, 2012) to 'socialise' the economics of global Business as Usual (BaU), or is the agenda about bringing about Timely Transformation (TT) described by Hubbard (2012) as system change with a new post-2015 global social contract,[15] once and for all leaving behind the notion of a Third Word (Escobar, 2004b)? Whatever the case, in practice pursuing either perspectives require collective action, but of different sorts. Irrespective of the game-oriented intention, the notion of an interlocutor remains relevant.

4 Are interlocutor examples emerging?

For our purposes, the definition of an 'interlocutor' can be articulated along the following lines:

> An interlocutor is a context-specific actant, implicated and playing pivotal roles in resolving collective action problems at scales demonstrating institutional effects.[16]

A look at the contemporary landscape of initiatives dedicated to bringing about collective action at different scales shows interesting innovations that both reflect but move beyond the categories we are accustomed to. Examples are: Backbone Organisations, Collaborative Intermediary Organisations (CIOs), Collective Impact Partnerships (CIPs) and Meshworks. But before examining what they look like, it is necessary to determine the extent to which so-called platforms, nodes, secretariats and equivalents that are formed as part of managing or 'holding' collaborative arrangements together could or should be seen as interlocutors.

Hosts as interlocutors?

The SUN example, and others such as the public private partnership to Roll Back Malaria (RBMP), are types of collaborations that arise, for example, from conference resolutions, mandates of multi-lateral agencies or INGOs, or a

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[14] Roberto Unger's interview on the 20th November 2013 BBC programme Hardtalk, sets out criticism of the TINA– There Is No Alternative – angle on this debate in some detail. http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/ht/all (Accessed, 22 January, 2014)

[15] http://www.thebrokeronline.eu/Articles/Business-as-usual-or-system-change (Accessed, 10 May 2013)

[16] To stress once more, the 'institutional' scale of change is not an a priori definitional requirement.

group of individuals initiating a collective action process. Then, in one way or another relational continuity involves a 'hosting' that is collectively designed and resourced. Such a hosting/coordination function can remain within its participating members – for example the Make Poverty History Campaign and the Secretariat of RBMP[17] - but the host does not implement, this is the task of members. However, over time hosting can transition into a formal entity collectively governed and starting to play an interlocutor role into the wider institutional landscape. An example is the Marine Stewardship Council. In this sense, set-ups which are created to 'host' collective action may or may not need to be equipped with interlocutor attributes. This possibility will be returned to when attributes are clearer. The prior question is: are interlocutor-type entities emerging?

Backbone organizations

A category of civic organisations is appearing which are foundation-funded to provide the 'backbone' for citizen-driven collective action. They are intended to act as a reliable addition to civic architecture specifically in support of initiatives. Proponents of Backbone organisations have been challenged to show that this type of entity is distinctive with respect to existing players.

> ***…it is*** important ***to differentiate between the role of backbone organizations and conveners***. The primary difference is that a single backbone entity is needed to help support the overall development of civic infrastructure to have collective impact. Conveners, on the other hand, are focused on working with the relevant partners – practitioners and other interested stakeholders – to build comprehensive and data driven outcomes. (Emphasis in original) [18]

The point is that convenors' involvement is time-bound, while Backbones are intended as an enduring civic scaffolding or skeleton that others can collectively populate and 'flesh out'.

Playing a backbone role entails equipping such a civic infrastructure with interrelated functions. These are to: guide visions and strategy; support aligned activities; establish shared measures and practices; build public will; advance policy; and mobilize funding. The tasks are not to proactively set the collective agenda, drive solutions, receive all the finance, be self-appointed or go about 'business as usual' as a funder, illustrated by the Rockefeller case. In terms of the latter, the backbone should not be at the forefront but remain behind the scenes to establish collective ownership.

According to Turner, Errecart and Bhatt (2103), a Backbone role involves an ability to exert influence without formal authority to do so. In their view, such ability calls for a combination of technical competence, ongoing commitment, maintaining objectivity, provide quality data, have strong cross-

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[17] http://www.rollbackmalaria.org/partnership/secretariat/docs/RBMoperatingFramework.pdf

[18] http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/PDF/Roles_of_the_Backbone.pdf. See also debates about being a dedicated backbone organisation versus providing backbone functions across organisations. http://www.strivetogether.org/blog/2013/12/backbone-organization-or-backbone-function/

network connections and being visible enough to have a public reputation which is respected and hence trusted. The types of collective impact being sought are at different scales; from community development in neighbourhoods to improving workforce potentials.

A notable feature of a backbone is the attention to the quality and style of leadership, cast in the mould of a visionary, politically astute, humble leader with an appreciation that problems are located with systems.

> Someone who has a big picture perspective—[who] understands how the pieces fit together, is sensitive to the dynamics, and is energetic and passionate.[19]

This profile raises an interesting question of the extent to which an interlocutor creates a psychologically safe environment which facilitates the increase of social and psychological capital of the participating entities and their representatives.[20]

Collaborative Intermediary Organisations (CIOs)

The CIO label was used in an enquiry into the governance, role and capabilities of entities established to instigate and guide urban transitions towards sustainability in Cape Town, South Africa (Hamann and April, 2013). Two case studies provided empirical material on what, inter alia, organisational capabilities are required. One, the Grabouw Sustainable Development Initiative (SDI) was instigated by the Development Bank of South Africa through its Sustainable Communities Programme. A process goal (ibid: 16) was:

> … premised on the need to build cohesive communities, bridging racial, language, cultural, and race divisions, and the simultaneous integration of economic development, social wellbeing, and environmental integrity.

SDI's formation rested on a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the municipality. This step set off a participatory process with a wide range of potential role players as representatives and as individuals, leading to a Social Compact and subsequently a Social Accord with a vision horizon of 25 years.

A second CIO, The Cape Town Partnership (CTP), was established as a non-profit company with directors from business associations, local and provincial government and civil society organisations (CSOs). Its role at formation is defined thus:

> "a development facilitation agency focused on mobilisation, coordination and alignment of public, private and social resources".[21]

The review of literature on 'transitions' of societies towards sustainability in resource use - often cast at the level of countries or sectors and their forms of governance - confirms the importance of establishing a compelling vision

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[19] http://www.fsg.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/PDF/Roles_of_the_Backbone.pdf

[20] I am grateful to Eben November for this observation.

[21] http://www.capetownpartnership.co.za (Accessed, 24 February 2014)

(Hamann and April, 2013:14). An additional issue is having effective capacity to coordinate action towards the vision allied to 'dexterity' in altering the substance of leadership and organisational capacity over time. Thus, a CIO may go through stages, from 'visioning', through strategy to aligned mobilization and implementation. The case studies re-confirmed the presence of common challenges in gaining successful collaboration (ibid:14).

> Babiak and Thibault (2009: 117) list some of the common challenges as "environmental constraints; diversity in [participants'] organizational aims; barriers in communication; and difficulties in developing joint modes of operating, managing perceived power imbalances, building trust, and managing the logistics of working with geographically dispersed partners." More specifically, an inherent challenge in cross-sector partnerships is effective communication and negotiation between individuals and organisations with different objectives and cultures, encapsulated by Le Ber and Branzei (2010b) as contradictory value frames: "Clashes in expectations and/or identities often predispose cross-sector partnerships to distrust, conflict, and premature failure … [even though] most partners work hard to understand their dissimilarities."

What was found in addition may reflect the segregated history of the country where poor communities are particularly sensitive to their participation being 'authentic' and not a 'consultation' which does not exhibit any leverage on collective decision-making. This finding corresponds with the substantial literature on participation in development studies (e.g., Chambers, 2008). Underlying the issue of real authenticity were incompatibilities between poor people looking for short term gains for their involvement against the longer term, process rather than outcome perspectives (Hamann and April, 2013:20) associated with sustainability transitions. In turn, this time factor had a bearing on what was perceived as the 'exogenous' nature of the issues that an 'endogenous' CIO was established to address. In play was the extent to which the endogenous CIO is helped or hindered by being both embedded - a living presence in the context - but adequately autonomous in its dealings with participants with statutory power. The case of CTP fared better in these regards than SDI with its exogenous impetus from Pretoria and inability to connect vision to implementation. The CTP solved this process problem by establishing a separate non-profit entity to take on the practical implementation work.

Once again the quality of CIO leadership featured prominently in explanations for relative performance between the cases.

> 'Finally, many of the above mentioned organisational capabilities require important, at times unusual leadership capabilities at the individual level. … For a start, partnership leaders frequently mentioned the importance of translating diverging value frames and perspectives.… Interviewees also emphasised the importance of system thinking (see Alexander et al., 2001): 'You need to find and describe the bigger picture to people. There needs to be the realisation that we can only solve some problems collectively.'
>
> The case studies also identified two aspects of collaborative leaders new to the partnership literature, though they have been linked to the theme of "complexity

> leadership" (Mumford et al. 2000; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). The first is an explicit comfort in spaces of high complexity and ambiguity. ... The second is the ability to frame conflict and tensions between individuals, groups, or perspectives, as an opportunity for creativity and innovation. … Another interviewee involved in the CTP noted, "I do think we need a different language around conflict, it is a pathway towards innovation."'

The last point is of particular interest in arguing for a quality of leading and organisational competencies which treat inter-organisational conflict as a source of energy and a driver in moving collaboration forward. Put another way, a pragmatic conclusion is that any CIO needs 'talent' in making productive the disputes and conflicts that are inherent to causes and remedies of social dilemmas. This finding resonates with wider literature on organisational conflict which sees this condition as not just as inevitable but as an important engine for organisational innovation, movement and adaptation (e.g., Kriesberg, 2009; Pondy, 1992).

Collective Impact Partnership (CIP)

This approach to bringing about collaboration is seen to be one of four strategies through which international NGOs (INGOs) can get 'ahead of the curve' in adapting to rapid shifts in the global operating environment and at scale (FSG, 2013). The other three are: putting more boots on the ground, concentrating on systemic change and harnessing the private sector. With allusions to Porter and Kramer's (2006) arguments in favour of corporations adopting a systemic approach to creating 'shared value' in and beyond commercial value chains, this study argues that INGOs can and should move from pro-forma partnerships with businesses and governments that are, more often than not, little more than fund-seeking relationships to becoming leaders of multi-sector action. In other words, (I)NGOs could adopt a civically principled, cooperation-driven 'fourth' position located between and connecting tri-sector institutional actors of state, market and civil society (Fowler, 2000).

The FSG examination of American NGOs working internationally that all received some level of funding from the United States government argues that their collaborative potential is seen in only a few examples because it is under-valued by leadership and undermined by the silo way in which funding operates. The authors put forward a partnership 'spectrum' that will increase INGOs collaborative capabilities, distinguished from existing models as 'collective impact partnerships' (CIPs).

> These "collective impact" arrangements provide a level of discipline, mutual accountability, and longevity that most existing models lack. Collective impact partnerships are distinguished from other partnerships through five key conditions: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and a *backbone organization*. (FSG, 2103: 23, emphasis added)

The five conditions suggest what collaboration will require. What remains unclear from this proposed arrangement is the 'on-the-ground' reality in terms

of the multi-actant organisational forms constructed in operational sites that would be a local, rather than an American NGO, 'backbone'. The literature on international NGO-ism does not inspire confidence that an externally financed entity would be local enough to be 'embedded', nor enjoy the sort of autonomy called for in the CIO case. There is also an issue of how the political economy of NGOs with rights-driven agendas can play a 'neutral' role: they have, at minimum, a vested interest in sustaining themselves alongside a moral imperative to grow their scale of impact. They are essentially implicated, in ways that contain ambiguities. Nevertheless, the World Wildlife Fund's multi-actant leadership in the Coral Triangle Initiative shows that that a relational role-shift from pro-forma 'partnerships on paper' to complex collaboration in something resembling CIPs is possible.[22]

Meshworks

The concept of 'meshworks' stems from an observation of how communication technologies are enabling a previously unknown density and scale of networked connectivity between people and organisations with institutional effects – for example on business models, politics and gender relations across the world. It is difficult to imagine, for example, that the antics of an African War Lord would have gained global attention if a documentary had not gone viral via social media and the controversy it caused.[23] The advent of mobile and internet communication is argued to be 'game changing' in its potential to reshape human collaboration by self-propelled meshing together of disparate people, locations, information, knowledges and resources – supply and demand are being upended (Shirky, 2008).[24]

However, this disruptive networking challenge to existing systems can mask significant differences in the organisation and application of power. As Escobar (2004a) notes:

> The Mexican theorist, Manuel de Landa, has introduced a useful distinction between two general networks types: *Hierarchies* and flexible, non hierarchical decentralised and self-organised *meshworks*.
>
> These two principles are found mixed in most real-life examples. … The Internet is a case in point: having grown mostly on the model of self-organisation it is becoming increasingly colonised by hierarchical forms … Today the Internet can be said to be a hybrid of meshwork and hierarchy components with a tendency for elements of command and control to increase. (Escobar, 2004a: 352).

These two network models contain a distinction about the location and principles of subordinating power 'over' and emancipatory power 'with' actants that are often masked by the apparent neutrality of the concept. In networks,

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[22] http://worldwildlife.org/places/coral-triangle (Accessed, 21 March, 2014)

[23] http://www.nbcnews.com/technology/how-30-minute-documentary-protesting-african-warlord-went-viral-376214 (Accessed, 12, March, 2014)

[24] http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/high_tech_telecoms_internet/the_disruptive_power_of_collaboration_an_interview_with_clay_shirky (Accessed, 12 March 2014)

some participants do the working while others do the netting! Care is therefore required when considering the collaborative potential offered by new technologies.

This critical framing is useful for examining a new type of multi-actant, collaboration-inducing entity put forward by Don Beck (2007) in the context of philanthropy as a seventh type of Foundation.[25] While recognising blending and overlap, the other six types of Foundation are characterised in terms of 'what matters most': humanitarianism; family interests and 'pet' concerns; a personality-driven empire; advocacy of beliefs; enterprise; ecology. In his perspective, an emerging seventh has something else: a win:win:win in assisting the efforts of multiple others. Enhancing collective capacity to tackle complex problems of people and planet is the 'what matters most' driving a new approach to philanthropy.

So, what will a Meshworks-type foundation actually be able to do that others can't or don't? Paraphrasing Beck, a Meshworks foundation: (1) will learn how to align its own resources, stakeholders, clients, and customers so that internal operations run in a smooth, positive, and additive way; (2) understands the decision-making "codes" inherent in all of the other six foundation types, to enable it to "mesh" them in common cause; (3) thinks in a time-line fashion in that it "meshes" the past, present, and future into an integrated wholeness, taking a long view while dealing in tactical issues on a daily basis; (4) is more interested in *what* is right rather than *who* is right; who has *competency* rather than *status*; (5) measures and assesses itself based on whether it has been successful with the unique win:win:win strategy; (6) always has an eye on building something for the future; (7) continues to renew itself, learn from mistakes and be open to constant change, transitions, and transformations; and (8) possesses an ability to *morph* itself to find rapport, identify with, and shape itself to connect with a number of different organizations, interest groups, political groupings, and professional societies.

Beck (2007) also argues that the cyber world is an actant that complements personal relationships. It can only invent and innovate in combination with others and not its own right. Its 'third win' purpose is to 'mesh' people organisations and resources in sophisticated arrangements involving its own collective intelligence, flexibility and ability to respond to the moment enabling others to act rather than the primacy of itself. However, without adequate attention to governance, the potential for hierarchy applied from Foundations with poor accountability will remain potential sources of problems.[26]

The Hague Center (2009) provides a case example of applying a meshworks approach to collaboration in designing a multi-actor roadmap to reduce global CO2 emissions by 80% by 2020.

> An effective meshwork differs from a network or group in that *the interests, beliefs, behaviors and functions of the different members are aligned to serve a common purpose.* Many

[25] http://www.humanemergence.org/mesh.html (Accessed, 21 March, 2014)
[26] http://www.alliancemagazine.org/en/content/undermining-foundations-non-accountability

> smaller parts act together as a larger functional whole. At one level, a meshwork is an alignment of hearts and minds around a common purpose. At another level, it is an alignment of forms, functions and resources to achieve a larger functional purpose.

This explanation poses an interesting question about the role of The Hague Centre – which is not an endowed philanthropic Foundation envisaged by Beck. Is it an instigator, host or interlocutor or fulfil another function? Put another way, does a meshworked form of collaboration make distinctive demands on how collaboration is brought about and to fruition? And, are interlocutors tied to a particular political-economy associated with philanthropy?

5 Interlocutors for Complex Collective Action – A discussion of attributes

The foregoing 'probes' into the notion of an interlocutor are not 'scientific' in the sense of a systematic scan of multi-actant collaborations operating across the world. This needs to come. Rather, the approach has been to identify ways in which such arrangements arise in terms of the attributes of a critical party in complex collaborative processes that need to operate at a meaningful scale. By attributes is meant the mix of roles, competencies and principles that are involved in making collaborations work. What might the foregoing exploration tell us about the attributes of an interlocutor with 'game-changing' intentions and potentials? Seven attributes appear to be in play.

Leadership allied to conflict management

One probably pivotal attribute is a style of leadership that gains respect when establishing and applying rules and processes which guide the psycho-social behaviour of groups by exerting influence without having or exercising formal authority. In addition to expressing a compelling vision, this attribute calls for leadership which anticipates conflict as a starting condition for collaboration which must be transcended over time. Put another way, leadership is both sensitive to and knows how to manage disputes, making disagreements a productive force for change and innovation.

Interlocution as trust building

Allied to leadership is an essential condition of building trust, both in the integrity and technical competence of the interlocutor as individual and/or as an organisation, as well as to be progressively gained between other collaborators. Put another way, the psycho-social condition of trust translates into bonding social capital of the individuals in a collective effort in ways that also establish bridging social capital as actual commitments between their respective organisations. An interlocution process involves careful attention to sequencing and scale of collective 'win wins' which gradually erode prejudicial

stereotypes that actants bring which mistrust the motives of other participants. This conflict-inducing pre-disposition was anticipated in the SUN example. Accompanying such processes is attention to participants who are appointed against their will or better judgment, or are designated to act as 'guardians' preventing encroachment over their institution's interests. Over time, such behaviour can undermine progress, debilitate trust and sap energy that requires corrective action.[27]

System sensitivity and scaling

Like politics, almost all intractable problems are local somewhere (Goldfarb, 2006). Under such conditions, the task of an interlocutor is to unpack and find multi-actant entry points to alter systemic relations which scale the local to the global and back again. This work includes determining sites and forms of resistance as 'normal' and criteria for assessing collective performance (Ford and Ford, 2009). Current investment in social innovation and design laboratories are examples of where this type of multi-disciplinary, collaborative analysis is taking place[28] (e.g., Harich, 2010). The Meshworks idea is premised on applying such an integral perspective to large scale societal game change.

Awareness of polycentric governance, distributed authority and power

System sensitivity towards game-changing or rule-changing objectives involves a good understanding of existing configurations of power, authority and governance associated with decision making. Sites of support and resistance that are likely to be faced by those collaborating need to be factored into intervention design and the ebb and flow of interlocution processes. An intervention with a systemic approach through multiple actants is likely to need the attributes of institutional entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. This is a concept of how people's agency can shape institutions, while simultaneously being constrained by them, cognitively, normatively and through regulation and sanction (e.g., Scott, 2008; DiMaggio, 1998). Attention to points of entry also requires competence in making political readings of why and how institutions do (not) change in order to devise and apply power-calibrated interventions (Meadows in Harich, 2010: 44).

Presence and the long haul

To fulfil a role of instigating collective action and bringing it to fruition at scale, interlocutors are unlikely to be detached from the inspirations for and the consequences of results. Beyond the logic that everyone is connected in one way or another to problems that are truly global, the professional task calls

[27] I am grateful to Joe McMahon for pointing out this feature of participant behaviour.

[28] See for example, <http://sigknowledgehub.com>

for an acceptance of *being implicated*, of belonging to processes and outcomes. Again, the notion of *presence* means letting go of a position of external observer of, say, a collaborative group, in order to re-engage in a more insightful way. It invokes the idea of letting go of pre-conceived and secure realities to re-locate oneself within processes which re-institutionalise the never ending interplay between structure and agency in ways that 'unroot 'rather than ameliorate causes of social dilemmas (Senge, et al, 219). But this way of belonging is difficult to realise when relying on existing language which, in the West at least, lineates change and segregates the whole of a complex problem into 'manageable' parts. Consequently, a multi-linguistic and associated cultural attribute becomes vital.

Polyglot

Participant diversity of the type associated with social dilemmas brings diverse frames of reference with multiple jargons and vocabularies where the same words cannot be relied on to mean the same thing to everyone. A competent interlocutor needs attributes of a polyglot, speaking and 'reading' actant communications which can have multiple meanings. Advances in technologies that satisfy multi-lingual requirements should help, but understanding the geo-institutional and organisational life worlds of participants will remain a human competency. Case examples suggest the significance of adequate and timely 'translational' communication that keep everyone in the loop without belittling those less educated or les empowered or uncomfortable in vocalising, which is a typical problem faced by women in strongly patriarchal societies. The CIO experience speaks to this. Without care, technologies can create exclusion and amplify the voice of some parties over others. The task is to open up information flows and reduce the hierarchy of access feeding the transparency needed for trust.

Sovereignty and financing

Finally, the CIO example and the idea of a Meshworks Foundation illustrate the importance of attributes of governance that ensure an interlocutor's behavioural 'sovereignty' and accountability, if not autonomy. By this is meant a clear allocation of decision rights that do not compromise independence of thought and action towards a partisan or prescriptive interpretation. As with many other attributes, the quality and conditions of an interlocutor's financing become a critical variable in determining collaboration-enhancing performance. The backbone concept infers a freedom of agency for would-be interlocutors. The practice will need to bear this out.

6 Conclusions

This paper is an initial attempt to explore an emerging concept in collective action theory and practice across a wider terrain than its socio-political origin. It argues that the societal problems creating demand for more complex and

far-reaching collaboration between different institutions are such that the existing repertoire of role players bringing about the necessary relationships and processes shown in Table 1., are not adequately suited to what is involved. Support for this conclusion is illustrated by four types of entity that are emerging to fill the space, together with an analysis suggesting that seven attributes are involved in fulfilling the tasks involved. These examples do not (dis)prove a working hypothesis that the nature of the world's collaboration needs stimulates an emergence of different actants be they called interlocutors or some other label. Nor does this investigation imply that one of more of these attributes is not to be found in today's relation-enabling players. Rather, it is their particular combination and a choice to be present and implicated or 'neutral' which appears to make an interlocutor distinctive.

Whether or not the attributes identified stand the test of time is less important than the fact that innovations are underway which signal an institutional ecology generating a need and niche for more and better ways of bringing complex collective action into play and to completion. While this exploration has concentrated on large scale, intractable problems, the notion and role of an interlocutor can equally be applied to other micro and meso scales and reasons for collaboration across institutional borders, so to speak.

The contribution of technologies as actants in interlocution processes is less easy to pin down as distinctive, in part because so much that technology does is taken for granted as part of the day to day of relating. Yet, it is clear that intervention designs rely on technology to scale messages, to bring about wider, systemic effects and to mobilize people to act collectively. This is not just the story for mass activism but occurs in self-organising sports, in crowd sourcing funding for public causes and in expressing opinions in public debates about how society should (not) work for the benefit of whom. The point is to ensure that the function of technology in collective action is properly taken into account.

In terms of a way ahead, further exploration of interlocutors requires both conceptual and empirical grounding for first, second and third order questioning. For the former, a conceptual step would be to set the notion of an interlocutor in theories of inter-organisational relations, specifically in relation to the work of 'boundary spanners' as internal actors with responsibilities for external collaboration (e.g., Alexander, 1995; Robinson, Hewitt and Harris, 2000). A complementary conceptual angle could be to place interlocution processes in the U-frame of observing, engaging and wilfully committing as a necessary quality of engagement described by Peter Senge (e.g., Generon, 2006; Scharmer, 2007). A start would be to map the actants of existing multi-institutional collaborations with diverse objectives against the attributes identified above.[29] When does cross-institutional collective action

[29] A recent study of the structural design of six forms of collaboration with different actants and objectives may be one starting point for detailed examination of the value of an Interlocutor view (Patscheke, Barmettler, Herman, Overdyke and Pfitzer, (2014).

come into being and brought to re-institutionalised fruition, by whom, and under what conditions?

First order analysis would be directed at understanding commonalities and differences in terms of the 'holder' and the 'movement' of a collective effort and time frames. Are there patterns? What is redundant? What is missing?

A second order would, for example, be to learn from the institutional mix and 'frictions' in play when the task is, for example, adopting pro-social standards in markets, protecting and expanding sexual rights, ensuring global access to adequate nutrition, re-habilitating and protecting coral reefs or the altering international rules to prevent illicit financial flows taking place. What is the story of bringing about and guiding collective action to remove the systemic 'glass ceiling' faced by women in the work place? Who was/is involved, when and through what processes? When and why do activists and their 'targets' sit down at the same table to explore collective ways forward? Are different 'weights' of interlocutor attributes in play in each case?

A third order would be to locate case finding in debates about rule-changing and game changing – collective action for a more morally oriented Business as Usual or Timely Transformation to a different order of a society and the world's functioning?

Finally, turning new knowledge into implementation could focus on systemically increasing the number and quality of interlocutors. One way would be to bring identified and confirmed attributes into the design of the attitudes, skills, languages, relational competencies, operational capacities and interactive processes called for in present and future multi-actant collaborative endeavours. Whatever the questioning, a long and interesting journey of discovery lies ahead.

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