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Scaling deep or scaling up? How relational mechanisms affect the scaling of social innovation

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Abstract

While literature on social entrepreneurship has recently turned attention to how social enterprises manage the relational dynamics of social innovation, most empirical studies have focused on the formation of partnerships and alliances as a driver of the development of social innovation. This paper contributes to the scholarly debate by further unpacking the relational mechanisms required to ensure the partnership success in scaling social innovation. By problematizing the relationship between relational mechanisms and the achievement of different scalability objectives, we hypothesize that the development of social innovation partnerships characterized by process-based trust is conducive to their success in better serving the needs of a given community (i.e., scaling deep) in particular under conditions of environmental uncertainties, while brokered access and formal mechanisms enhance partners' ability to expand their initiatives in new communities (i.e., scale up). We develop our context-specific hypotheses in the Italian social innovation field based on an original database of Italian social innovation partnerships.



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