



## Book Review

Organization Studies  
2015, Vol. 36(6) 831–834  
© The Author(s) 2015  
Reprints and permissions:  
sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0170840614564320  
www.egosnet.org/os  


Paul-Brian McInerney

From Social Movement to Moral Market: How the Circuit Riders Sparked an IT Revolution and Created a Technology Market

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014. 256 pp. ISBN: 978 0804785129

**Reviewed by:** Shon Hiatt and Jake Grandy, *University of Southern California, USA*

*From Social Movement to Moral Market* opens the black box of how social movements shape and are shaped by economic institutions. The book's introduction briefly summarizes research on market creation, presents the concept of a moral market and sets the context for the study. Building on insights from the economic sociology literature, McInerney describes markets as embedded in social networks, governed by trust and reciprocity, and infused with their own systems of meaning. By introducing social movements to the economic sociology literature, McInerney explains how markets can become infused with normative values and meaning. The interaction of movements and markets leads to a complex blending of social and economic values that McInerney calls 'moral markets'. The book is a timely addition to current scholarship at the intersection of organizations and social movements that examines important questions about how social values are infused into and alter markets (Hiatt, Sine, & Tolbert, 2009; Lee, 2009; King & Pearce, 2010; Hiatt & Park, 2013). The single case study presented in this book explores these questions and some of the unintended consequences that result.

The first chapter describes the emergence of the Circuit Rider movement and how the 'worthiness' or value of the movement was established. The Circuit Rider movement, born in the 1990s, was composed of itinerant activists who traveled across the country to provide information technology support to small social justice and environmental non-profit organizations. At that time, most non-governmental organizations (NGOs) saw little use for information technology, even though this relatively new technology had already been widely adopted in the private sector. The large foundations who funded NGOs did not provide resources to acquire information technologies, nor the training or support to use them. To overcome this barrier, the founders of the Circuit Riders movement promoted the value of information technologies to the nonprofit sector by convincing foundations that information technology was not just a piece of infrastructure for their grantees but necessary for their mission. The Circuit Riders' success lay in connecting the technology directly with the organizations' missions, using tactics that Latour (1986) called strategy association. By claiming that an organization's mission and information technology were equivalent, the Circuit Riders were able to increase their 'account of worth' (p. 25) and augment their moral authority for collective action. McInerney later explains how the movement's collective identity evolved and broadened over time and why foundations came to accept its legitimacy.

Chapter 2 explains the movement's growth and mobilization. Leaders within the Circuit Rider movement increased membership through organizing meetings and conferences with foundation founders and private sector technology providers. These meetings serving as field-configuring events (Garud, 2008), were designed to allow Circuit Riders to evangelize, strengthen their collective identity, and build support among the foundation elites. However, an unintended consequence of these meetings was the emergence of an institutional entrepreneur who infused the market principles of effectiveness and efficiency into the movement's account of worth, thereby creating a new model of market-based non-profit technology assistance. McInerney describes in detail the dramatic showdown that occurred at one meeting between the institutional entrepreneur and the Circuit Rider leadership, which is one of the highlights of the book.

Chapter 3 then explores the role of institutional entrepreneurs in building new organizational forms that bridge movements and markets. Applying the research on institutional entrepreneurship (reviewed in the chapter) to the case study, McInerney explains how factors such as the entrepreneur's structural position, competence, and use of rhetorical devices that appealed to the foundations' preferences for market principles contributed to her emergence and solidified her support among foundation leaders. In addition to individual factors, organizational aspects such as the gradual professionalization of Circuit Riders contributed to the institutional entrepreneur's rise. By challenging arrangements espoused by social movement activists and foundation elites, the institutional entrepreneur created a social enterprise that embraced both market and movement values and applied business practices to social problems. The author extends the literature on social enterprises beyond the common taxonomic or normative accounts to the theoretical and practical implications of this new organizational form.

The next chapter introduces the concept of moral ambivalence that exists in social enterprises. Social enterprises exist in moral markets and face competing institutional demands. They must struggle to maintain a balance between social and economic values, a position which the author defines as 'moral ambivalence'. The social enterprise that emerged had to balance different accounts of worth. On the movement side the account was equating technology with mission and social justice; on the market side it was equating technology with effectiveness and efficiency. Social enterprises can take advantage of moral ambivalence by appealing to a wide diversity of stakeholders who espouse either social or economic values, or both. The drawback to moral ambivalence is that stakeholders from the movement side may question the legitimacy and integrity of the organization while stakeholders from the market side may equally question the organization's commitment to economic efficiency and financial solvency. McInerney provides an account of how the emergent social enterprise balanced social and economic values, but over time drifted towards the economic end of the spectrum.

Chapter 5 documents the Circuit Riders' response to this new hybrid form and the enterprise's drift towards economic values over social values. Some in the Circuit Rider community joined the new social enterprise and coordinated their activities, while others openly challenged the new model, describing it as a competitor for scarce resources and a heretic that did not sufficiently espouse the social values on which the movement was founded. Although the detractors were ultimately ineffective at successfully challenging the marketization of non-profit technology assistance programs, they did force the new social enterprise to pivot back towards social values. Yet, the emergence of the hybrid form and the division it created among Circuit Riders eventually led to the collapse of the movement.

In Chapter 6, McInerney concludes with a general discussion of the sociology of movements and markets. He claims that the forces of capitalism have entered virtually all areas of daily life, a subject of concern to sociology's early scholars. While social activists made demands on markets to align with social values, market actors translated these demands into actions more palatable to

managers, shareholders and the average consumer. This response has resulted in a modified form of capitalism where markets for the socially and environmentally conscious consumer exist. From the perspective of social movement activists, this is an unfortunate and unintended consequence. Whereas activists desire wholesale reform of capitalism, the incorporation of some social values makes such markets more resilient against future movement activism (Hiatt & Grandy, 2014). The author then outlines a number of tactics that activists can adopt to maintain their effectiveness and avoid this pitfall. For example, he cautions activists to carefully consider how they frame their messages: a narrow framing alienates potential sympathizers while a broad framing diminishes the impact of the message. McInerney therefore argues that activists must cultivate a deep understanding of stakeholders and the capability to effectively craft multivalent accounts of worth.

The book also poses some important questions for future research. McInerney rightly points out that, thus far, scholars have treated social movement outcomes as either successful or unsuccessful. In the case of the Circuit Riders, they did not successfully achieve their goals of social justice; however, they were not entirely unsuccessful as their efforts drew attention to the use of technology in the non-profit sector. Longitudinal analysis of social movement outcomes would help scholars understand the long-term forces that shape social movements and markets. Along these lines, he also points out that success and failure depend on the point in time at which they are being evaluated. At one point the Circuit Rider movement appeared successful, with membership numbering in the thousands; yet at the end of the study period the movement had retreated into obscurity. Finally, his work suggests that markets are not just arenas of Darwinian competition; both competitive and collaborative forces are at work as organizational actors seek arrangements to reduce uncertainty. Future research might explore the conditions under which competition and collaboration take place within markets and movements.

There is much to love about this book. In particular, it is a compelling and rich narrative about the emergence of social enterprise from a social movement and it raises a number of questions that can be an impetus to further research. For example, do all hybrid organizations eventually drift toward an economic focus? While this book showed how a social movement can help hybrid organizations stay focused on social values, what other environmental and organizational factors prevent mission creep? Additionally, because this ethnographic account is focused entirely on micro-level causal factors, we know very little about the macro-level events that occurred in the environment that could have fostered or interacted with the micro-level processes.

Academic researchers interested in the dynamic relationship between movements and markets will no doubt find this book valuable. The Circuit Rider movement was essential for demonstrating the market value of technology assistance for non-profits. Yet, the social enterprise that emerged as a result of its efforts negatively affected the Circuit Rider movement by appropriating many of the resources and support from large corporations. Ultimately, the once-strong movement faded into obscurity. This book may also be useful to both social movement activists and corporate managers. Activists intent on preventing their social movement from drifting towards economic values and becoming social enterprises can take lessons from this case. Likewise, corporate managers may find new market opportunities and growth by engaging more with social movements and addressing their concerns.

## References

- Garud, R. (2008). Conferences as venues for the configuration of emerging organizational fields: The case of cochlear implants. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45: 1061–1088.
- Hiatt, S. R., & Grandy, J. B. (2014). Institutional uncertainty as public politics: Climate change hearings & new technology development. Academy of Management Conference Best Paper Proceedings, Philadelphia, PA.

- Hiatt, S. R., & Park, S. (2013). Lords of the harvest: Third-party influence and regulatory approval of genetically modified organisms. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(4), 923–944.
- Hiatt, S. R., Sine, W. D., & Tolbert, P. S. (2009). From Pabst to Pepsi: The deinstitutionalization of social practices and the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 54, 635–667.
- King, B. G., & Pearce, N. (2010). The contentiousness of markets: Politics, social movements, and institutional change in markets. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36, 249–267.
- Latour, B. (1986). The powers of association. In J. Law (Ed.), *Power, action, and belief: A new sociology of knowledge* (pp. 265–280). Boston: Routledge.
- Lee, B. H. (2009). The infrastructure of collective action and policy content diffusion in the organic food industry. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52, 1247–1269.



