Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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“Homelessness through Different Lenses: Negotiating Multiple Meaning Systems in a Canadian Tri-sector Social Partnership”

Peter B. Gustavson School of Business

Wednesday, April 27, 2016
9:00AM
David Turpin Building
Room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Mary Yoko Brannen, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Roy Suddaby, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic (Member)
Dr. Matthew Murphy, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic (Member)
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External Examiner:
Dr. Majken Schultz, Department of Organization, Copenhagen School of Business

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Bruce Wallace, School of Social Work, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Research has shown that socially-focused partnerships that cross sectors (referred to as social partnerships within) are necessary in order to effectively address pressing societal issues such as poverty. Yet, in these complex organizational contexts, there is often variability within and between involved organizations as it relates to basic assumptions around work and the meanings given to practices at macro, meso and micro levels of analysis. Put differently, there are often a plurality of meaning systems at play in such multi-faceted organizational arrangements. Accordingly, the purpose of this dissertation was to understand to what extent multiple meaning systems exist in social partnerships focused on addressing multi-faceted societal challenges and, whether and how such differences in meaning systems are strategically negotiated over time. At a deeper theoretical level, this research was focused on illuminating the processes by which meaning systems are negotiated when organizational boundaries are blurred and when a plurality of meaning systems are at play, with a central focus on players that act as boundary spanners within these complex organizational contexts.

To understand the complexities at play in social partnerships emanating from multiple meaning systems, I conducted a multi-site ethnographic study, involving in-depth interviews and participant observation, of the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness Society (Coalition) located in Victoria, British Columbia. In doing so, I utilized the principal literature streams that address multiple meaning systems at work: the culture literature in organization studies and the institutional logics perspective. As well, I incorporated other literatures based upon the emergent findings, namely organizational identity.

Through this work I make a number of contributions within the area of sustainability, particularly the social partnership literature, as well as organizational theory. Empirically, I develop a process model that elucidates how players negotiate multiple meanings of organizational identity over time in a social partnership setting characterized by permeable boundaries and shared authority, at the group level of analysis. This is significant as we know little about how identity plays out in such multi-faceted organizational settings with continual blurred boundaries even as research has indicated that such arrangements are likely to surface identity issues among players (Hardy & Maguire, 2005). I also elucidate how individual players bridge across multiple meaning systems in a social partnership over time, answering the call for more research concerning the role of individuals and their interactions with organizations in the collaboration process over time (Manning & Roessler, 2014). To my knowledge, this work is one of the first of its kind to empirically explore tri-sector socially focused collaborations – involving players from the public, private and nonprofit sectors – that are more integrative and interconnected in nature (Austin & Seitaniidi, 2012a) and that employs a process based perspective to understand how such collaborations unfold over time. In addition, I theoretically develop the link between institutional logics and organizational culture that emerged empirically via this study to guide future integrative work to holistically account for the multiplicity of meaning systems at work within and between such multi-faceted arrangements.