

WARREN O. NILSSON

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Summary

- Associate Professor of Social Innovation at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business
- Academic Director of the UCT GSB MPhil in Inclusive Innovation Program
- Faculty Associate, UCT Bertha Centre for Social Innovation
- Co-director of the Rockefeller Foundation Global Fellowship Program on Social Innovation in partnership with the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the University of Victoria, and the University of Waterloo.
- Faculty Affiliate, University of Michigan Center for Positive Organizations
- My research focuses on the organizational dimensions of deep institutional transformation with a particular emphasis on social and environmental sustainability. I collaborate with social purpose organizations of various kinds to explore the relationship between unusually engaging organizational practices and social innovation. My paper “Positive Institutional Work” in the *Academy of Management Review* received that journal’s Best Paper Award for 2015.
- Co-founder, with Tana Paddock, of Organization Unbound (organizationunbound.org), a global community of inquiry exploring ways for social purpose organizations to more strongly connect their internal cultures with their external missions. We have published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* and our short film “Changing the Way We Change the World” recently premiered at the Addis International Film Festival.
- I have received multiple awards for my teaching and have taught more than 50 courses at the undergraduate, graduate, and executive levels in subjects ranging from organizational strategy and development to social innovation and sustainability. I have worked with very diverse, international groups of students. Served as design co-leader for a UCT MOOC on social innovation, in partnership with local NGO RLabs.
- I have significant professional experience in community development and a passion for connecting my academic research to practitioner-driven social initiatives.

Education

Ph.D. in Management (Strategy & Organization) – 2010

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

Dissertation: *Sustaining Engagement in Social Purpose Organizations:
An Institutional Perspective on Positive Organizational Practices*
Supervisor: Henry Mintzberg
Ph.D. Program Research Award 2009

Areas of theoretical expertise: Social Innovation, Institutional Theory (in sociology), Positive Organizational Scholarship

Master of Business Administration – 1999

University of Baltimore, Baltimore, Maryland

Bachelor of Arts (College Scholar)– 1990

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

My research explores the relationship between positive organizational dynamics (e.g., engagement, creativity, compassion) and social innovation. I am particularly interested in how organizations develop and sustain the capacity for deep, intentional, institutional change.

Theoretically, I synthesize two streams of research– Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) and Institutional Theory – to develop a construct of ‘Positive Institutional Work’ that differs markedly from existing treatments of institutional work in the literature. Empirically, I explore this construct through qualitative inquiry into especially vibrant social purpose organizations that have altered the typical institutional dynamics in their fields. To date, I have worked with organizations focused on education, sustainability, food security, youth development, mental health, socially ethical wine production, and technology training and incubation.

Publications

- Nilsson, W. (2015). “Positive institutional work: Exploring institutional work through the lens of positive organizational scholarship.” *Academy of Management Review*, 40: 370-398. Received the Academy of Management Review 2015 **Best Paper Award**.
- Nilsson, W., Bonnici, F., & Wosu Griffin-EL, E. (2015). “The Social Innovation Lab: An Experiment in the Pedagogy of Institutional Work.” In V. Bitzer, R. Hamann, M. Hall, & E. Griffin-EL (Eds.), *The Business of Social and Environmental Innovation: New Frontiers in Africa*: 201-212. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Methner, N., Hamann, R., & Nilsson, W. (2015). “The Evolution of a Sustainability Leader: The Development of Strategic and Boundary Spanning Capabilities in Woolworths.” In V. Bitzer, R. Hamann, M. Hall, & E. Griffin-EL (Eds.), *The Business of Social and Environmental Innovation: New Frontiers in Africa*: 87-104. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2014). “Social Innovation from the Inside Out.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* Winter: 46-52
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2013). “Inscaping: Exploring the Connection Between Experiential Surfacing and Social Innovation.” *NESTA Conference Proceedings: Social Frontiers – The Next Edge of Social Innovation Research*. London. Available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/192022484/Inscaping-Exploring-the-Connection-Between-Experiential-Surfacing-and-Social-Innovation>
- Nilsson, W. (2009). “The Giving Field.” *Ascent Magazine*, Spring.
- Bento, R. F. and Nilsson, W. (2009). “Visual Metaphors: A New Language for Discovery and Dialogue.” *Transformative Dialogues* 2(3): 1-12.
- Nilsson, W. and Janzen, E. (2008). “The Expressive Organization.” *Livraison* 9: 48-50. Spring.
- Nilsson, W. (2006). *The Southern Wall: Organizational Engagement at Santropol Roulant*. Montreal: J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.
- Bento, R. and Nilsson, W. (2005). Beyond Words: Visual Metaphors and Dialogue in Management Education and Development. *Changing the Way You Teach: Creative Tools for Management Educators*. T. Torres, M. Gascó and A. Coelho. Oviedo, Spain: Septem.

Articles Under Review and in Development

- Nilsson, W. & Paddock, T. “Inscaping: Exploring the Connection Between Experiential Surfacing and Social Innovation.” We outline the enabling role that experiential surfacing plays in helping to foster the capacity to initiate and sustain social innovation.

- Nilsson, W. & Burger, A. "Institutional Archeology: History, Disruption, and Social Innovation." A case study of Solms-Delta, a South African social enterprise in the wine industry. Considers the relationship between the collaborative exploration of historical artefacts and narratives and an organization's capacity for institutional disruption and social innovation.
- Nilsson, W. "Positive Institutional Maintenance: Sustaining Engagement in a Social Purpose Organization." Taking organizational engagement as a paradigmatic positive organizational scholarship (POS) construct, this seven-year, qualitative study explores how engagement is institutionally maintained in a social purpose organization. The study expands upon the novel institutional concept of experiential legitimacy and identifies new modes of institutional work.
- Hamann, R., Nilsson, W. & Drimie, S. "Social Innovation Between Dialogue and Dialectic: Potentialities for Change in the Food System." An empirical exploration of dialogic agency as a critical and overlooked dimension of institutional work for social innovation in the context of the Southern African Food Lab.
- Moore, M., Olsson, P., Nilsson, W., Rose, L., & Westley, F. "Navigating Emergence and Systems Reflexivity as Key Transformative Capacities: Experiences from a Global Fellowship Program." An empirical exploration of the pedagogy of social innovation in complex systems.

Current Research Projects

- Scaling the invisible. A case study of RLabs, a South African social purpose organization renowned for both its vibrant organizational culture and its ability to disrupt entrenched institutional patterns of disadvantage and inequality. Exploring whether and how experiential innovation can be scaled.
- Scaling deep. A case study of a Zenith Cleaners, a Canadian social enterprise that is using deep metaphor to expand its social innovation impact. (With Tana Paddock)

Additional Research Experience

Living Labs Evaluation Project– Santropol Roulant, Montreal (2004-2006)

Partnered with a leading local community organization to design a multi-year evaluation focused on the inter-organizational impacts of engagement practices in the social sector.

McGill-DuPont Social Innovation Initiative, Montreal (2002-2003)

Research assistant to a team led by Professor Frances Westley (University of Waterloo) exploring social innovation in complex systems. Resulted in the book *Getting To Maybe*.

Professor Henry Mintzberg, McGill University, Montreal (2001-2002)

- Research assistant for projects including a monograph on the balanced society and a book on management education (*Managers Not MBAs*).

Presentations

- Nilsson, W. and Burger, A. (2016). "Institutional Archeology: History, Disruption, and Social Innovation." *European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium*. Naples.
- Nilsson, W. and Burger, A. (2016). "Institutional Archeology: History, Disruption, and Social Innovation." *University of Edinburgh Business School Paper Development Workshop on Organizational and Institutional Change*. Edinburgh.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2015). "Exploring the Experiential Dimension of Social Innovation and Institutional Change." *University of Michigan Centre for Positive Organizations Research Incubator*. Ann Arbor (remote link).

- Nilsson, W. (2014). "Positive Institutional Maintenance: Sustaining Engagement in a Social Purpose Organization." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Philadelphia.
- Nilsson, W. (2014). "Paying Attention to the Good Anthropocene." *Seeds of the Good Anthropocene: A Southern African Perspective*. Stellenbosch.
- Nilsson, W., Paddock, T., & Parker, M. (2014). "Social Innovation from the Inside Out." *Stanford Social Innovation Review Webinar*. Palo Alto (remote link).
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2013). "Inscaping: Exploring the Connection Between Experiential Surfacing and Social Innovation." *NESTA Conference: Social Frontiers – The Next Edge of Social Innovation Research*. London.
- Nilsson, W. (2012). "Positive Institutional Work: Rethinking Institutional Work through the Lens of Positive Organizational Scholarship." *Business of Social and Environmental Innovation Conference*. Cape Town.
- Nilsson, W. (2012). "Positive Institutional Work: Rethinking Institutional Work through the Lens of Positive Organizational Scholarship." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Boston.
- Nilsson, W. (2012). "Sustaining Social Change." *TEDx Cape Town*. Cape Town.
- Paddock, T., Glencross, J. and Nilsson, W. "Making Organizations Work." *The Change Collective*. Cape Town.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2010). "Changing the World by Changing Our Organizations." *Centre for Social Innovation*. Toronto.
- Nilsson, W. (2010). "Universities as Social Purpose Organizations." *McGill-Milton Parc Café Conversations*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. (2008). "Organization Unbound: Organizing for Sustainability." *McGill Business Conference on Sustainability*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. (2007). "The Expressive Organization." *Centre des Arts Actuels SKOL*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. and Rabinowicz, J. (2006). "The Re-Enchantment of Organizational Life." *Concordia University Institute in Management and Community Development*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2006). "Organizations as Social Movements." *Concordia University Institute in Management and Community Development*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2006). "Educating for Sustainability." *McGill Business Conference on Sustainability*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W., Paddock, T. and Rabinowicz, J. (2006). "The Art of Organizational Engagement." *Lanark County Early Childhood Education Network*. Lanark, Ontario.
- Nilsson, W. (2005). "Re-Imagining the Service Organization." *Family Resource Programs Canada Conference*. Ottawa.
- Nilsson, W. (2003). "Organizational Engagement at Santropol Roulant." *McGill-DuPont Social Innovation Initiative*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. (2003). "Giants and Windmills: Rethinking Institutional Strategy." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Seattle.
- Nilsson, W. and Bento, R. (2001). "Gateways to the Mind: Visual Metaphors in Management Development." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Washington, D.C.

Areas of Instructional Expertise

Social Innovation, Positive Organizational Development, Organizational Dimensions of Social and Environmental Sustainability, Organizational Strategy, Corporate Social Responsibility, Nonprofit Management, Social Entrepreneurship & Social Enterprise.

Experience

University of Cape Town, Graduate School of Business (2011-)

Cape Town, South Africa

Academic Director, MPhil in Inclusive Innovation

Course titles:

- Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship (MBA)
- Organizational Development for Social Innovation (MBA)
- Social Innovation Lab (MBA)
- Company Analysis (MBA)

Additional program contributions:

- Rockefeller Foundation Global Fellowship Program on Social Innovation
- Oxford EMBA
- Social Entrepreneurship & Systems Change
- New Managers Programme
- PGDip in Innovative Leadership
- Ph.D. Research Colloquium (history of organizational theory, institutional theory)
- MPhil in Inclusive Innovation
- Executive Management Programme for School Leadership
- Oliver Tambo Fellowship Programme and Diploma in Health Management

Supervisions

- PHD: Current (5)
- MPhil/MComm: Graduated (7), Current (7)
- MBA: Graduated (17)

McGill University, Desautels Faculty of Management (2003-2010)

Montreal, Quebec

Instructor for 32 classes. Average size 40-60 students. Course titles:

- Organizational Strategy (undergraduate)
- Strategies for Sustainability (MBA & undergraduate)
- Social Context of Business (undergraduate)

Doctoral Student Society Distinguished Teaching Award – 2006, 2007, 2009

McGill University, Executive Institute (2003-2010)

Montreal, Quebec

Led multiple sessions in executive programs: *International Master's in Health Leadership (IMHL)*; *Advanced Leadership Program (ALP)*; *International Master's in Practicing Management (IMPM)*.

École des Hautes Études Commerciales (HEC) (2010)

Montreal, Quebec

Instructor. Course title:

- Contemporary Issues and Social Responsibilities of the Firm (MBA)

University of Baltimore, Merrick School of Business (2000-2002)

Baltimore, Maryland

Instructor for five classes. Course titles:

- Economics of Public Policy and Corporate Social Responsibility (MBA)
- Organizational Behavior (undergraduate)

Community Involvement/Administrative Activity

Co-Director, Rockefeller Foundation Global Fellowship Program on Social Innovation. (2015-)

Raised funding of R16,000,000 for the UCT Graduate School of Business's Bertha Centre for Social Innovation as the lead partner of this fellowship program. The program focuses on system entrepreneurship and brings together experienced social innovators from around the world for four learning modules over the course of a year. Serve as the administrative lead for the program and the co-lead on program design with partners from the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the University of Victoria, and the University of Waterloo.

Co-founder, Organization Unbound (2009-)

A global community of inquiry experimenting with ways that social purpose organizations can live out in their daily practices the changes they are trying to create in the world and by doing so seed deeper patterns of institutional transformation. Produced a short film called "Changing the Way We Change the World" which was accepted into the Addis International Film Festival and has been viewed over 5,000 times in its first year online. Developed self-guided training materials free for use in organizations and classes. Sponsored a series of dialogues and workshops. Developed a collaborative blog (organizationunbound.org), which has averaged 600 unique visitors a month from over 100 countries during the last five years.

Co-lead Designer and Presenter, UCT-RLabs MOOC on Social Innovation (2016)

As part of UCT's ongoing MOOC project, I collaborated with the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and with local NGO RLabs to produce a MOOC on social innovation via the platform Coursera. The course is unique in its approach. We partnered with local practitioners as well as academics to create a practical, action-oriented learning experience appropriate for potential innovators from a wide variety of educational and cultural backgrounds.

Convener, The Changing Room (2015-)

A research group of 20 graduate students and social change practitioners exploring the relationship between experiential organizational dynamics and large-scale system transformation. Meets monthly.

Convener, ScaleShift (2013-2015)

A practitioner community of inquiry, hosted at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, that met monthly to explore issues related to scaling social innovation.

Member, UCT Graduate School of Business Transformation Committee (2012-2015)

Diversity and inclusion at the Graduate School of Business.

Program Development Teams, UCT Graduate School of Business (2011-)

Social Innovation Stream for MBA Students (lead academic). M.Phil. in Inclusive Innovation (contributing academic). PHD Research Colloquium (contributing academic).

Member, Citizens Movement for Social Change Working Group on Woundedness (2012).
Catalyzing citizenship across South Africa.

Member, Kufunda Learning Village Eagles Council (2010-2014)

Served on the advisory team of a residential, sustainable living project in Rua, Zimbabwe. The project experiments with and holds trainings on multiple themes including: permaculture; eco building; herbal health; solar energy; collaborative governance; community building; pre-school education; and youth leadership.

Curriculum Developer, McGill Social Context of Business Course Team (2003-2010)

Played a key role in the continuing development of the faculty's core undergraduate course exploring social themes.

Member, Mintzberg Colloquium on Social Sector Organizations (2002-2006)

Participated in a colloquium of professors and doctoral students pursuing research on social sector organizations and social transformation.

Vice President, Montreal Urban Community Sustainment Initiative (2005-2006)

Founding board member of a sustainability initiative combining cooperative housing, cooperative business development, green design, and food security.

Ph.D. Student Representative, McGill Management Ph.D. Committee (2002-2003)

Served as student liaison to the Ph.D. program steering committee. Participated in policy, budgetary, and curricular decision-making.

Related Work Experience

Organizational Consultant, Washington, D.C./Baltimore, Maryland (2000-2001)

Provided fundraising and project support for social sector clients working on initiatives ranging from education to microenterprise development to urban greening.

Executive Director, Baltimore Caregivers, Baltimore, Maryland (1997-2000)

Founded and directed a community-based, welfare-to-work training and employment initiative in the health care sector. Managed a staff of 40 people. Handled all fundraising and coordinated the development of a network of public, community, and private sector partners. Fostered the transition to a cooperative management model in which participants took on leadership roles.

Community Economic Development Associate, South East Community Organization, Baltimore, Maryland (1995-1997)

Served as a community organizer for urban, grassroots economic development projects. Helped build bridging programs in an 80,000-person catchment area struggling with poverty, crime, drugs, racial tension, and school breakdown.

Communications Coordinator, Coalition for Low-Income Community Development, Washington, D.C./Baltimore, Maryland (1991-1994)

Provided technical assistance to low-income communities nationwide. Developed written materials focused on policy analysis and participatory organizing techniques. Helped low-income neighborhoods position themselves for access to federal block grant development funds.