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Keywords

organizations, approach, alternative, social, marketing, organization, practices, business, sustainable, adopting

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Organization-Based Social Marketing: An Alternative Approach for Organizations Adopting Sustainable Business Practices

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Abstract

This article conceptualizes a new area for social marketing practitioners by focusing on individual behavior change that might occur within organizations. Organization-Based Social Marketing (OBSM) draws from organization change theory and internal marketing theory, while maintaining social marketing's focus on beneficial behavior modification. The article argues that as such, OBSM represents a viable approach for organizations seeking to address the increasing demand for change strategies that promote proenvironmental behavior among their employees.

Keywords

Social marketing, organisation based social marketing, sustainable business, pro-environmental behaviour, employee behaviour

Introduction

Since its emergence in the early 1970s, social marketing has matured as a discipline, a state signified by its continuing development as a recognized field of academic research and practitioner interest. This maturity is indicated further by the evolution of fields of study within the general social marketing domain. For example, a substantial body of literature is developing under the banner of "community-based social marketing" (Flocks et al., 2001; Mackenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999; Middlemiss, 2008; Tabanico & Schultz, 2007; Weenig, 2002). This article attempts to examine the emergence of a further field of social marketing thought and practice which we have labeled "organization-based social marketing" (OBSM). That is, the application of social marketing practices to address social issues within the boundaries of organizations, whether they are public, private, or not-for-profit bodies. In addition, this article considers the role of OBSM as a potential management tool for organization as they face the growing imperative to adopt environmentally sustainable business practices.

Increasingly, organizations around the world are realizing the benefits of adopting more environmentally sustainable business practices. Research (Gonzalez-Benito & Gonzalez-Benito, 2005; Melnyk, Sroufe, & Calantone, 2003; Sharma & Vredenberg, 1998) demonstrates that the benefits of adopting these practices go beyond the boundaries of corporate social responsibility and positive public image: They can impact favorably on business performance while also helping to address a pressing social issue. If the potential to improve performance alone were not sufficient incentive for organizations to adopt and manage sustainable business practices, governments in many countries are legislating to force businesses to do so. Social marketers would recognize this form of government intervention as an example of upstream social marketing. In Australia, for example, the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act (NGER ACT, 2007) requires corporations to report on energy Production and consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

As a result of pressure from government and the public, as well as proven financial and operational benefits, organizations of all types are introducing sustainable business programs of varying degrees of complexity. Environmentally sustainable business programs can be regarded as lying along a continuum, from rather modest initiatives such as reducing waste within a single business unit to more complex all-organization programs that involve significant internal changes to culture, ethos, and individual employee behavior. As Esty and Winston (2009) suggest, often a necessary and critical component of any sustainable business program involves the need to change individual employee behavior and through this modification of organizational culture. Social marketing, with its proven record of changing individual behavior in the fields of public health and the environment (Smith, 2006), has potential as a valuable approach for organizations to draw on to help them successfully introduce environmentally sustainable business practices.

In this article, we first attempt to understand the precursors for the emergence of this field of social marketing, which we term OBSM. We attempt to locate OBSM in relation to other relevant fields of academic study, notably organizational change and internal marketing (IM). We suggest OBSM draws not only on principles of social marketing but also intersects with these other two disciplines. As a result, we argue that OBSM could be a potentially powerful tool to bring about positive social change among the individuals who comprise an organization. More specifically, we also argue the potential merits of OBSM as a tool of choice for organizations wishing to introduce environmentally sustainable business practices and further, that OBSM exists as a viable area for further academic study and practitioner involvement.

The Evolution of Social Marketing

In general terms, social marketing can be defined as “the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify, or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups, or society as a whole” (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002). Since Kotler and Zaltman (1971) first coined the term, social marketing has evolved into a recognized area of both academic study and practical application. Studies have shown this approach to be a useful tool in effecting individual behavior change, with social marketing methods and practices widely adopted most notably in the fields of health (Grier & Bryant, 2005; Kennedy, Mizuno, Seals, Myllyluoma, & Weeks-Norton, 2000) and road safety (Rothschild, Mastin, & Miller, 2006; Smith, 2006).

Community-Based Social Marketing

A sign of the maturity of an area of academic study is the emergence of subfields of study. Ling, Franklin, Lindsteadt, and Gearon (1992) argue that social marketing displays such maturity, as does Andreasen (2003) who suggests that social marketers should be “self-confident” in applying the discipline to a wider range of organizations and situations. Already the term community-based social marketing has developed in reference to the practice of identifying the benefits and barriers to a behavior and organizing the public into segments with common characteristics which allows efficient delivery of programs (MacKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999, p. 3).

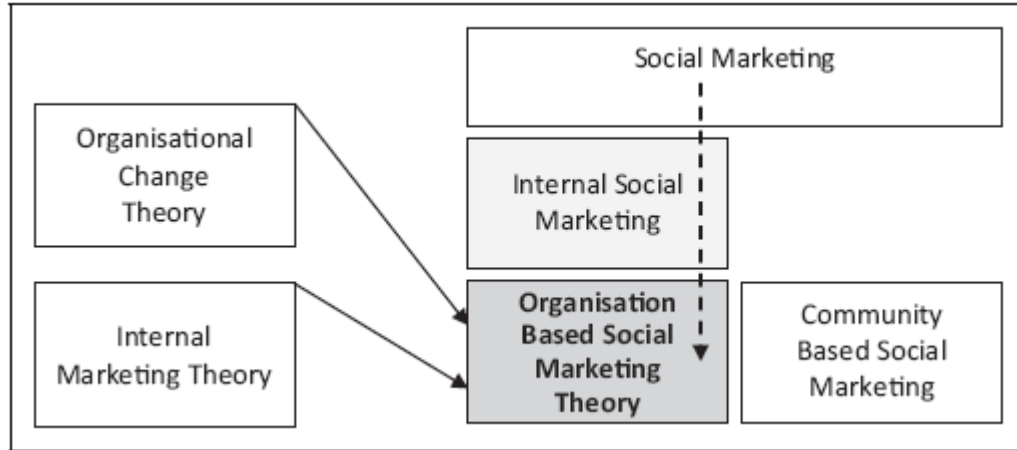


Figure 1. Theoretical contributions in the development of Organization-based social marketing theory.

In this application, social marketing’s principles of developing positive behavior change remain constant while the focus of the process moves from the individual to the group. Community-based social marketing is finding wider application particularly in an environmental context. In contrast, however, social marketing’s application and acceptance as a method of individual behavior change within the boundaries of an organization, be it a for-profit, nonprofit, or government organization, is neither as well conceptualized nor well developed.

Internal Social Marketing (ISM): A Precursor to OBSM?

A more recent extension of the social marketing nomenclature is reference to the term internal social marketing (ISM) which has been used within the extant social marketing literature (e.g., Dann, 2005; Smith, 2009). To date, there has been only very limited academic work on ISM, a shortfall that could

be explained by the fact that this area lacks a strong theoretical foundation. ISM, intuitively, has its roots firmly embedded within the social marketing literature. An understanding of its theoretical basis can be gained by considering its relationship with other theories about how organizations achieve planned change using marketing-based techniques and practices to modify the behavior of key stakeholder groups, such as employees. The academic literature on organizational change and IM stand out as particularly relevant in this regard. Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationship between these bodies of literature in the process of conceptualizing OBSM.

Defining OBSM

OBSM represents a further extension of accepted social marketing techniques. Just as communitybased social marketing addresses the change needs of a social collective in the form of a community group, OBSM is applied to the behavior change needs of the social collective of employees, which exists within an organization, regardless of its profit based or not-for-profit nature. In this instance, social marketing tools have been adapted, just as Dann (2005) argues social marketing itself is the adaptation rather than direct transference of marketing tools.

For the purpose of this article, we suggest that the term OBSM refers to

The process of adapting the tools and techniques of social marketing to achieve the prosocial behaviour change of an organization's internal stake holders, that is, its management and employees.

This definition is based on concepts outlined by Smith (2009) and Dann (2005), both of whom examine the further development and broader application of social marketing.

OBSM's Relationship With Models of Organizational Change and IM

Theories of organizational change and IM share a common purpose: positively changing the behavior of employees and/or stakeholders. This focus on behavior change is also the function of social marketing and, we argue, ISM, hence, we launch our discussion by showing how theories of organizational change and IM act as a springboard for the development of an OBSM model. Both management approaches have, over many years, generated extremely large bodies of literature. This article does not seek to present a meta-analysis of this material. Instead, the aim is to develop the concept of OBSM by locating it within the broader field of management and marketing theory which focuses on the process of achieving effective organizational change. This goal will be achieved by reviewing these two bodies of literature, and their relevant models, to show how and where they conjoin.

If one conceptualizes an organization as a dynamic group, "group life is never without change, merely differences in the amount and type of change exist" (Lewin, 1947, p. 13). Two major schools of thought have dominated change strategy: the planned approach to organizational change and the emergent approach. Planned change is the term Kurt Lewin coined to distinguish the type of change that was consciously planned and embarked upon, as opposed to change that might occur by accident, impulse, or force (Marrow, 1969 cited in Burnes, 2004, p. 267). The planned approach focuses on preplanned change, with a beginning and end point, but by the early 1980s criticism had grown about its failure to acknowledge the organizational reality of incremental change. Proponents of the emergent approach argue "change is a continuous, dynamic and contested process that emerges in an unpredictable and unplanned fashion" (Burnes, 2004, p. 291). This occurs in the context of the day-to-day actions and decisions made within an organization which is constantly sensing and reacting to its environment.

As social marketing is often a "planned" behavior change, we will confine our discussion to planned change, which is intentional and has two specific goals: improving the organization's reaction to changes in its environment and changing employee behavior (Robbins, Millett, Cacioppe, & Waters-Marsh, 2001, p. 699). Nadler and Tushman (1979) examine the process of change via the interrelationship between four major components: task, individuals, formal organizational arrangements, and informal arrangements. This process of transformation is represented below in Figure 2.

The model's hypothesis is that the degree of fit or congruence of these four major factors will affect the level of organizational effectiveness (Nadler, 1993), with problems arising from poor congruence. Similarly, Burke and Litwin's model, represented below in Figure 3, examines successful change via the "transformational and transactional dynamics" (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999, p. 296) of organizational conditions or the causes and their effects. Transformational factors are those that require new employee behaviors (leadership, culture, mission, and strategy), while transactional factors deal with

psychological and organizational variables that predict and control motivational and performance, for example, management practices, structures, systems (policies and procedures) task requirements, and individual skills and abilities.

Elements common to these two models are the central importance of the individual, the tasks pertaining to them, and their motivation. Organizational change theory already identifies employees, or individuals, as one of the key components in the change process. The focus of IM is to raise managerial awareness about the importance of employee factors when implementing the required processes when working toward a change goal. Piercy and Morgan (1991) describe this as providing a “language for analysing organisational issues.” This holistic or “total” management approach (Ahmed, Rafiq, & Saad, 2003) underpins IM’s role in integrating intraorganizational perspectives in a change environment.

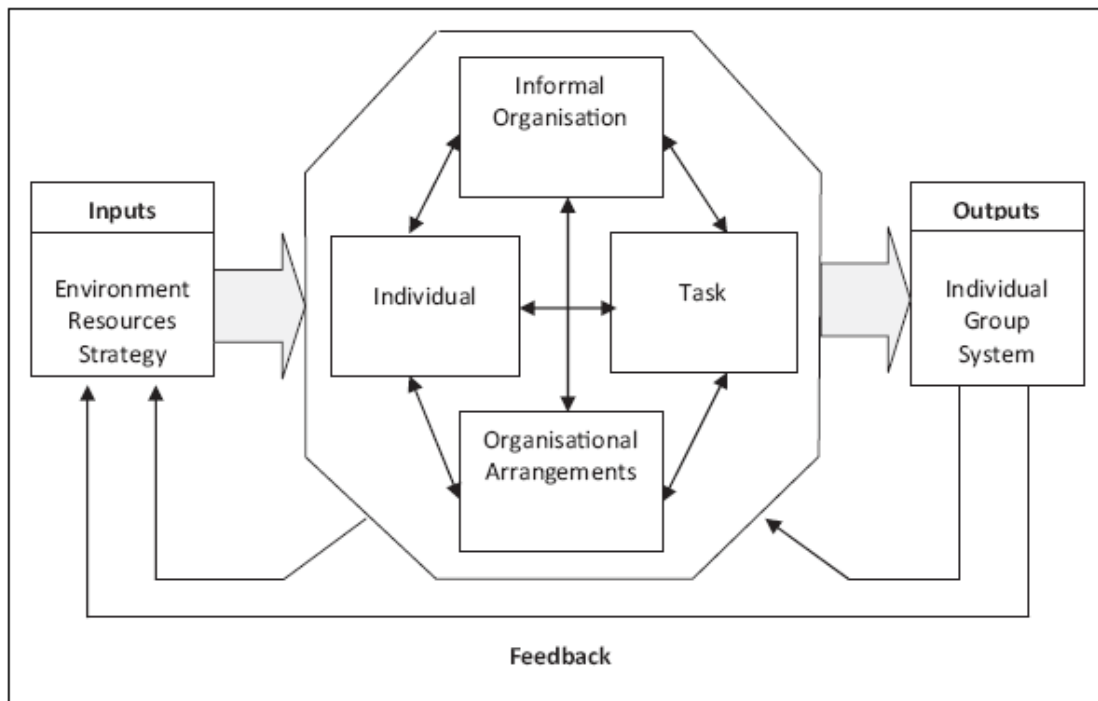


Figure 2. A congruence model for diagnosing organizational behavior (Nadler & Tushman, 1979)

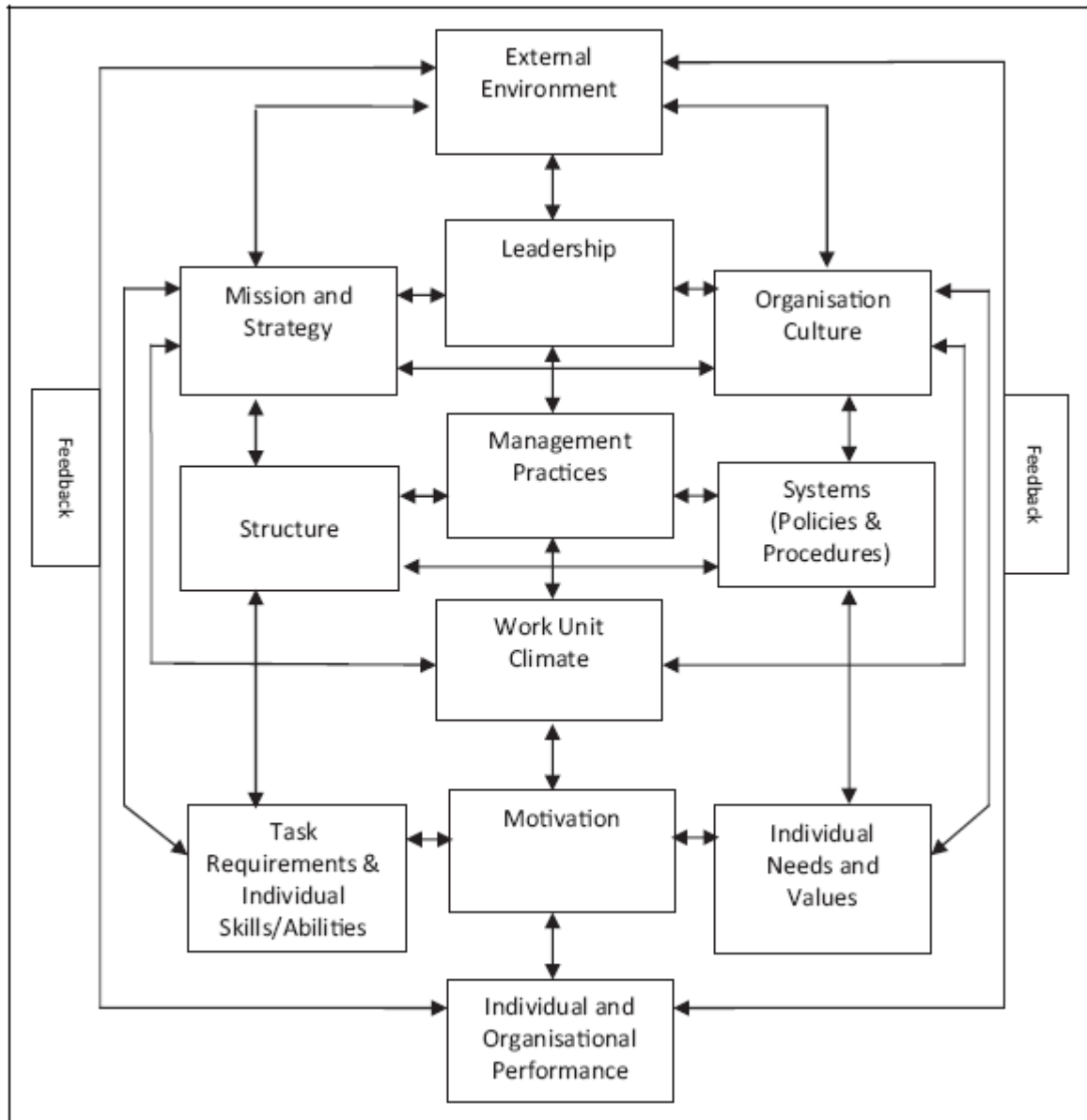


Figure 3. Burke–Litwin model of organizational performance and change.

Originally, elements from the fields of marketing and service management were drawn together to generate employee commitment to company goals in connection with service delivery and customer satisfaction. Gronroos (1981, p. 237) focused on the strategic use of IM to “create an internal environment which supports customer-consciousness and sales-mindedness among the personnel.” Organizations use a marketing-like approach to focus on improving the performance of employees, a process that complements and increases the effectiveness of an external marketing strategy. This exchange with employees, the organization’s internal customers (Berry, 1981), is a “prerequisite” (George, 1990) for successful external marketing interactions. The key is motivating staff to react in the desired way (Gronroos, 1985) as a result of an active coordinated approach. Piercy and Morgan (1991) argue that the organizational change implied by the implementation of marketing strategy is more effective if the IM program matches the external marketing built for customers and competitors.

The IM models highlighted in this article show the processes by which organizations can analyze the marketing and management challenges that spring from their change goals and implement appropriate internal strategies. Rafiq and Ahmed have refined the IM models developed by Berry and Gronroos in Figure 4 in which the role of the employee ‘element’ in managing organizational change has been further investigated/expanded in terms of motivation, job satisfaction, and empowerment. All these factors are deemed to have a critical impact on the effectiveness of the change program which the organization launches.

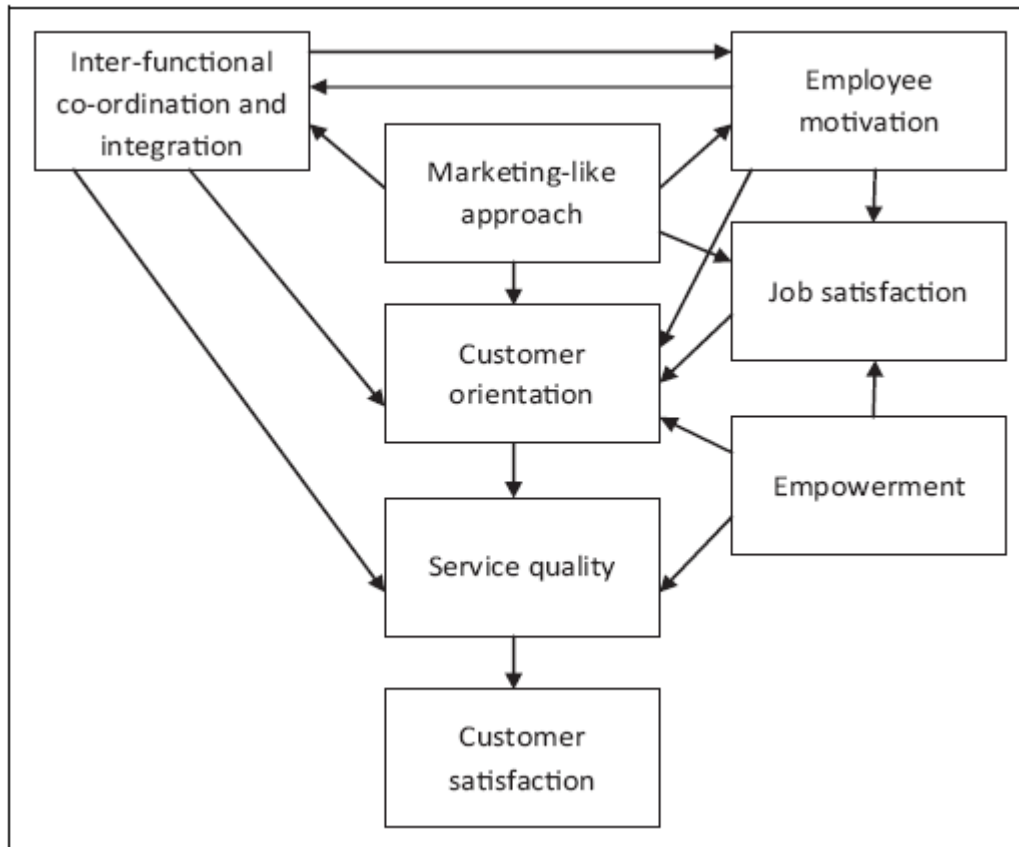


Figure 4. A model of internal marketing for services (Rafiq & Ahmed, 2000).

Ahmed, Rafiq, and Saad, (2003) developed a framework, shown in Figure 5, for implementing marketing strategies to motivate employees to act in a customer-oriented fashion (p. 1226).

Ahmed et al., also cite employee satisfaction and competencies as critical elements in the change management process, a focus that links back to Nadler and Tushman and Burke and Litwin whose models also identify the importance of individual competencies. From this point, we argue that models of organization change and IM share a common stage and issue—achieving individual level change—in order to achieve the broader goal of larger scale change. It is this confluence of theoretical elements that leads to the emergence of a conceptual OBSM model. The figure below represents this nexus and shows how these commonly shared elements meld under the banner of OBSM. This emerging new branch of the social marketing discipline can make a significant contribution as an approach that focuses on effecting individual behavior change in order to achieve an organization’s change goals.



Figure 5. Conceptual model of internal marketing.

OBSM as an Approach to Introducing Environmentally Sustainable Business Practices

As we have argued in the preceding sections, OBSM lies at the nexus of several bodies of literature on achieving successful change within an organization. We suggest that its strength as a change agent to deal with this new management challenge of establishing and maintaining sustainable business practice lies in the fact that OBSM evolves from a combination of the most relevant and established theories—organizational change, IM, and social marketing itself, as is shown in Figure 6. In this manner, OBSM continues the tradition of social marketing evolution by drawing on the principles and practices of established bodies of knowledge. We have attempted to show that models of both organizational change and of IM share a common component, the need to bring about individual change within the context of a planned organizational change. In essence, we argue that successful organizational change is built on individual change and ongoing support. Social marketing supplies OBSM with its tools and techniques for how to achieve individual change while theoretical models of both organizational change and IM suggest where OBSM can be applied in the process of achieving organization-wide change. In this section of the article, we identify an emerging area of application for OBSM—the introduction of environmentally sustainable business practices.

OBSM strategy has already had limited airing within academic thought under the term of internal social marketing. Smith (2009) suggests that organizations have neglected the potential of social marketing as a change tool and demonstrates its application in reducing carbon emissions within a service-based organization. Social marketing’s strategy of building relationship commitment, increasing the perceived value of the exchange and increasing self-efficacy are simply applied within an organization where the actions of the individual (or employee) combine for a greater benefit.

The new millennium has marked a fundamental shift in how business regards resource availability and environmental impact. The consequential trend of businesses considering ways in which to introduce sustainably conscious business practices is not only continuing to grow but accelerating in pace (Olsen, 2009). Research on this expanding field has concentrated on a range of themes, including the role of management (Georg & Fussell, 2000); corporate culture change and employee involvement (Harris & Crane, 2002; Ramus, 2002); the greening challenges facing newly industrialized countries (Ho, 2011); management and evaluation processes (Kolk & Mauser, 2002); changing organizational culture (Harris & Crane, 2000); and the change needs specific to small- and medium-sized enterprise (Millard, 2011).



Figure 6. Theories of influence affecting individual and organizational change.

Organizations are now not so much debating whether to operate sustainably, but rather how to do so. Given the irrevocability of environmental business change, this is an area in need of academic research. Organizations are seeking effective tools in order to change behavior and increase their level of operational sustainability (Scott, 2010; Shrivistava, 1996). Social marketing has a proven record in the area of sustainable behavior and in providing practical, effective strategies. More specifically, OBSM presents an even more viable approach to use in order to achieve this process within an organization.

Conclusion

This article has set out to examine the potential of an emerging extension of social marketing thought and practice, which we label as OBSM. This area of social marketing concerns itself with the application of social marketing within the boundaries of organizations to achieve sustainable business outcomes. We have attempted to link OBSM to established theories of organizational change and IM in an effort to suggest where in these processes OBSM could make a difference. In other words, we argue theories of organizational change and IM suggest where individual change is required, while social marketing contributes the how to achieve individual change. We have also highlighted OBSM's particular suitability as a management tool for organizations to consider as they face the growing imperative to adopt environmentally sustainable business practices.

The emergence of OBSM would appear to be a natural stage in the development of social marketing as a maturing field of academic study. Given that organizations, regardless of size or focus, are increasingly pressured to consider their environmental profile there is a natural fit between the theory and application of OBSM and organizations' introduction of environmentally sustainable business practices. We suggest that OBSM has great potential to make a significant academic and managerial contribution in this area.

In conclusion, we would encourage further debate and academic research into the potential of OBSM as a tool for the establishment of sustainable business practices. Case studies on the application

of OBSM may be a suitable starting point for the further development of this field of social marketing.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

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