



Institutional entrepreneurship as emancipating institutional work

James Meredith and the Integrationist Movement at Ole Miss

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to propose an action-interaction-process framework to extend research on institutional entrepreneurship. The framework examines an actor's characteristics, interactions in an institutional context, and the process by which entrepreneurial action is accomplished.

Design/methodology/approach – Via a sociohistorical archival method of narrative analysis, the action-interaction-process framework is applied to an exemplary case of institutional entrepreneurship – the case of James Meredith and the integrationist movement at the University of Mississippi in the 1960s.

Findings – The findings show that institutional entrepreneurs who maintain little power and influence over the institutional field must form strategic alliances to mobilize constituents and capitalize on the convergence of resources in the social setting.

Practical implications – Through the process of collective action, institutional entrepreneurs can overcome resistance to change and displace inequitable institutional policies, while establishing new practices and norms.

Originality/value – This research provides a stronger approach to examining institutional entrepreneurship and institutional entrepreneurs, the interaction between the institutional entrepreneur and the social context in which the individual operates, and the process by which inequitable institutionalized norms are reformed through collective action. This approach is useful to researchers examining institutional entrepreneurship or any area in which power disparity plays an important role.

Keywords Action-interaction-process, African American, Civil rights, Collective action, Institutional entrepreneurship, Socio-historical archival method

Paper type Conceptual paper



Entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed not only as a process of economic change through wealth creation, but also as a process of social innovation entailing change that occurs through change of institutions or the rules that govern human behavior (Venkataraman *et al.*, 2012; Murphy *et al.*, 2006; Murphy, 2009). Conventional or

traditional entrepreneurs have been defined as agents who facilitate or carry out a vision based on novel ideas to create successful innovations. Institutional entrepreneurs, by contrast, are actors who leverage resources to change institutional rules and are motivated to transform existing institutions or create new ones (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Maguire *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, institutional entrepreneurs differ from conventional entrepreneurs in terms of their primary goal, which is institutional reform, instead of economic gain (Dacin *et al.*, 2010). Whereas institutional entrepreneurs have different goals from conventional entrepreneurs, they have certain parallels with the goals of social entrepreneurs (i.e. the generation of social value). The primary difference between institutional and social entrepreneurs is in the means used to achieve their goals. Social entrepreneurs use economic means to achieve social ends, but institutional entrepreneurs use primarily institutional means (Carrara and Welsh, 2009; Humphreys *et al.*, 2012).

Institutional entrepreneurs are often peripheral actors who desire to change institutionalized norms that govern the behavior of organizational actors, but they often lack the power to do so by themselves (Hardy and Maguire, 2008). The efforts to trigger institutional change through social innovation, when undertaken by these typically peripheral actors, are often constrained by the power of central actors who are motivated to maintain exclusive authority to change institutionalized practices (Garud *et al.*, 2007). The imbalance of actor motivation and power is what makes institutional entrepreneurship a particularly complex phenomenon and very intriguing to researchers in terms of the challenges of examining how institutional entrepreneurs recognize opportunities to change ineffective and/or inequitable institutionalized norms that affect the welfare of constituents (Maguire *et al.*, 2004).

Past studies conducted in the domain of institutional entrepreneurship research have primarily taken a largely actor-centric approach by examining individual characteristics, while only a handful of studies have addressed contextual influences such as resistance to entrepreneurship and the process by which an institutional entrepreneurial action is accomplished (Hardy and Maguire, 2008). The limited number of studies which have examined contextual influences recognize that institutional entrepreneurs often operate in an environment of socially embedded agency (Garud *et al.*, 2007), and indicate that the theoretical frameworks with the agentic perspective of institutional entrepreneurship ought to be expanded beyond the actor to account for the interaction between actor and institutional context and the process by which action is accomplished (Choi *et al.*, 2009; George and Zhou, 2001; Somech and Drach, 2013; Taggar, 2002). In other words, a more integrative conceptual framework is necessary when institutional entrepreneurship is examined.

In this paper, we use an action-interaction-process framework to examine: how an actor's entrepreneurial characteristics reflect life experiences and formed moral convictions; how the interaction between the actor and the institutional context engenders polarization between supporters and opponents of an entrepreneur's mission; and how the process of emancipatory institutional entrepreneurship evolves through collective action. As it accounts for individual differences in institutional entrepreneurs, the interaction between institutional entrepreneurs and the institutional context, and the process by which institutionalized norms are broken and reformed, this framework provides a more comprehensive perspective from which cases of institutional entrepreneurship can be analyzed.

We define an institutional entrepreneur based on Battilana *et al.*'s (2009) two criteria:

- (1) the actor must initiate changes which are divergent from the institutionalized norms; and
- (2) the actor must actively participate in the implementation of these changes.

Consistent with these criteria, we apply our framework to the case of James Meredith, the first African-American student to enroll at the University of Mississippi ("Ole Miss"). Meredith undertook the pioneering entrepreneurial act of pursuing bold institutional change during the Civil Rights Movement. He became known for recognizing the opportunity to confront the social inequity against his race exhibited in the behavior of the institutional and state leadership in Mississippi in the 1960s. His defiance of inequitable enrollment practices at Ole Miss was a particularly important event in American history because it created institutional change in enrollment policies at the local, state, and national levels. Although Meredith initially "acted alone, not as a part of any organized movement" (Eagles, 2009, p. 1), his actions became a vital impetus for the wider collective quest for social justice that mobilized other actors. Thus, collective action was the process-mechanism through which Meredith's entrepreneurial mission was accomplished.

The action-interaction-process framework of institutional entrepreneurship that is used in this article emphasizes the process of social-change activities that remove institutional constraints (Rindova *et al.*, 2009). In Meredith's case, his individual actions and social interactions resulted in an entrepreneurial process that removed an unjust enrollment policy at Ole Miss and brought broader autonomy and benefit to this social collectivity. We view this case of institutional entrepreneurship as the emancipating process by which inequitable institutionalized constraints were removed African Americans aspiring to acquire quality higher education. The process was triggered by Meredith's moral determination and resourcefulness to ally strategically with social actors who possessed the power needed to mobilize the resources required to enact the desired social change.

We argue that our example of applying the action-interaction-process framework can significantly inform scholarship of institutional entrepreneurship by conceptualizing an emancipatory institutional work of these actors and illustrating how it is conducive to narrative analysis. In particular, we posit that our framework offers a more fine-grained view of institutional entrepreneurship as a personalized, yet embedded agency with the potential to trigger social changes through collective action. As such, we respond to the call for research studies of institutional work with a "stronger connection with the "personhood" of the agents studied" (Voronov and Vince, 2012, p. 76).

We have organized our article into four principal sections. In the first one, we explain the narrative method of analyzing the events related to Meredith's attempts to enroll at Ole Miss during the Civil Rights Movement. Next, we review institutional entrepreneurship research to construct our action-interaction-process framework. In the third major section, we use that framework to conduct a narrative analysis of Meredith's entrepreneurial actions to enrich understanding of institutional entrepreneurship. Finally, we review the implications of Meredith's entrepreneurial

actions aimed at achieving social change and outline future directions for research in this area.

Narrative analysis

Contemporary entrepreneurship research is increasingly focusing on interactions between individuals and opportunities, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of opportunities; and outcomes that “transform the extant world into new opportunities” (Venkataraman *et al.*, 2012, pp. 28-30). This broad contemporary research focus is conducive to narrative analysis of life stories rich in individual-opportunity interactions and processes. The life story of Meredith has this characteristic because it illustrates how he managed to navigate the complexities of institutional resistance and the constraints that he encountered. Such complexity lends this case what Weick (2007, p. 14) referred to as “properties of richness” (Quinn and Worline, 2008).

More importantly, the narrative of his life story can be interpreted in term of entrepreneurial actions, interactions, processes and practices by which Meredith and his supporters from the Civil Rights Movement engaged in collective action, which triggered the process that disrupted and reshaped the institution of enrollment at Ole Miss in the early 1960s. A narrative analysis of Meredith’s life story can show how individual experiences of unjust institutions shaped his moral convictions and guided his social interactions that fueled collective action for transformative change of these institutions (Voronov and Vince, 2012).

Narrative analysis of entrepreneurship uses stories as a means of theorizing (Czarniawska, 2004). As theories are embedded in shared beliefs (Bevir, 2011), theorizing based on the interpretation of narratives implies that how we construct reality matters to concept formation. When concepts such as institutional entrepreneurship are analytically derived from an entrepreneur’s narrative, they uncover underlying beliefs that can explain an institutional entrepreneur’s actions and interactions because his or her beliefs indicate reasons for those actions and interactions. Therefore, to conceptualize institutional entrepreneurship using a narrative approach, one must tell the actor’s life story that reflects his or her beliefs.

Narrative analysis helps us uncover how entrepreneurial agency (i.e. the ability to act by one’s own accord to discover, create, and exploit opportunities) is intertwined with opportunities for social change and embedded in the relational powers that infuses it with meaning. The relational process of meaning making emerges through the entrepreneur’s actions and interactions in a form that transforms these experiences into a meaningful story (Garud and Giuliani, 2013). Focusing on the institutional entrepreneur’s actions, his or her interactions with the surrounding context, and the process by which institutional norms are changed through collective action, reveals the activities that lead to the establishment of new practices via institutionalization. This revelation is grounded in Lounsbury and Crumley’s (2007) conceptualization of activity innovations which facilitate new practice creation.

We tell Meredith’s story using his own archival collection of narratives. Our narrative analysis employs the sociohistorical archival approach (Novicevic *et al.*, 2011) to identify and organize the sources that narrated about Meredith’s institutional entrepreneurial activity. Such sources (e.g. notes, letters, diaries, interviews, speeches, transcripts, drafts, and records) are analyzed in light of the social context and the

institutional environment in which they are embedded and which Meredith faced (Hill, 1993). Once that analytical phase is complete, the synthesis of analytical findings is conducted. The synthesis involves the interpretation of the analytical findings by combining social science and historical approaches (Burke, 1981) to assess the extent to which the findings could be matched to the construct (i.e. institutional entrepreneurship) that guided the narrative analysis (Conway, 1986).

An action-interaction-process framework of emancipatory institutional work

The research of institutional entrepreneurship is specific because it focuses on entrepreneurial gains that are not primarily based on economic benefits, but rather on social benefits from policy change through institutional reform which influences the manner in which institutions operate (Dacin *et al.*, 2010). Institutional entrepreneurs act as embedded agents who mobilize and capitalize on the convergence of resources to explore and exploit opportunities and change institutional rules for the purpose of displacing prevailing institutions or establishing new ones (Dacin *et al.*, 2010). The daunting task of discovering the factors that influence this phenomenon has led many researchers to adopt an actor-centric approach to institutional entrepreneurship and examine the characteristics of institutional entrepreneurs (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001).

The actor-centric approach to researching institutional entrepreneurship has focused on different individual characteristics of entrepreneurs including entrepreneurial cognitions (e.g. George *et al.*, 2006); interests, goals, and strategies of responding to institutional pressures (e.g. Leca and Naccache, 2006; Mutch *et al.*, 2006); and the entrepreneur's position and power in the institutional field (e.g. dominant versus peripheral positions), as these factors may likely reflect the extent to which the entrepreneur is embedded in the institutional context (Hardy and Maguire, 2008). The actor-centric approach has recently introduced the notion of performativity, which maintains that activity is typically accomplished through skilled actors who utilize evaluative agency to alter institutionalized practices (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007). New theoretical models have been developed proposing how performativity-driven activity variations can initiate field-wide efforts to formalize an innovation as an institutionalized practice (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007), thus linking the entrepreneur's actions and interactions to institutional entrepreneurship as a process.

Increasingly, researchers are adopting the process-centric approach to institutional entrepreneurship which focuses on "an emergent outcome of activities of diverse, spatially dispersed actors who face considerable difficulty in achieving effective collective action" (Hardy and Maguire, 2008: 211). As institutional entrepreneurs often operate on the periphery of the institutional field rather than maintaining dominant central positions that provide authority, legitimacy, and power (Hardy and Maguire, 2008), the process-centric line of research has examined how acts of institutional entrepreneurship are achieved through the cumulative efforts of a diverse group of actors. The primary focus of this view is not on the actor who initiates institutional entrepreneurship, but rather the process by which institutional entrepreneurship is achieved.

The actor-centric and the process-centric approaches to institutional entrepreneurship examine actor-driven and process-driven social innovations in

activities and identify key components of institutional entrepreneurship. Social innovations in the institutional domain are also driven by the interaction between the actor and social context in which the process develops. The interactions occur because institutional entrepreneurs seek to change entrenched institutionalized norms, as they typically face resistance from the powerful actors who are embedded in the institutional context (Klein *et al.*, 2010). To avoid the threat of collective inaction, institutional entrepreneurs often must overcome resistance from actors with power in the social context in which they operate and interact strategically to accomplish their entrepreneurial mission.

We argue that it is appropriate to combine all three approaches into a staged action-interaction-process-centric framework when examining how collective inaction is overcome in response to resistance to institutional entrepreneurship. Therefore, we use the three-stage action-interaction-process framework to examine the case of Meredith as an exemplary case of institutional entrepreneurship. We use the actor-centric approach as the first stage to examine the entrepreneurial characteristics of Meredith as they were formed over his life experiences. As the second stage, we analyze Meredith's interaction with both supporters and opponents of his entrepreneurial mission. As the third stage, we use the process-centric approach to analyze how Meredith's activity innovations were accomplished through collective action. We utilize narrative analysis as a method for each of the three stages.

Actor-centric narrative analysis: Meredith's life experiences

Meredith was raised in an African American family that tried its best to shield him and his siblings from racial injustices in the American South where his family lived during the years post World War Two. Meredith's father, Moses "Cap[tain]" Meredith, emphasized family values and maintained his home, property, and family in an exemplary way (Meredith, 1966). Cap and his wife, Roxie, instilled a sense of pride and self-respect into their children and worked to protect their family from the sense of indignity engendered by the injustice and inequality of segregation. Meredith later frequently reflected upon his family's values of pride, order, and independence, referring to them as "protectors against indignity" (Eagles, 2009; Meredith, 1966). The strong moral commitment to justice and equality instilled in him at a young age would later become defining characteristics that emboldened him to engage in institutional entrepreneurship.

Meredith first encountered the harshness of unjust segregation on a bus ride home from Detroit when he was asked to leave the non-segregated coach and sit in the segregated coach before entering his home state of Mississippi. Embarrassed and heart-broken, Meredith from that point on saw his personal responsibility to change the institutions that prevented equal social status of African Americans. This sense of responsibility stemmed from Meredith's moral commitment developed during his upbringing, which had a great deal of influence on the person he became and the ideals of social justice that he maintained (Eagles, 2009).

After high school, Meredith entered the US Air Force. This was a relatively easy transition for him because his upbringing had been characterized by "order, discipline, pride, and personal responsibility" (Eagles, 2009, p. 208). Meredith received high marks in the military because he enjoyed working in a socially equitable environment that was dominated by discipline and not imbued with racial tension. Meredith's service to

his country reinforced the moral convictions which had been instilled in him as a child and had formed his view of how the world should operate. However, when he returned to Mississippi after having served eight years in the armed forces, he found that social injustice and inequality still characterized life for African Americans at that time. Thus, Meredith had a single mission in mind; "I returned to my home state to start a war" (Meredith, 1966, p. 20). However, this would be a different kind of war – a war against the institutional norms of social injustice.

Meredith chose his home state as his battlefield, not only because he knew it best, but also because he was aware that it was one of the last remaining strongholds of ways of the Old South. He understood that his focus should be on the solution that would yield the mutual improvement of both the oppressors as well as the oppressed (Meredith, 1966). Meredith's enemy was not white Americans, but rather the doctrines and principles embedded in the institutionalized system of social injustice as evidenced by a letter written by Meredith in 1980 which stated "the main protector and perpetuator of white advantage is the system of justice" (Meredith, 1980: Box 48, Folder 5).

To disrupt the institutionalized norms governing the system of his home state, Meredith went back to his roots and chose to focus on the system of education. Education was always exceptionally valuable to Meredith because his family had instilled in him the desire to obtain a quality education. His parents often sacrificed potential to gain more income from farming by sending the children to school instead of working (Meredith, 1966). Because of this commitment, Meredith realized the importance of getting quality education, even to the point of sacrificing his own well-being. In particular, Meredith understood that a disparity between the average education levels was a strong deterrent to equality between the races (Eagles, 2009).

Meredith did not passively tolerate the status quo of unjust institutionalized norms of enrollment at Ole Miss. He claimed, "If we want more equality, we must make a condition that will lead to this end." Meredith challenged his contemporaries by asking who would "weather the storm of prosecution and persecution, suffer the consequences of facing reality and pay the price for that courage. Who has that courage?" (Eagles, 2009, pp. 215-216). Although Meredith was aware of the challenges that lay before him, his moral convictions had become so ingrained in his identity that he could not stand idly by and watch the injustice. Thus, he remained alert to act on an opportunity to end racial inequity as an institutional entrepreneur. His moral convictions were reinforced by many letters he received from supporters who acknowledged the need for change as evidenced by the following statements: "I feel that you are being paid a severe injustice" (Rifle, 1962: Box 3, Folder 3); "Every person who knows what justice is, stands behind you" (Maskal, 1962: Box 3, Folder 3). When the timing was right, Meredith acted on an opportunity to break established societal norms of inequality and attempted to enroll in the most prestigious educational institution in the state, the University of Mississippi (i.e. the Ole Miss).

Interaction-centric narrative analysis: resistance from the social environment

Entrepreneurial attempts of peripheral actors to change institutional norms and policies typically stand in contrast to social control exercised by the institutional authority of central actors that strive to maintain institutional status quo (Rao, 1998). Due to this conflicting situation, social-change initiatives can be perceived as either just

or unjust depending on how its expected social outcomes are viewed by different internal and external constituent groups that are either opponents or proponents of institutional change (Trethewey, 1997). For example, a specific change may be perceived as just by one group of constituents supporting change, but as unjust by another group of constituents opposing change. Therefore, acts of institutional entrepreneurs, exhibiting defiance of a specific policy that they perceive as unjust, often engender polarization among the supporting and opposing constituent groups which creates conflict (Klein *et al.*, 2010). This conflict about support and resistance to the institutional change forces both institutional authority and entrepreneurs to search for the means to gain broader legitimacy for and against change-directed actions (Mair and Marti, 2009; Ruebottom, 2013; Sharir and Lerner, 2006).

Extant research of institutional changes indicates that the most common means to gain legitimacy is the use of rhetorical strategy both by those who promote institutional change as protagonists, and by those who oppose institutional change as antagonists (e.g. Ruebottom, 2013). Rhetorical strategy is a particularly useful tool for individual institutional entrepreneurs to gain legitimacy and overcome resistance in the social context by casting themselves as protagonists seeking equitable social change and their opponents as antagonists acting against the social good. Thus, to understand how Meredith's actions triggered institutional entrepreneurship, we must not only examine Meredith as the actor, but his interactions in the context in which resistance to his actions took place.

Resistance to Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship for integration

The University of Mississippi of the 1950s was perceived as the crown jewel of the state of Mississippi, as it offered to its students not only valuable educational experiences, but also unique social experiences (Eagles, 2009). The university was most widely known for its winning football teams that set the "national standard of excellence" for football programs in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was also known for its beauty queens, as the university had two consecutive Miss Americas (1958 and 1959), while eight Ole Miss students were crowned Miss Mississippi between 1948 and 1961. Therefore, Ole Miss was truly the pride of every white Mississippian and the dream school for most young adults in the state (Meredith, 1966).

The pride in the university, however, went further than sports and beauty pageants, as many viewed Ole Miss as a symbolic link to the glories of the Old South (Eagles, 2009). Evidence of this sentiment surfaced in the 1960s when the traditional segregationist policies of the university were challenged by opponents of segregation and proponents of integration. As a response to these challenges, many proponents of the status quo expected Ole Miss to act as a safeguard against integrationists by retaining ideologies of segregation through entrenched admission policies that would prevent racial integration (Eagles, 2009). Ole Miss "self-consciously and proudly defended Southern traditions and customs while it protected white Mississippi's sons and daughters from dangerous outside influences" (Eagles, 2009, p. 17). The university was a safe haven for children of elite constituents where they could form strong loyalties to one another, to the institution, and to its segregationist values. In those times, Ole Miss was a prime example of an institution embedded in a social context avoiding change as its supporters maintained the perspective of resistance that "any

challenge to Ole Miss, whether internal or external, posed a direct threat to the values and stability of the dominant white culture” (Eagles, 2009, p. 24).

The administrators at Ole Miss understood the importance of maintaining relationships with its elite constituents as evidenced by their avid avoidance of the integration issue in regards to their enrollment policies. When Chancellor J.D. Williams was questioned by a colleague from Kentucky regarding integration, the Chancellor indicated that it was in the best interests of his institution to follow the traditions of the community in which it operated (Eagles, 2009). As he viewed increasing enrollment at Ole Miss as his primary mission, the Chancellor knew that agitating segregation supporters would be detrimental to this purpose. Therefore, when the issue of integration arose framed as an opportunity for African Americans to enroll at Ole Miss, he tried to avoid taking a stance about it by stating, “We feel that as long as the people of Mississippi have indicated their desires by state law, there is no point in our taking a stand” (Eagles, 2009, p. 26).

The Chancellor’s avoidance of taking a stance on the integration issue entailing policy change was in his view justified by the constraints that he perceived as inherent to holding the position of a public leader at Ole Miss. In reality, however, his avoidance was a prime example of poor leadership amidst social change as he supported neither side of the issue, which later engendered upward defiance from the external community. “Upward defiance” is a concept that refers to the friction created between organizational members and leaders during times of mutiny (Coye *et al.*, 2009). We broadened this concept and applied it to describe confrontational behavior of constituents and leaders in a community. We felt that this was applicable to examining the integration crisis at Ole Miss because Meredith was attempting to become a part of the organization, but had to engage in the defiance of leadership from the outside to accomplish this feat.

Meredith was not the first to attempt to defy Ole Miss’s poor leadership and segregation practices towards African Americans by applying for enrollment at the university. In 1948, Charles H. Gray courageously applied to Ole Miss after the Supreme Court had decided in favor of admitting Ada Sipuel to the whites-only law school at the University of Oklahoma (Eagles, 2009). Gray was not admitted due to purported lack of financial assistance, but the true nature of the rejection was revealed after Ole Miss received applications from two more African-American students, Pauline Y. Weathers and Robert C. Leathers, and the university administration took a proactive stance against admitting African Americans by sending a letter to all African-American residents of Mississippi stating that they were automatically ineligible for admission (Eagles, 2009).

This action did little to hinder the determination of the African-American community and further encouraged action by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Medgar Evers, member and seat holder of Mississippi’s NAACP Board of Directors, worked with the NAACP’s State Legal Redress Committee to form a plan to end segregation at Ole Miss. As a result, Evers applied for admission to the university and endured a drawn out process that resulted in the University generating another formidable barrier to black applicants which required all applications for admission to be supported by five letters of recommendation from University of Mississippi alumni (Eagles, 2009).

This policy had obvious ulterior motives as alumni from Ole Miss at that time were white, and finding five that would support an African-American's admission to their alma mater would be practically impossible. In this way, this policy's approach sidestepped the race issue while maintaining a latent barrier. The barrier was enacted most likely because of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) which ruled separate-but-equal schools unconstitutional. Therefore, it reflected not only a determined avoidance of change that was exhibited by the leadership at Ole Miss but also the unjust means by which new policies were implemented in this institution in support of old anti-integrationist ideologies.

Additional means, including the 10th amendment, were used by supporters of segregation to thwart federal governmental intrusion into the established traditions of the Old South (Eagles, 2009). The 10th amendment states that "the powers not delegated to the US by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." Referring to the 10th amendment, Ole Miss's leadership and segregationists attempted to generate support for their ideologies. They claimed that the federal government's interference was an act appropriate only in a country of communism, and violated the US constitution. Segregationists thus attempted to resort to ideology and remove race from the dispute to thus increase their odds at prevailing. They resorted to this attempt of imposing an institutional constraint because the likelihood of winning a legal battle with an argument based on ethnicity was minuscule.

During the legislation sessions that resulted from Meredith's repeated attempts to enroll at Ole Miss, Meredith's opponents brought his character into question in an effort to deny his admission by claiming that he was troublemaker without any educational ambitions and only wanted to cause a controversy (Eagles, 2009). In response to these claims Meredith's lawyer, Mrs Constance Motley, retorted, "Of course, he's a troublemaker because he is trying to change a policy which prohibits him from getting a first-class education" (Eagles, 2009, p. 262). Meredith was only a troublemaker in the eyes of segregationists in that he was "against the policy of segregation" (Eagles, 2009, p. 259). The trouble he was creating at the university was changing the institutional norms to gain social justice which was only possible through the removal of the institutional constraint of segregation. While Meredith was aware that his entrepreneurial actions were certainly in defiance of institutional policies and societal norms, he was morally convicted in the primacy of his social mission to end social inequity embedded in the enrollment process at Ole Miss.

The leadership of the university was joined by the leadership at the state level in attempts to resist changes to the organizational and societal norms that had governed the traditional way of life in Mississippi. Governor Ross Barnett, who was one of the most determined opponents of integration at Ole Miss, often wielded his authority to prevent integration. Specifically, Governor Barnett not only gave numerous speeches to rally support for segregation but also established an "Anti-Communist Day in Mississippi." He defended the state's right to make its own laws, thereby denying African-Americans admission to Ole Miss on the federal grounds (Eagles, 2009).

The leadership at Ole Miss was quick to follow suit as it invited a series of speakers to address Ole Miss students on the threats of communism. Many outside parties also chimed in with speeches on topics such as "Communism and Integration: Partners in Ruin" and "Communist Encirclement" (Eagles, 2009). Unjust societal norms had

become ingrained in the way of life of Mississippians and were influencing leadership decisions to mask racial injustice with ideology at both the local and state level. Resistance from opponents of Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship was so fierce that it culminated in a riot that occurred on the campus of Ole Miss which caused tremendous structural damage to the campus, injured more than 50 militiamen, and killed a news reporter and a bystander (Meredith, 1966). These events illustrate the lengths to which supporters of segregationist policies were willing to go to resist change and protect their established norms.

Meredith was not deterred, however, as he also had tremendous support from proponents of his mission. This support is evidenced by the following quotes from letters written to Meredith: "We look to you, Meredith, as a standard bearer in that fight" (Kilstein, 1962: Box 3, Folder 3); "Our thanks to you for taking such a decisive lead in what is all America's struggle for equality" (Akerstein, 1962: Box 3, Folder 5); "I have been active in organizations for civil rights, but now I will do my utmost because you are an inspiration" (Roth, 1962: Box 3, Folder 7); "Do not become disheartened; it is men like yourself who must take the lead and set the example" (Kaminski, 1962: Box 3, Folder 7).

Overall, the interaction between Meredith and the social context (i.e. opponents and supporters of his mission) created two polarized constituencies:

- (1) students, alumni, governmental, and tax-paying citizens who were supporters of segregation and provided the majority of the funding for the university; and
- (2) civil rights activists and the US government which could wield its authority to shut the university down.

Chancellor J.D. Williams felt caught by the opposing sides and as a result consistently rode the fence to let the cards fall where they may. Thus, while actions of institutional entrepreneurship typically seek to end some form of inequitable institutionalized norm, this case provides an illustration of the strength of resistance that institutional entrepreneurs may likely encounter from actors who are strongly embedded in those institutionalized norms.

Process-centric narrative analysis of institutional entrepreneurship: breaking institutional norms through collective action

The influence of position and power of the institutional entrepreneur is appropriate to examine from the actor-centric perspective in rare cases when the entrepreneur is initiating social change from a dominant position (e.g. Hensman, 2003; Leblebici *et al.*, 1991). However, the paradox of power and change should be examined from a process-centric perspective in more common cases when change is initiated from an unfavorable position, and it is likely only possible to be implemented successfully through the collective efforts of diverse actors (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007). The paradox of power and institutional change is that the change does not come from the dominant actors who maintain high levels of power and influence because they are likely strongly embedded in the institutional field, and thus subject to its cognitive, normative, and regulative pressures (Hardy and Maguire, 2008). Rather, it is much more likely that the change will come from institutional work of entrepreneurs who are peripheral actors that are less embedded in the institution because they have the most to gain from institutional change (Leblebici *et al.*, 1991), but who have much less power

to enforce this change (Maguire, 2007). Research in this domain of institutional work, which is still nascent in its conceptualization, indicates that a primary avenue by which peripheral entrepreneurs could change institutionalized norms is by forming strategic partnerships with influential members and organizations in the social context with the objective of mobilizing constituents to engage in collective action.

As institutional entrepreneurs often lack the power, influence, or legitimacy to change institutional norms by force, they compensate for this deficiency by forming alliances with other actors in the institutional field. Particularly attractive alliance partners are leaders of social movements because these movements have greater capacity to mobilize the critical mass of supporting constituents and the leaders have public visibility and credibility, as well as the capacity to exhort significant public influence. With access to this capacity, institutional entrepreneurs have the potential to turn the local situation to the tipping point for their cause of defying inequitable institutional norms and prevail with the desired social change (Snow, 2004). In turn, leaders of social movement organizations need institutional entrepreneurs to discover and explore initial opportunities for change initiatives which are aimed at defying unjust policies and which have the potential to galvanize the movement. In the following section, we examine the process by which the institutionalized norms in Mississippi were changed not only as a result of Meredith's actions, but also the through the collective process of engaging a diverse group of actors in the institutional field.

Institutional entrepreneurship through collective action

Meredith was a true believer that his mission could lead to the improved welfare of whites and blacks alike. He was convinced that social justice was not only a moral imperative, but also an economic imperative because he viewed the African American community as an untapped source of valuable human capital that could raise the standard of living for every person in the society (Meredith, 1966). His understanding reflected Wright's (1999) view that the civil rights movement brought about an economic revolution not only for African Americans, but also the entire southern region of the US. For example, a few years following the Civil Rights Movement, the percentage of African Americans working in textile and other manufacturing industries increased substantially (Wright, 1999). Also, the per capita income of the entire South showed a linear increase during the time period following the civil rights revolution (Wright, 1999). Meredith's foresight regarding the potential for African Americans to make an economic contribution helped him identify the opportunity for institutional entrepreneurship. However, he also understood that for exploitation of this opportunity, he needed the support of powerful leaders as well as the convergence of resources to succeed in his mission.

Before the civil rights revolution occurred, social injustice had been the main barrier faced by African Americans when attempting to discover acceptable opportunities to make economic contributions to society. For example, Meredith had originally hoped to become a traditional entrepreneur and run a gas station in the black section of Jackson, Mississippi, but when he experienced rejection of financial support due to racial prejudice, he realized that it was unacceptable "to engage in business under these conditions" (Eagles, 2009, p. 216). Later, Meredith recognized that he, as a minority applicant acting alone, would not be capable of enrolling at Ole Miss due to the number

and power of opponents both within and outside of the university that would prevent his attempt by almost any means necessary. Thus, he had to stay alert and wait until the appropriate resources converged to create an opportunity for the deinstitutionalization of inequitable social norms. Once this opportunity was created, Meredith needed an alliance with a social movement that could mobilize supporters for collective action.

Extant research indicates that the emergence of social movements is influenced by the following three key factors: mobilizing structures, framing processes, and political opportunities (McAdam, 1999). Mobilizing structures, which can be formal or informal, mobilize people to take collective action by using framing processes to establish a collective identity among challengers, or opponents, to the status quo that gives constituents hope that the source of their dissatisfaction can be changed (Donovan, 2002). Political opportunities are important to social movements because they provide a source of legitimacy and power which institutional entrepreneurs can, in turn, leverage and utilize to further the social mission. Political opportunities to challengers of institutional norms can arise through crises, war, industrialization, and political realignments (Donovan, 2002). When these opportunities are exploited utilizing the supporting resources, institutionalized norms can be displaced through the process of collective action.

To exploit the opportunity to successfully break the segregation barrier and change institutionalized norms at Ole Miss, Meredith leveraged the resources and the framing process of the Civil Rights Movement to mobilize by prominent social organizations (e.g. SCLC, SNCC, and NAACP). These organizations had legitimate power and framed a collective identity among supporters (Donovan, 2002). The legitimacy and framing power of these organizations became salient when John F. Kennedy insisted on the civil rights platform at the Democratic convention during the presidential race, thus indirectly legitimizing an opportunity for Meredith's action. One day after Kennedy's inauguration on January 20, 1961, Meredith requested an application to Ole Miss which started the process of a power struggle between the state and federal government (Meredith, 1966).

John F. Kennedy won the 1961 Presidential election by a narrow victory which he owed in part to the support from African American voters (Donovan, 2002). A primary aspect of Kennedy's campaign platform was the promotion of equal rights and helping minority children, which caused a landmark shift in African American voting from a republican to democratic ticket (Lowery and Marszalek, 1992). Thus, with such strong social and political resources converging simultaneously, Meredith recognized his opportunity for collective action of institutional entrepreneurship and felt that the timing of his actions was perfect (Meredith, 1966). He learned from the failure of Medgar Evers who had previously undertaken the same action as Meredith, but without any consideration for the opportune timing and was thus unsuccessful. In contrast, Meredith first recognized the opportunity which was created by the convergence of resources before committing to his entrepreneurial action to pursue his mission of achieving social equity for African American students in Mississippi.

After Meredith requested an application from Ole Miss, he and his lawyers from the NAACP engaged in a drawn out legal battle with the institution as well as with the state of Mississippi (Meredith, 1966). Once Meredith announced his plans to register at the university in September, 1962, President Kennedy stepped in by warning

university officials that he would see to it that Meredith was allowed admission into the college (Donovan, 2002). Nevertheless, the Board of Trustees at Ole Miss gave Governor Ross Barnett, who openly supported segregation and had been elected just one year prior to Kennedy's election on the basis of the segregation platform, full authority to act in matters pertaining to Meredith. Without hesitation, Barnett secured a state order barring the board from registering Meredith, and thus essentially declared segregation to be part of Mississippi law (Eagles, 2009).

After Barnett personally denied Meredith admission on September 20, the Fifth Circuit court ordered that Meredith be registered on September 25 in Jackson, MS. The board of trustees followed the court's order and took back Governor Barnett's power, but Barnett still managed to deny Meredith on September 25 (Meredith, 1966). When Meredith found out the governor did not have the authority to make that call, he tried to register again on September 26, only to be denied admission by Lieutenant Governor Paul Johnson (Donovan, 2002). On September 30, 1962, President Kennedy federalized the state of Mississippi's National Guard and sent troops to protect Meredith. Governor Barnett responded on public television by claiming that the state of Mississippi was under attack by the US armed forces which led to President Kennedy's public address in which he stated to the residents of Mississippi, "Mississippi, the eyes of the nation and all the world are upon you and upon all of us... the honor of your university, and your state, are in the balance" (Doyle, 2001, p. 126).

With the collective support of multiple social organizations (e.g. NAACP, SCLC, SNCC), millions of supporters in the Civil Rights Movement, and the President of the US of America, Meredith was finally registered as a student at the University of Mississippi on Monday, October 1, 1962. Meredith knew from the beginning that it was an impossible task to accomplish alone. Thus, only when the social and political resources converged to create the opportunity to challenge institutionalized norms, Meredith decided to capitalize on these resources by seeking support from strategic partners to mobilize constituents and claim civil rights. Evidence of this mobilization of support from other civil rights activists can be found in the following statements from letters written to Meredith: "Never forget, there is always someone to break down a barrier to begin a crusade before others like him can succeed" (Theis, 1962: Box 3, Folder 3); "You are not alone, however much it may seem that you are, and however helpless your millions of supporters may be . . ." ". . . your actions have inspired many smaller and less public battles" (Hemphill, 1962: Box 3, Folder 3).

Meredith understood that his enrollment was only the first step and that many other applicants would have to follow in order for his efforts to be worthwhile. By acting as an institutional entrepreneur, he had accomplished his mission that eventually broke a symbolic stronghold of racial injustice in US higher education. Meredith's case is an effective representation of institutional entrepreneurship because it illustrates how his entrepreneurial action evolved into the process of collective action. The institutional norms of enrollment at Ole Miss would not have been changed without a courageous entrepreneur such as Meredith who capitalized on the framing process enacted by the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, Meredith could not have accomplished his mission without the support of organizations and individuals who possessed legitimate power to mobilize constituents to engage in collective action. His case teaches us that institutional entrepreneurship is bigger than the individual entrepreneur, or any of the supporting actors. Rather, it is the combination of actors

and effective execution of collective action which culminates in socially beneficial outcomes, such as the deinstitutionalization of inequitable institutional norms and the creation of a new set of institutionalized practices.

Discussion

Defiance of institutional policies or practices is typically viewed as inappropriate unless these policies and practices are obsolete, misaligned, or inequitable. In these occasions, the acts of defiance may be the very action that improves the institution's contribution to its constituents or society in general. These occasions, when defiance of authority is justified, is particularly significant when policies and practices unfairly affect "broader structures of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender" (Gooden and Portillo, 2011, p. 170). When an institution is embedded in the context of polarized constituencies so that its policies reflect the privileged interests of the more powerful group of constituents, it often takes an entrepreneurial individual who is able to recognize the convergence of resources, and is willing to act on the opportunity, as well as to build a coalition of supporters and constituents to stand up and overcome these sources of injustice (Murphy and Coombes, 2009). Thus, a need arises for an institutional entrepreneur to emerge and take action to change institutional arrangements, given his or her ability to garner scarce resources and navigate complexities of institutional change.

The scarcity of resources and the complexity of institutional change are the primary motivators of institutional entrepreneurs to seek allies for collective action. For collective action to occur, institutional entrepreneurs need to engage in institutional work and ally with the powerful, resource-rich actors to obtain legitimacy for the change initiative and build a broader base of supporters. The success of collective action depends on the extent to which the social power of the allies is legitimate, the supporter base is fragmented, and sufficient resources can be mobilized. This success depends also on the extent to which the interests of the entrepreneur, the allies, and the supporters are interdependent and aligned (Bruton *et al.*, 2010).

Institutional entrepreneurs are a unique type of entrepreneur that can recognize and capitalize on the convergence of diverse resources to accomplish the mission that is based on his or her moral convictions about social goals. These entrepreneurs are often primarily concerned with ending social injustice when power and social influence are unfairly distributed within institutions or in the wider social and institutional environment. At the collective level, they are concerned activists engaged in improving the overall well-being of people within a society by influencing the creation of equitable policies that sustain the improved societal welfare. At the individual level, institutional entrepreneurs take a more courageous stance than other types of entrepreneurs because they are unconditionally committed to their cause, although they are aware that they lack the power needed to confront institutionalized norms and engender change. Meredith was an institutional entrepreneur who exhibited this type of courage as evidenced by the following statements from letters written to him: "It is a relief to see that there is one man at least who is not afraid to take on his shoulders a cross that is too heavy for most of us" (Konvalinka, 1962: Box 3, Folder 5); "It is too bad that more people are not as ready to fight for an ideal. Not many will, especially alone" (Buffet, 1962: Box 3, Folder 3); "You must have a strong deep feeling of the goal you are striving for" (Lydenberg, 1962: Box 3, Folder 3).

We used Meredith as an exemplary individual case of heightened social concern and personal courage to extend the conceptualization of institutional entrepreneurship as the process of transformative social change. Meredith realized that pursuing a divergent change of enrollment practice at Ole Miss in the early 1960s could not be accomplished through the efforts of a single individual, but only through the mobilization of political, social, and financial resources through collective action. When the timing was right, Meredith's actions were supported by the civil rights organizations that mobilized constituents to assist in Meredith's cause. By capitalizing on the supporting social network and the political tug-of-war occurring between the federal and state government, Meredith was able to accomplish a seemingly impossible feat. His desire to bring about social equity and just policy change created an insatiable desire to break the institutional injustices and improve the lives of every constituent of the university, including the university itself.

The implications of Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship

The short-term implication of Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship was the change of Ole Miss policies and practices, which was manifested as the removal of barriers to racial integration in this institution of higher education. Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship was successful because it triggered a pro-integration movement for changes in Ole Miss admission practices. Specifically, the number of African American students attending Ole Miss rose from 16 in 1968, to 200 in 1970, to 700 in 1982, and over 1,000 in 1995. In addition, Ole Miss teams became open to African American athletes – the basketball team admitted its first African American athlete in 1970, while the football team adopted this practice in 1972 (Eagles, 2009).

The long-term implication was the change in the mindset of Mississippians and the broader community, which was manifested as the shared understanding that equality among the races was beneficial to everyone. Although a cultural divide existed regarding racial integration in the beginning, as vividly illustrated by hundreds of letters written to Meredith from both opponents and proponents of racial integration, this divide was eventually overcome with Ole Miss visibly accommodating racial change. The change was made particularly visible when Ole Miss formed the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation in 1998 and created the civil rights memorial with Meredith's statue in 2006.

Future research

Future in-depth research of Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship should be conducted by content-analyzing: the collection of letters written to Meredith from his supporters during his eventful and often dangerous experience at Ole Miss which are housed in the University of Mississippi's Department of Archives and Special Collections; Meredith's book entitled *Three Years in Mississippi* which was written shortly after his time spent at Ole Miss; and Charles Eagles's book entitled *The Price of Defiance*, which provides a comprehensive historical analysis of Meredith's role as an institutional entrepreneur.

The content analysis of the letters written to Meredith could assess constituent polarization in terms of resistance or acceptance of Meredith's actions aimed at contributing to racial integration in institutions of higher education. As Meredith's institutional entrepreneurial actions were a successful first step towards ending

institutional injustice, it would be interesting to examine how he laid the foundation for others to build upon. In this regard, researchers could analyze letters written to Meredith to evaluate if the public's response to Meredith's actions resembled a form of socially-constructed and collectively endorsed leadership. The letters to Meredith from supporters could be content analyzed to determine why Meredith's entrepreneurial actions caused both antagonist and protagonist constituents to view him as a symbolic leader of the pro-integration movement. This line of research would provide a unique link between the concepts of entrepreneurship and leadership as the constituents' response to Meredith's entrepreneurial actions could be researched in terms of the legitimization of his symbolic leadership.

Conclusion

Institutional entrepreneurship underscores the complementarity of social change and entrepreneurship in the domain of policy change. This study utilizes an action-interaction-process framework to extend extant research on institutional entrepreneurship by providing a comprehensive method of narrative analysis to capture the actor's characteristics, interactions in the institutional context, and the process by which the entrepreneurial collective action is accomplished. Each aspect of this framework is crucial to clarify the intricacies of institutional entrepreneurship, as it is a very unique form of entrepreneurship, which must utilize the convergence of political, social, and economic resources to capitalize on opportunities that facilitate the achievement of goals.

The actions of James Meredith at Ole Miss in the 1960s provide valuable insight about the functioning of an outstanding institutional entrepreneur. Meredith's pursuits of social change based on his moral convictions were met with formidable opposition, but he was committed to his mission to end segregation by influencing policy amendment. The stimuli behind Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship were the moral convictions instilled in him by his family and his service in the US military. When Meredith faced resistance from the institutional context, he waited until the appropriate resources converged so that his mission could be accomplished through collective action. James Meredith was a true institutional entrepreneur as he was motivated by a desire for social welfare, rather than personal gain, which resulted in a more productive and equitable society with inclusive institutions of higher education. The impact of Meredith's institutional entrepreneurship is succinctly summed up by the following statement from one of his devout proponents: "One man does make a difference, it must make a difference, and one man has made a difference" (Dail, 1962: Box 3, Folder 5).

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