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FROM THE EDITOR

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION: BUSINESS MODELS, ECOSYSTEMS, AND SOCIETY IN THE SHARING ECONOMY

INTRODUCTION

This special issue of *Academy of Management Discoveries* (*AMD*) examines how the sharing economy can reshape the traditional management theories and practices. We define "sharing economy" as *a socioeconomic ecosystem that commonly uses information technology to connect different stakeholders—individuals, companies, governments, and other—to share or access different products and services and to enable collaborative consumption* (Belk, 2014; Hamari, Sjöklint, & Ukkonen, 2016; Wosskow, 2014). We posit that the sharing economy represents a radical shift in how business is organized and leads us to question many of our management theories and practices of labor, employment, the firm, and the nature of economic enterprise (Davis, 2016b). In the sharing economy, the roles of suppliers and customers tend to often overlap and become imprecise as the different parties can act as both as suppliers and customers (Belk, 2014; Moore, 2013; Williamson & De Meyer, 2012).

Because of the increasing importance of the sharing economy in a number of different sectors of the economy and society, established firms are under pressure to consider how to incorporate the principles of the sharing economy into the design of their own business models. This is not an easy task, because the sharing-economy business models connect thousands of suppliers and customers via an information and communications technology (ICT) platform that relies on active participation of a wide range of different ecosystem stakeholders. The sharing-economy business models represent commonly a higher level of diversity of interrelationships and opportunities for co-investment, co-learning, and co-innovation than traditional business models. As a result, organizational boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred and add to the pressure for organizations themselves to evolve toward more open, virtual organizations (Moore, 2013; Rong, Hu, Lin, Shi, & Guo, 2015).

The emergence of the sharing economy raises a range of novel research questions for researchers regarding the roles of organizations and individuals operating in this new society. For example, who has power in the sharing economy: organizations or individuals? How will the new sharing-economy business models and ecosystems alter the ways work is carried out and organizations are designed? What are the implications of the trend that the employer–employee relationship becomes more loosely connected as, for example, between Uber and its drivers?

In the sharing economy, significant business opportunities arise from the large volume of data generated by online communities associated with the sharing economy. The insights gained may be used to improve the design of new products and business models and to enable customers to engage, directly or indirectly, in design and innovation processes. Data may also be collected, analyzed, sold, and resold, generating revenue for various participants (Chen, Chiang, & Storey, 2012; Frankel & Reid, 2008), raising questions regarding data confidentiality, ownership, and how the value jointly generated by the ecosystem is shared.

Although research on the sharing economy is still in the pre-paradigmatic discovery stage and has not yet converged on a specific set of theories on which to base the empirical analyses, this can also be seen as a richness in this emerging research stream. The nascent sharing-economy research can, for example, build on the prior work on business models (e.g., Amit & Zott, 2012; Teece, 2010), two-sided platforms (Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Zhu & Iansiti, 2012), organizational power (Pfeffer, 1992; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974), open innovation (e.g., Chesbrough, 2003; Chesbrough & Garman, 2009; Garud & Kumaraswamy, 1993; Laursen & Salter, 2006), ecosystems (Adner & Kapoor, 2010; Rong & Shi, 2014; Van de Ven, Polley, Garud, & Venkataraman, 1999), and the research organization structures and boundaries (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005).

We seek to use in this *AMD* special issue the journal's emphasis on "discovery" to address a fundamental issue confronting organization and management scholarship. While often pursuing the development of theory, and particularly new or unique theory (Mone & McKinley, 1993), researchers have not paid sufficient attention to changes in actual organizational phenomena. For instance, Phan, Wright, and Lee (2017) recently noted that the rise of artificial intelligence and its effect on work and the social order has drawn little research attention. The economic ecosystem has changed dramatically over recent decades. For instance, there is now more financialization (Krippner, 2005; Martin, 2002), fewer publicly listed corporations (Davis, 2016b), more specialization and less diversification inside enterprises as managerial agency problems have diminished (Denis, Denis, & Sarin, 1997), growing prominence and importance of alliances and network forms of organizations (Davis & Marquis, 2005), and evermore boundaryless production processes (Davis & McAdam, 2000). However, much of extant management theory and empirical research has largely ignored these and other important changes.

The overarching objective of this special issue is to accelerate research attention on the important transformation that is currently taking place with the emergence of new types of sharing-economy business models and ecosystems. However, an equally important goal of this special issue is to serve as a stimulus to foster research on other profound changes in the world of work, organizations, and management. Although the sharing economy has many attributes that require deeper analysis, certainly one important aspect is the "radical shift in how business is organized," with much of the provision of labor, products, and services coming from platform-mediated interactions between evermore numerous providers, many of whom work independently and often part-time, and customers.

The six articles in this special issue make important progress in describing and addressing significant questions raised by the sharing economy. After reviewing these six articles, we will discuss also some of the other dynamics of the sharing economy that have not been covered in the articles and put forward an agenda for future research. The areas we identify highlight how much more, in both theory and empirical research, remains to be carried out to explore the many social policy and management implications of the changes in economic systems now underway.

ORGANIZING AND MANAGING THE PROVISION OF SERVICES

Can anyone be a service provider in the sharing economy? Many questions arise when virtually everyone (or possibly no one, a situation that would make the business fail) can become a "host" on Airbnb, a driver for one of the ride-sharing services, a lender on one of the online lending platforms, a retailer on eBay or Amazon, or a chef for the many websites offering meals in people's homes. Thus, one issue is how platforms create "communities" of providers interacting on those platforms, how the platforms come to define the boundaries of their community, and how governance of the community operates. As Reischauer and Mair 2018 discuss in their article on "Governing Online Communities Core to Value Creation," there are many differences between organizations in the sharing-economy and traditional organizations. First and most obviously, boundaries are substantially more permeable as providers easily and frequently opt in or out of the platforms. Second, sharing-economy organizations need to "encourage users"—in other words, to attract both buyers and sellers to the platform to create and capture value.

The study, conducted in Berlin, Germany, found a range of responses to the need to build online communities to create value. Some organizations used a standardized, one-size-fits-all model. Others relied more on customization, whereas still others used what the authors referred to as a "differentiation" approach in which the platform created subcommunities. The study, based on inductive research, nicely describes the various ways communities are created and managed but leaves open the questions of under what conditions the various modes of governance are used and also when one or the other is more likely to be effective.

In a related study on "Value creation processes in nascent peer-to-peer marketplaces," Kyprianou examined the activities that nascent intermediaries pursued to govern participation in emerging peer-to-peer marketplaces and how these activities contributed to value creation. Based on an analysis of nine peer-to-peer marketplaces, it was discovered that the intermediaries focused on governing supply-side participant heterogeneity and cross-side interactions. These two were seen the most critical aspects from the perspective of value creation as they enabled the intermediaries to address the common concern for recruiting more participants while at the same time supporting, promoting, and monitoring individuals' conformity to value-adding behaviors.

Service quality is a central issue arising in sharing-economy companies. In traditional organizations, managers developed and implemented hiring standards (Cohen & Pfeffer, 1986), trained employees, and provided control and supervision, including firing poor performers, to ensure that quality and safety standards were met. Platforms that operate in the sharing economy do few to none of these tasks, at least explicitly. Platforms "manage" their providers through ratings.[1] Consequently, customers can and

[1] There is a burgeoning research investigating the relationship between consumer ratings and other measures of performance. Some studies question the validity of ratings (e.g., De Langhe, Fernbach, & Lichtenstein, 2016) in the presence of reasonably widespread rating fraud (Luca & Zervas, 2016), whereas others report reasonably good correspondence between ratings and traditional measures, for instance, of hospital performance (Bardach, Asteria-Peñaloza, Boscardin, & Dudley, 2012).

often will confront providers with less experience and capability than they might have at more traditional organizations with more explicit management processes, and, as a consequence, variation in the quality of the customer experience is likely to be higher absent the same level of control, training, and oversight.

The study by Bucher, Fieseler, Fleck, and Lutz 2018 on "Authenticity and the Sharing Economy" examines one particular manifestation of the service quality issue, in this case coming from the providing of lodging by amateurs: how the close proximity of guest and host in Airbnb listings that offer shared space can create unmet expectations on the part of guests. Their study explores what mitigates the effects of possibly unpleasant experiences, something important for both Airbnb and the hosts. The authors found, using both qualitative and survey data, that "guests make a trade-off between authenticity and a hotel-like experience," in that the more that respondents felt that Airbnb provided an authentic, localized, individualized experience, the less concerned they were with interpersonal contact, or the presence of the host's personal artifacts.

Finally, Vaskelainen and Münzel 2018 focus in their study "The Effect of Institutional Logics on Business Model Development in the Sharing Economy: The Case of German Carsharing Services" on a further business-related issue that sharing-economy companies often face: what their fundamental business model will be. The authors note that "the business models of many corporations are founded on the idea of private ownership of goods." Examining the car-sharing market in Germany, they explore how institutional factors influence some fundamental business decisions. There are two car-sharing models: so-called station-based car sharing in which people are expected to return the car to where they got it and free-floating car sharing in which people can take one-way trips and leave the car anywhere "as long as it is within the operating area of the service." The authors find that corporation-backed actors favored the free-floating model because it permitted more rapid growth, whereas smaller and more environmentally oriented organizations tended to promulgate the station-based business model. This study adds to the literature that shows that institutional structures, through their effects on various values, affect the choice of business practices even in an ostensibly similar domain.

DEALING WITH REGULATORY OVERSIGHT

Many sharing-economy companies face enormous challenges in achieving legitimacy and particularly in dealing with political entities that seek to regulate or tax their business models. For example, local jurisdictions frequently tax hotel rooms, often at rates higher than sales taxes (because for the most part the taxes are not paid by local voters), and thus, cities are concerned that lodging rented through Airbnb would not pay such taxes. Karsten (2017) noted that although the sharing economy provided flexibility and efficiency, sharing-economy companies "have been criticized for ignoring regulations that govern traditional industries," with such regulatory avoidance providing substantial savings and an unfair advantage to sharing-economy companies.

In their study, Uzunca, Rigtering, and Ozcan (2018) explore in their study on "Sharing and Shaping" how firms achieve institutional legitimacy in countries with varying levels of institutional development. Their study opens with an interesting example of the actions an organization might take to win public approval and acceptance: When an earthquake struck Italy in 2016, Airbnb waived its service fees for hosts in the affected region, thereby, making it easier to offer free or reduced cost shelter to people displaced by the destruction of housing. The authors find that in a country such as Egypt with more societal issues, sharing-economy companies such as Uber can help solve consumer problems by providing online ratings and governance that ensure a higher and more responsive level of service. In countries with more developed and stronger institutions, Airbnb's more conciliatory approach has helped it avoid issues of institutional legitimacy and conflicts with government that beset Uber with its more confrontational, disruptive style. When Uber has been challenged in its ability to operate in a locale, it has often tried to organize its customers to lobby authorities for permission for Uber to be able to continue and for helpful changes in laws and regulations. However, as the case of Airbnb in the Netherlands shows, even Airbnb is sometimes unwilling to comply with governmental requests, in this case, around data on property rentals, and thus can also generate opposition and hostility from important institutions. The inability to adapt the business model to the local conditions may lead to a loss of community approval which can reduce the ability of a sharing-economy company to gain the resources and scale needed for profitable operations, low market share, and eventual exit from the market. This is what happened for Uber as it failed to adapt to the local market conditions in the different Southeast Asian countries. Eventually, Uber sold its operations to Grab that had emerged as its main competitor with a business model that was more sensitive to the needs of the regulators and the local communities.

Achieving accommodations with local regulatory authorities remains an important issue for sharing-economy companies. What is "disruption" and "modernization of outdated regulations" to some social actors is law-breaking and regulatory avoidance to others. Comparing Airbnb and Uber across three different contexts, as Uzunca et al. (2018) do, represents a useful step in enhancing our understanding of how sharing-economy companies negotiate their institutional environments. Understanding why some firms adopt various strategies and how those strategies vary both over companies and across locales remain a substantively important topic.

HOW SHARING ECONOMY CAN HELP ORGANIZE COLLECTIVE ACTION

The last study in this special issue challenges us to expand both the definition of the sharing economy and the questions researchers pose about it. Kanberger, Leixnering, Meyer, and Hoellerer examine the organizational and institutional response to the refugee crisis in Austria during 2015, when some 300,000 people fleeing Africa and the Middle East poured into the country, in many cases poor, tired, and hungry and seeking to reach Germany or Sweden. Austrian organizations were in almost every sense of the word caught by surprise—there was little information about how many refugees were on the move—and because of the changing policies of Hungary, with which Austria shares a border, it was uncertain as to *when* or *if* the refugees would arrive. The study examines the response of numerous existing Austrian governmental and nongovernmental organizations as well as the development of new organizations and new forms of cooperation in the Train of Hope. Although different from business-oriented sharing-economy organizations, there were also important commonalities. In particular, just as platform organizations, such as Uber or Airbnb, coordinate the interactions among buyers and sellers, the Train of Hope faced the task of mobilizing resources and coordinating the delivery of goods and services to refugees. In particular, this research, by focusing on a different context and a situation of extreme urgency, helps us understand how "effective organization of distributed collective action" was accomplished. The Train of Hope case introduces a broader moral and economic perspective of the "sharing economy," and the underlying role of ICT in mobilizing social movements.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although this special issue highlights well the three main themes emerging from the six articles, there are many additional topics that continue to require further work. We focus here on a few pressing future research directions.

- ***New models of organizing***: Sharing-economy business models and ecosystems represent new forms of organizing. We think that empirical comparisons of alternative business models provide important opportunities for advancing our knowledge of organization and management theories. The new empirical models and taxonomies for designing organizations will less likely be based on bureaucratic hierarchy, centralization, supervisory controls and employment, and more on reflective of decentralized networks of entrepreneurs and independent contractors with output controls monitored closely by information and communication technologies (Davis, 2016a, 2016b). No doubt, these models will vary by context. As the comparative country study by Uzunca et al. of Uber and Airbnb show, context is critical in determining what business models of sharing economy are appropriate.
- ***Legitimacy and collaborative governance***: The studies by Vaskelainen and Münzel 2018 and also Uzunca et al. show that the same sharing-economy business model often requires different forms of legitimacy and institutional governance arrangements in different contexts. This requires study and learning of how sharing-economy organizations coordinate with other stakeholders (governments, suppliers, platform owners, customers, and affected citizens) to gain legitimacy and regulatory approvals to operate in the regions they serve. How might these multisided ecosystems associated with the sharing economy be governed?
- ***Changing nature of work***: Research is also needed to examine the effects of the sharing economy on the nature of work and the roles of individuals in society. It is clear that the sharing economy is changing the nature of work from the traditional employment relationship to that of independent contractors performing contingent, part-time, and temporary work. In the *AMD* special issue on "The changing nature of work," Barley, Bechky, and Milliken (2017) discuss the dramatic effects of this changing nature of work on the careers, identities, and work lives of individuals in the sharing-economy workforce that has grown to about 15 percent in the United States by 2015. This change challenges theories of labor, employment, and the nature of the economic enterprise. Based on advances in information and communication technologies, the sharing economy increasingly shifts work that was previously performed by individuals in secure employment

contracts to be performed by independent contractors with no health care, unemployment disability, or pension benefits. This is triggering a major public policy debate in the United States and other market-based economies on how governments might provide universal social support for citizens whose work and careers may no longer be based on employment contracts, and whose benefits are not portable for individuals moving from job to job or to independent contractor status? (Katz & Krueger, 2016).

- ***Sharing Economy and Society:*** Beyond the changing nature of organizing, governing, and work, there is a need to study how the sharing economy influences many other aspects of society. For example, big data collected at sharing-economy platforms and databases generate questions about individual privacy regarding how online data are captured and manipulated to realize value in the sharing economy? What models and methods can be used to ensure data security and customer privacy? The relationship between the sharing economy and environmental sustainability is nontrivial and also requires further research. For example, how does the sharing economy contribute to sustainable development in the transportation industry? Does ride sharing enable more effective use of the different means of transportation and result into less traffic or do the lower prices of taxi traffic increase further traffic? Might the sharing bicycle business model replace part of the current traffic system and reduce the congestion caused by ride sharing?

CONCLUSION

The sharing economy highlights many features and issues that merit study by management scholars: the design and choice of a business model, strategies to achieve institutional legitimacy, the avoidance of being circumscribed by government action (a topic some people refer to as nonmarket strategy), and how to get people to sign up for and then deliver quality goods and services when those people are neither employees nor even contractors in the traditional sense. As such, the sharing economy brings into sharp focus a number of important societal, organizational, and management issues and does so in somewhat unique, novel contexts.

Predictions are that the size of the sharing economy will grow substantially over the coming years, with Yaraghi and Ravi (2017) arguing that sharing economy will grow from $14 billion in 2014 to $335 billion by 2025. Moreover, data from a survey conducted in 2016 by *Time*, Burson Marsteller, and the Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative (Steinmetz, 2016) suggest that already "44 percent of United States adults have participated in such transactions, playing the role of lenders and borrowers; drivers and riders; and hosts and guests." These 90 million people are large in both an absolute sense and as a fraction of the population. Similarly, the sharing-economy business models have experienced a rapid uptake in Europe and Asia.

Consequently, understanding the many implications of the sharing economy remains an important research task for management scholarship. The studies in this special issue make important contributions to understanding a number of important aspects of the sharing economy. Nevertheless, clearly much more research still remains to be carried out.

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