

BAM 2021 PDW PROPOSAL:

Bridging differing perspectives on ecosystems research: Towards an integrative framework

Abstract

Management practitioners and scholars alike use a range of terms such as industry, sector, and market to describe and characterise an organisation's environment. More recently the word *ecosystem*, a term borrowed from the field of biology, has entered the lexicon. Today, the ecosystem literature is growing but not homogeneously. It is diversified with interesting contributions made by scholars from innovation, strategy, and entrepreneurship fields. Although some scholars address them as complementary concepts, the literature lacks evidences about what are the interfaces and connection between the different ecosystem research streams.

This Professional Development Workshop (PDW) aims to bring together a diverse range of scholars from different disciplines across the special interest groups (SIGs) within the British Academy of Management. The organising committee aims to facilitate a virtual workshop to encourage interaction and exchange of ideas among participants that do not typically participate in the same paper sessions and SIGs. Literature points out what the differences might be among various ecosystem research streams, however this PDW aims to make a difference and addresses how different school of thoughts regarding ecosystems can be aligned. In doing so, this PDW is intended to facilitate discussions, synergies and new connections among the participants to bring conceptual clarity around ecosystem notions. Therefore, we aim to align conceptualisations of ecosystems from different perspectives.

Given the above, our intention is to discuss the following during the PDW: *What do ecosystems explain? What does explain ecosystems?*

Following a short presentation session by the speakers, we will invite attendees to engage in conversation to address the above questions from theoretical and empirical perspectives using interactive Zoom tools. We aim to develop our collective work into an edited book and/or a journal special issue proposal.

Professional Development Workshop on Ecosystems

David Teece suggests that the ecosystem notion might substitute for the industry now (Teece, 2016). Indeed, the interest in ecosystem notion is on the rise (Baldwin, 2018). Ecosystem concept increasingly appears in the vocabulary of policy papers. There are more than 80,000 ecosystem stories published per annum in media (Kapoor, 2018). Also, prestigious journals in business and innovation management publish more than 900 articles (with 90 per cent published in the last ten years) which focus on the ecosystem concept (Bogers et al., 2019). However, what explains ecosystems emergence, dynamics (Paton et al., 2021; Sminia et al., 2019a, 2019b) and their practical applications remains undertheorized.

The term ecosystem was first used in the management literature in the mid-1990's by Moore (1993) who was seeking to understand how firms could attain sustainable advantage by out-innovating competitors. Ecosystems can accommodate a constellation of organisations with a valuable offering and this enables the creation of a more extensive value proposition (Adner and Kapoor, 2010; Dedehayir et al., 2018). Therefore, the foundation for ecosystem research is the presence of complementarities and interdependence between members beyond supply chains, which forms sophisticated relationships within the ecosystem.

First, a *business ecosystem* is a community of interacting actors where the activities of each affect all the others. Thinking on business ecosystems evolved from earlier work that was based on the industry concept that was mostly associated with Porter (1980) who posited that firms are competing in industries, with an industry described as all firms that are in the business of producing the same product or service. In a departure from this thinking business ecosystems are defined as “groups of firms that produce products or services that together comprise a coherent solution” (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018, p. 3164). In addition to firms, an ecosystem also includes the material resources (funds, equipment, facilities, etc.) and the human capital that make up the institutional entities (e.g. the universities, venture capitalists, economic development and business assistance organizations, etc.) participating in the ecosystem.

Second, *innovation ecosystems* (Gawer, 2014; Kapoor, 2018) puts more emphasis on the creation of new value propositions as opposed to delivering an existing value proposition. Therefore, from an ecosystem perspective, innovation is a distributed activity as it takes place across a large collection of organizations (Bessant and Moslein, 2011).

Third, a *platform ecosystem* is defined as “a technical system comprising a core set of essential functional elements (the platform) plus a set of optional complements” (Baldwin, 2018: 2). For

example, companies such as Apple, Amazon, and Google set themselves up as a technological hub to which other firms had to commit to be able to participate. The platforms permit the members of the ecosystem to innovate autonomously while competing collectively against other firms and/or ecosystems in the pertinent marketplace. (Teece, 2016)

Finally, *entrepreneurial ecosystems* have become a prominent tool for research and policy to understand how diverse actors and regional factors can lead to (productive) entrepreneurship. It follows a rich intellectual history, dating back to the Marshallian industrial districts and following cluster (Rocha, 2004), learning regions, and regional systems of innovation (Cooke, 2001), among others. Despite this and their popularity among researchers and policy makers, they are still not well understood and undertheorized (Wurth et al., 2021).

Aforementioned ecosystem notions are grounded in strong research traditions. With this PDW, we seek to embrace the diversity of phenomenon, theoretical perspectives and linkages across innovation, strategy and entrepreneurship fields (Kapoor, 2018). We aim to bring clarity in terminology and concepts used in ecosystem research to enhance our cumulative understanding into interconnectedness among research streams. In doing so, this PDW will develop participants' knowledge and understanding regarding synthesising these often-disconnected literatures to better align research, policy and practice in the field.

The PDW is going to be delivered online via Zoom within the BAM Conference 2021. We will invite academics and ECRs who investigate business ecosystems, innovation ecosystems, platform ecosystems and/or entrepreneurial ecosystems. We will use innovative online tools such as Chat, Polling and Breakout Rooms to facilitate an interactive session. We will have two break out rooms where each group discusses a different topic: 1) what are the overlaps that cut across ecosystem research streams and 2) what are the differences among ecosystem research streams. In doing so, we will mix up participants and encourage interdisciplinary conversations. The PDW will start with a 15 min presentation delivered by the organisers followed by a 30 min group workshop (using break out rooms) and will finish with a 30 min general discussion.

Our longer-term aspiration is to create a vibrant, multidisciplinary research network. Therefore, we will announce follow up events and networking opportunities at the end of the PDW. Particularly, we would like to engage with relevant scholars for collaboration in journal special issue proposals, and edited books related to ecosystems research.

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