

Managing Contradictions between “Business as Usual” and Transition Dynamics in Service Ecosystems

As'ad Nabila, Patrício Lia

Purpose: Multiple service ecosystems are undergoing a process of transition, such as the transition of energy ecosystem towards distributed and carbon-free production and consumption. However, little is known on how actors can effectively manage the implications of such profound changes in service ecosystems (Kabadayi et al., 2020; Sigala, 2020). This paper explores the concept of contradictions (Hargrave and Van De Ven, 2009) that emerge in service ecosystems under transition, and how actors may embrace both “business as usual” and the profound changes in service ecosystems.

Study design/methodology/approach: This study adopts a qualitative approach (Charmaz, 2006) and abductive analysis (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) with multiple actors in the energy sector. The study involved 31 in-depth interviews with four different groups of actors encompassing multiple levels of aggregation: (1) internal stakeholders of a utility provider; (2) external partners of the utility provider; (3) advanced customers of the utility provider; and (4) broader actors within the energy sector.

Findings: The findings revealed three types of contradictions between (1) governance model, and plurality of perspectives and interests; (2) internal and external resources; and (3) pressures for stability and change. These contradictions are closely interdependent, meaning that the approach taken to embrace one type may influence and/or being influenced by one another. This interdependence influences actors to gradually adopt a more both/and approaches, upon which they acknowledge that their complementarities are central for supporting the transition process towards clean energy.

Originality/value: This paper provides an in-depth empirical understanding of the contradictions (Hargrave and Van De Ven, 2009) that are latent in service ecosystems under transition, and how actors embrace these contradictions as a source of creative tension to cope and influence the profound service ecosystem changes.

Keywords: service ecosystem, transition, contradictions