The Long and Winding Road:
Building Legitimacy for Complex Social Innovation in Networks

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Social innovations, which increasingly take place in inter-organizational networks, occur in environments characterized by resource scarcity. To secure access to resources, social innovators need to establish legitimacy for their initiatives. Yet, empirical work investigating the process of establishing legitimacy for social innovation – also known as legitimation – is absent. This research aims to uncover how legitimacy is established when social innovations are developed, over time, through inter-organizational networks. To investigate this process, the research adopts a longitudinal case study of a network of five market-leading organizations in the home care sector. A process-based analysis of evidence from 33 meeting observations, 45 in-depth interviews, and 249 documents reveals three novel findings. (1) The attainment of overall legitimacy depends on the establishment, over time, of three types of legitimacy targeted at different audiences. These are framed as building blocks oriented towards achieving inter-organizational, multilevel and external legitimacy. (2) The process of establishing legitimacy, across the building blocks, is underpinned by two dominant combinations of patterns – denoted as courting and demonstrating commitment. (3) Variation in two underlying mechanisms - conflicting tensions and role promotion – drives the enactment of these patterns across the different building blocks. The study's novelty lies in the extrication of critical types of legitimacy and dominant patterns and mechanisms which underpin the process of establishing legitimacy. It contributes to social innovation and innovation legitimation literature by providing a deep-grained understanding of the process to establish legitimacy within social innovations carried out through inter-organizational networks.

INTRODUCTION

Access to and usage of basic services, such as healthcare, are essential to meet human needs. Yet, despite economic growth, these requirements are not always guaranteed. The 2017 Global Monitoring Report, for instance, points out that half of the world cannot access basic healthcare services (WHO-World Bank, 2017) and more than one quarter of the European population has unmet healthcare needs (European Patient Forum, 2016; Eurostat, 2018). To address these types of unmet social needs, organizations increasingly engage in the development of multiple interdependent services with a social objective (Spurrell, Araujo and Proudlove, 2019). These social innovations are typically developed through a wide array of interested bodies operating in inter-organizational networks and have been defined as new service constellations with a social objective (social NSCs) (Agarwal and Selen, 2009; van Riel et al., 2013). An illustration of social NSCs are integrated care projects, in which a multitude of healthcare/welfare providers align their offerings to better serve the needs of vulnerable populations, such as elderly, low-income groups, and ethnic minorities.

Recent studies have focused on such social NSCs and their impact on the quality of welfare and health provision, thereby showing positive effects for the targeted populations (e.g., De Corte et al., 2016; De Regge et al., 2017). Many of these services, however, fail to successfully realize social benefits because of pre-NSC launch difficulties of the networks developing such innovations (Huxham and Vangen, 2004; Popp et al., 2014). A key difficulty for networks is gaining access to resources to support the development of social NSCs (Raab, Mannak and Cambré, 2013). Several studies have demonstrated that gaining access to resources is associated with establishing legitimacy for the innovation (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Rao, Chandy and Prabhu, 2008; Bunduchi, 2017; Ito, 2018). Here, legitimacy is defined as the collective acceptance of the appropriateness or desirability of actions of an entity (Suchman, 1995; Bitetine and Haack, 2015). The process of establishing legitimacy within a socially

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constructed system is – in line with the multilevel theory of establishing legitimacy (Bitektine and Haack, 2015) – labeled as legitimation.

There is a surprising dearth of studies examining the legitimation of social NSCs. Social NSCs present development conditions which confer additional complexities to the types of innovation studied in the legitimacy literature to date. Not only are these innovations developed in inter-organizational networks (Dougherty, 2017), social NSCs also emerge in environments characterized by different types of vulnerable populations and tighter funding (Voltan and De Fuentes, 2016). In these environments, there is increased competition for donors and grants (Weeravardena and Mort, 2008). Allocating resources to the development of social NSCs is often seen as lacking a justifiable basis for action (Sonenshein, 2016). Hence, the process of establishing legitimacy for social NSCs through inter-organizational networks is particularly important. This article aims to contribute to a better understanding of this process by uncovering how legitimacy is established when social NSCs are developed, over time, through inter-organizational networks.

As legitimation of innovation is conceptualized as a contested and dynamic process (Johnson, Dowd and Ridgeway, 2006; Laïfa and Josserand, 2016; Bunduchi, 2017), this research draws from process theory to inform its framing. Specifically, process theory is concerned with explaining an outcome by providing insight into how things evolve over time and why they evolve over time (Langley, 1999; Kouamé and Langley, 2018). The adoption of this perspective – which is detailed in the theoretical background section – informs three research questions:

(1) What types of legitimacy are established when developing social NSCs through inter-organizational networks and how do these legitimacy types change during the process of establishing legitimacy?

(2) What social NSC legitimation patterns (i.e., descriptive regularities) underpin the establishment of social NSC legitimacy and how are these patterns enacted throughout the process of establishing legitimacy?

(3) What are the dominant mechanisms (i.e., underlying forces) driving the enactment of social NSC legitimation patterns and how do these mechanisms vary during the process of establishing legitimacy?

The research questions are addressed through a longitudinal case study in the health and social care sector. The article ensues as follows. The theoretical background reviews pertinent literature informing the study and introduces and explains critical concepts. This is followed by a detailed methodology section. The findings are structured to clarify types of legitimacy and show how legitimation is underpinned by dominant combinations of patterns. The study findings further identify and explain the influence of underlying mechanisms that drive differences in the way the patterns are enacted in achieving the different types of legitimacy over time. The discussion section shows how the study contributes to the social innovation and innovation legitimation literature, clarifying (1) what types of legitimacy to establish, (2) what legitimation patterns to engage in, and (3) how to enact these patterns to establish different types of legitimacy when developing social innovations in networks. In all, the study provides a deep-grained understanding of the legitimation of social innovations developed through inter-organizational networks.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Developing and launching social NSCs as a process of legitimation

Social innovation has been conceptualized in many different ways, but researchers seem to be in agreement that it encompasses (1) processes of change in social relationships, structures, or systems, and (2) innovative solutions focused on addressing societal needs or problems (van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016). Innovative solutions with a social objective can change social

relations, structures, or systems and vice versa. In this vein, recent research defines social innovation as the development of innovations to improve the access of vulnerable populations to basic goods and services (Unceta, Catro-Spila and Fronti, 2016; Andries, Daou and Verheyden, 2019). Drawing from this definition, this study focuses on a specific type of social innovation: social NSCs. These are defined as multiple, interdependent services to address social needs, typically developed through inter-organizational networks (Agarwal and Selen, 2009; van Riel et al., 2013). An example is the combination of a digital assistant of a high-tech firm with new service packages from multiple local health and welfare providers to help lonely and isolated elderly people. As illustrated by this example, the needs of vulnerable populations are addressed by introducing new combinations of interdependent services (here, digital services and health and welfare packages). Social NSCs are thus innovative solutions to enable full access and usage of services. Due to their development in inter-organizational networks (here, high-tech firm and local health and welfare providers), social NSCs differ from social innovations developed in single organizations (Sonenshein, 2016; Turker and Vural, 2017).

This research contends that the social NSC development process, embedded within inter-organizational networks, needs to be supported, like any other type of innovation, by legitimation. In doing so, access to scarce resources may be enhanced (Weeravardena and Mort, 2008; Voltan and De Fuentes, 2016). So far, there is a surprising lack of studies on social NSC legitimation. A number of studies, however, empirically investigate the legitimation of innovations more generally. As shown in Table 1, extant studies have tended to coalesce around the context of new ventures (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002), business models (Laïfa and Josserand, 2016), products (Bunduchi, 2017), or consumption practices (Humphreys, 2010). The next sections further detail what these studies show, along with how the present study addresses important research gaps.

Insert Table 1 about here

Legitimation strategies and actions towards internal and external audiences

Legitimacy is, by its very nature, a collective notion. It is achieved when actions of an entity are generally perceived as desirable, proper or appropriate (Suchman, 1995; Bitetine and Haack, 2015). Suchman (1995) also adds that this generalized perception occurs "within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p. 574). The establishment of legitimacy means that a group of actors, as a whole, accepts or supports the actions of an entity – such as an innovation – as consonant with the socially constructed system in which they are embedded. This occurs whether or not these actions are supported or accepted by each actor personally (Johnson et al., 2006). What becomes apparent from previous studies is that the legitimacy of innovations can be judged by internal and external audiences (see Table 1). In most studies, internal audiences refer to actors who belong to the organization within which the innovation is developed and external audiences to those who do not belong to the pivotal organization. This evidence mirrors findings from organizational researchers who have a long tradition of studying different legitimacy types (Suchman, 1995; Bitektine, 2011).

As depicted in Table 1, extant research shows how legitimacy among internal and external audiences is shaped by rhetorical strategies in the organization or industry in which the innovation is embedded. For example, Humphreys (2010) exposes semantic categories used to frame new consumption practices in the media and van Driel and Koene (2011) examine self-restraint discourses emphasizing the supplementary nature of new businesses. Other innovation studies, shown in Table 1, discuss legitimation strategies which correspond to those elicited in the work of Suchman (1995). These strategies are (1) conformance – adapting the innovation to fit the socially constructed system, (2) selection – choosing a socially constructed system that gives legitimacy to the innovation, and (3) manipulation – making changes in the socially constructed system to ensure alignment with the innovation (Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; van

Dijk et al., 2011; Bunduchi, 2017). In addition to the aforementioned strategies, van Dijk et al. (2011) also found evidence for a (4) tolerance-seeking strategy – finding a niche of benign neglect where progress can continue despite a legitimacy crisis. Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) added (5) creation – developing practices, norms, rules, or interests that did not already exist in the socially constructed system. New ventures, for instance, engage in developing completely new business models (e.g., dot.com businesses), resulting in new government regulations (e.g., internet sales tax exemptions). The legitimation strategies, discussed above, suggest a continuum going from attempting to change the innovation to attempting to change the socially constructed context.

Bunduchi (2017) focuses on the implementation of the aforementioned legitimation strategies by product managers, thereby identifying three types of legitimation actions for new product ideas within organizations. The first action is *lobbying*, which refers to advertising the product by means of demos and presentations and regular communication with key stakeholders. The second action is *relationship building*, which incorporates external partner involvement and internal networking to gain support for the new product. The third action is *seeking feedback*, which involves ad-hoc internal testing of the product and gathering external feedback on the product/concept. All three actions are depicted to demonstrate how the innovation fits with the socially constructed context (conformance strategy). This research also shows how the first action is used to change the socially constructed system in relation to the innovation (manipulation strategy) and the second and third actions to selectively target an appropriate socially constructed context (selection strategy) (Bunduchi, 2017).

Lee and Hung (2014), in turn, focus on different actions through which social entrepreneurs and their sympathizers engage in establishing legitimacy for illegal products. These actions correspond with evidence from other studies, depicted in Table 1. The first type of action is *framing*. This is a cognitive mechanism, often involving rhetoric devices, to

motivate people (Lee and Hung, 2014). This action corresponds with additional evidence that projective storytelling, as a concrete action associated with rhetorical strategies, contributes to establishing legitimacy for new ventures (Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014). The second type of action is *aggregating*. This action encompasses interaction and collaboration of different participants in the industry to build critical mass (Lee and Hung, 2014). Thyroff, Siemens and Murray (2018) also show the importance of interaction and negotiation in the process of establishing legitimacy for new technologies. The third action is *bridging*. This involves accessing outsiders for resource acquisition and mobilization (Lee and Hung, 2014). This action shows the importance of endorsement by prominent external organizations in the process of establishing legitimacy for innovations (Ito, 2018).

The aforementioned evidence suggests that different types of strategies and actions can contribute to establishing legitimacy for innovation. A number of studies, however, point out that innovation legitimation is a dynamic and disputed process (van Dijk et al., 2011; Laïfa and Josserand, 2016; Bunduchi, 2017). This process is detailed in the next section, drawing on multilevel legitimacy and process theories.

Legitimation as a dynamic process underpinned by patterns and mechanisms

Bitektine and Haack (2015) acknowledge that legitimacy can evolve over time. In their multilevel theory of establishing legitimacy, they conceive legitimacy as a macro-level outcome. Legitimacy as a macro-level outcome encompasses – in line with the conceptualization of Suchman (1995) – sense-making of collective actors, such as groups, organizations, and field-level actors (such as media or regulators). Individual legitimation actions – such as those performed by product managers in the study of Bunduchi (2017) and those performed by social entrepreneurs and sympathizers in the study of Lee and Hung (2014) – are conceptualized as micro-level actions.

Under conditions of stability in the socially constructed context, Bitektine and Haack (2015) argue that legitimacy pressures individuals to act in ways that are perceived as desirable or appropriate by collective actors – regardless of the individual judgments of the legitimacy. If the organizational, market, or policy context remains unchanged, for instance, macro-level outcomes restrain individuals from engaging in micro-level legitimation actions. Under conditions of change in the socially constructed context, however, individuals may act in ways that deviate from what is perceived as desirable or appropriate by collective actors. In those situations, micro-level legitimation actions shape macro-level outcomes. The studies of Lee and Hung (2014) and Bunduchi (2017) acknowledge the importance of changes in the organizational, market, or policy context to trigger individuals to engage in legitimation actions, which can change the legitimacy of innovations.

Drawing from the multilevel theory of establishing legitimacy, this research centers on the way in which micro-level legitimation actions shape legitimacy as a macro-level outcome. Pertinent for this research is process theory, which contends that macro-level outcomes – such as legitimacy – can be explained by how and why micro-level legitimation actions evolve over time (Langley, 1999; Giesler and Thompson, 2016; Kouamé and Langley, 2018). Specifically, process researchers call for information about descriptive regularities in the evolution of a process over time and put attention to the theoretical mechanisms underlying these regularities (Kouamé and Langley, 2018). In this research emphasis is put on the importance of regularly occurring patterns and their underlying mechanisms (Langley, 1999; Bizzi and Langley, 2012).

Patterns refer to descriptive regularities in "who did what when" along the process and actors' interpretations of these actions (Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Langley, 1999). Previous research has shown that actors combine different actions to establish legitimacy (Lee and Hung, 2014; Bunduchi, 2017). Such studies lend further support to the importance of studying legitimation patterns.

Mechanisms, in turn, refer to the driving forces underlying patterns along a process (Langley, 1999). Van de Ven and Poole (1995) also emphasize the importance of exploring mechanisms in process research. They identify four specific categories of mechanisms: (1) life cycle mechanisms based on organic growth and genetic predetermination, (2) teleological mechanisms based on goal driven actions and adjustments, (3) dialectical mechanisms based on tensions between opposing forces, and (4) evolutionary mechanisms based on the processes of variation, selection, and retention. Dialectal mechanisms offer fruitful explanations of legitimation patterns, as previous research highlights the critical role of competing meanings (Humphreys, 2010; van Dijk et al., 2011; Thyroff et al., 2018) and ambiguities and conflict (van Dijk et al., 2011; Lee and Hung, 2014) within the legitimacy building process.

The extant research builds on the body of research to date (see Table 1), which demonstrates the importance of legitimation patterns and mechanisms in the process of establishing legitimacy for innovations. The present study seeks to enrich this evidence by exploring patterns and mechanisms inherent in the process of establishing different types of legitimacy for social NSCs. Hence, the research provides a novel exploration of the legitimation of a particular type of social innovation, which has received scant research attention. This type of social innovation presents challenging characteristics, as social NSCs are developed in inter-organizational networks. Despite calls for process research in and around inter-organizational networks (Bizzi and Langley, 2012; Kouamé and Langley, 2018), limited research attention has been paid to legitimation patterns and mechanisms within network settings. The methodology undertaken to carry out the research is explained and detailed below. The conceptual discussion above and the framework depicted in Figure 1 inform the research design. They form the basis for the study's aim to investigate how social NSC legitimation patterns and their underlying mechanisms unfold, over the duration of the innovation process, to establish different types of social NSC legitimacy.

Insert Figure 1 about here

METHODOLOGY

Research design and setting

The extant research was conducted in the home care sector. Home care providers increasingly engage in inter-organizational networks to develop social NSCs to ensure that vulnerable populations are fully cared for in health and welfare services (De Corte et al., 2016; van Riel et al., 2013). Specifically, this research adopts a case study design to examine social NSC legitimation in its real-world context. Since context plays an important role in triggering social NSC legitimation (Bunduchi, 2017), a case study design is appropriate. The case study focuses on how and why social NSC legitimation unfolds over time, thereby adopting a process perspective (Langley, 1999). Indeed, process researchers emphasize temporal evolution and emergence rather than relationships between variables during case study research (Bizzi and Langley, 2012). This research genre necessitates longitudinal data spread out over time – usually gathered in the context of a single case (Kouamé and Langley, 2018). As such, a longitudinal single case study design is deemed as appropriate to investigate social NSC legitimation patterns, their linkage to the establishment of social NSC legitimacy over time, and the unravelling of underlying mechanisms.

The specific case concerns the legitimation of a social NSC developed by a network comprised of five market-leading organizations in home care services in a Western-European region. The inter-organizational network is labeled as HomeNetwork[i]. In 2008, the HomeNetwork members started the development of a social NSC, namely a common intake procedure for frail elderly with complex needs. Until then, each HomeNetwork organization had procedures to start up its own health and/or welfare services. The joint procedure for starting up health and/or welfare services in the network they developed is labeled as the

'network intake'. This innovation aimed to ensure demand-oriented, instead of supply-driven, care. The network intake project involved exploration of which combination of health/welfare services provided by different HomeNetwork organizations would best fit with the elderly's needs in the home situation. The development of the network intake expanded to involve multiple organizations and took form over an eight-year period, before its launch in 2016. The case drew on intensity criterion for its selection (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Specifically, several significant changes in the market and policy context, along with the dynamic character of the network itself (see CONTEXT in Figure 2) reflect conditions of change in the socially constructed context (Bitektine and Haack, 2015). These urged HomeNetwork to engage in social NSC legitimation. By investigating the process of establishing social NSC legitimacy from the start of the network intake's development to its launch, the case allows the building of theory about the way in which social NSC legitimation patterns and mechanisms shape social SNC legitimacy over time.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Data collection

The longitudinal case study relied on diverse sources of evidence over time (see DATA in Figure 2), thereby allowing for triangulation of findings to build stronger interpretations (Bizzi and Langley, 2012; Yin, 2014). First, internal and external documents were integrated in an Nvivo database (n=249 – see Figure 2). These documents include all reports of social NSC meetings organized by the HomeNetwork between 2008 and 2017 (n=28), e-mail conversations before and after these meetings (n=92) and deliverables related to the social NSC development between 2008 and 2017 (n=129). The latter encompasses project plans, contracts, screenshots of the digital applications, brochures, presentations, websites/webpages about the social NSC

oriented towards external actors (n=109), newspaper and journal articles related to the social NSC (n=12), and policy texts and regulations (n=8).

Observation techniques were also employed. The first author attended all meetings related to the development of the NSC as an observer between 2014 and 2017 and observation reports were imported in the Nvivo database (n=33). These meetings were organized by the HomeNetwork (n=24) and external actors (n=7) and lasted one and a half to three hours. By gathering real-time data, the researcher can "see events in a way that is closer to that actually experienced by the participants, and that is sensitive to current activity and concerns" (Huy, Corley and Kraatz, 2014, p. 1657). Additionally, the first author had informal conversations with both internal and external actors. Internal actors joined the HomeNetwork for the development of the social NSC, while external actors were not engaged in developing the social NSC within the HomeNetwork. The informal conversations (summarized in Table 2) served to validate insights derived from the observations (Huy et al., 2014). These mainly took place before or after meetings, as a result of which the researcher notes were added to the meeting observation reports (n=33).

Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with different actors engaged in social NSC development between mid-2014 and 2017 (see Table 2 for an overview). These interviews lasted between one and two hours (n=45). All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim, thereby increasing the reliability of the research (Yin, 2014). By interviewing internal actors at all levels of the inter-organizational network (n=21) in combination with external actors (n=24), the risk that all informants would engage in "convergent retrospective sense making and/or impression management" was reduced (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). At several points in time, key informants were asked to comment on draft case study reports, thereby increasing the validity of the findings (Yin, 2014).

Data analysis

Process data are inherently very messy (Bizzi and Langley, 2012). As a starting point, a timeline with key dates and milestones within the development of the social NSC was generated. This is illustrated in Figure 2. Next, a chronological, thick descriptive story of social NSC legitimation was built from the data (inductive method), thereby triangulating data from documents, observations, and interviews. This organizing strategy – also labeled as a narrative strategy – is characterized by high accuracy and rich insights about processes (Eisenhardt, Graebner and Sonenshein, 2016), but generates complex narratives with limited generalizability (Langley, 1999). To facilitate the development of theoretical ideas, these narratives were turned into process flowcharts. These flowcharts depicted the actions with which actors engaged at different points in time, along with actors' interpretations of these actions. This approach allows the researcher to focus on the emergence of macro-level outcomes by homing in on micro-level actions (Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Langley, 1999).

The data analysis proceeded by identifying different types of legitimacy and different types of actors and actions along social NSC legitimation (Bizzi and Langley, 2012). To achieve this end, descriptive codes were developed for the different types of legitimacy, actors, and actions in the process flowcharts. These codes were grouped into more abstract categories (Miles et al., 2014). The abstract categories were compared with key concepts from the legitimation literature (e.g., Zimmerman and Zeitz, 2002; Lee and Hung, 2014; Bitektine and Haack, 2015; Bunduchi, 2017). Iterations between coding and revising the literature revealed three types of social NSC legitimacy (inter-organizational, multilevel, and external legitimacy), five types of actors (top managers, middle managers, frontline employees, project coordinators, and external consultants), and ten types of actions (aggregating, introducing or sharing ideas,

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signaling problems or concerns, feedback-seeking, reframing, searching for agreement, releasing budget, appointing, documenting and designing).

Further inquiry of the flowcharts – inspired by the temporal bracketing strategy proposed by Langley (1999) – revealed that the process of establishing social NSC legitimacy involves three broad periods: (1) a period oriented towards establishing inter-organizational legitimacy, labeled as inter-organizational legitimation; (2) a period concerned with establishing multilevel legitimacy, labeled as multilevel legitimation; and (3) a period focused on establishing external legitimacy, labeled as external legitimation (cf. research question 1). In each of these periods, multiple combinations of social NSC legitimation actors and actions were observed. By comparing the commonalities over time (Barley and Tolbert, 1997), two critical social NSC legitimation patterns emerged (cf. research question 2). As these patterns showed overlap with those associated with building and maintaining relationships, these patterns were labeled as courting and demonstrating commitment.

By returning to the process maps, narratives, and raw data, descriptive codes were developed to identify the mechanisms driving the enactment of courting and demonstrating commitment (cf. research question 3). These first-order codes were grouped into more abstract second-order constructs, thereby using constant comparison between emergent theory and data (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). This inductive analysis revealed two dominant social NSC legitimation mechanisms: conflicting tensions and role promotion. By engaging with the literature to sharpen the theoretical logic of relationships between constructs (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995; Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Sihvonen and Pajunen, 2018), a process model for establishing different types of social NSC legitimacy was developed.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented as follows. The first section unravels the criticality of two social NSC legitimation patterns, achieving three types of social NSC legitimacy geared to different

audiences. In the next sections, these patterns are evidenced and the underlying mechanisms are explicated. The final section unravels the complex process of building social NSC legitimacy. It uncovers three social NSC legitimation building blocks which are depicted and explained. The process is then synthesized and represented visually.

Two critical patterns for establishing three types of social NSC legitimacy

The case findings show that social NSC legitimation is made up of two complex combinations of actions in which actors engage at different points in time. They show parallels with the manner in which human relationships develop. Hence, the two patterns are denoted as 'courting' and 'demonstrating commitment', analogous with critical legitimacy-building patterns in relationship development (Holmberg and MacKenzie, 2002; Goodfriend and Agnew, 2008). A couple engages in early relationship activities of courting, namely testing the water. At this stage they engage in behaviors to increase communication, open up and share ideas about the way they perceive the relationship. In this early phase, there are signals of intentions but limited investment in the relationship. However, a favorable atmosphere is set where a future credible relationship is envisaged. Over time, changes in the relationship occur as the couple builds on positive judgements of each other. Commitment to the relationship is gradually made and demonstrated. Commitment is exhibited through tangible investments (such as ring-giving, asset sharing in our couple example).

These two dominant patterns led to the establishment of three types of legitimacy: (1) inter-organizational legitimacy – legitimacy among the top managers of the HomeNetwork organizations, (2) multilevel legitimacy – legitimacy among employees working at different levels of the organizations embedded in the HomeNetwork, and (3) external legitimacy – legitimacy among actors outside the HomeNetwork. Appendix 1 provides detailed descriptions and illustrative case evidence of the attainment of these three types of legitimacy. The following sections detail the patterns of courting and demonstrating commitment and show how they were

enacted to establish these types of social NSC legitimacy. It also explicates the way mechanisms of conflicting tensions and role promotion underpin these patterns. Further evidence is provided by referring to specific social NSC legitimation actions detailed in Appendix 2.

The enactment of "courting" and its underlying mechanisms

The first pattern (denoted as courting) clusters a set of actions oriented around 'setting the scene' and 'boundary scanning'. Scene setting involves creating an atmosphere in which social NSC development is welcomed. Here, individual actors open up to meet with one another, introduce ideas, and signal concerns (see setting the scene 1 [aggregating], 2 [introducing or sharing ideas] and 3 [signaling problems or concerns] in Appendix 2). The second set of actions, boundary scanning, encompasses identifying and addressing constraints for social NSC development. Here, individual actors - whether or not during meetings – query each other, engage in reframing, and seek agreement (see scanning boundaries 1 [feedback-seeking], 2 [reframing] and 3 [searching for agreement] in Appendix 2). Individual actors go back and forth between scene setting and boundary scanning actions, in all denoted as courting.

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY. The case evidence shows that, in establishing inter-organizational legitimacy, top managers and external consultants regularly engaged in a form of courting. In 2008, for instance, the top managers of all the network member organizations met twice to exchange ideas about how to deal with the topical issue at hand; vulnerable people who fall through the cracks of healthcare/welfare provision (setting the scene 1). Through these meetings they introduced the idea of a network intake (setting the scene 2). The top managers queried each other about the appropriateness of a network intake for increasing the accessibility of healthcare/welfare provision (scanning boundaries 1). Although the managers agreed that this new service might benefit vulnerable people, several of them expressed concerns about potential negative implications for individual HomeNetwork

organizations (setting the scene 3). One senior manager, for instance, expressed concerns about missing out on public funds for their own organization if they engaged in a collaborative venture. Concurrently, those top managers, whose organizations were already funded to carry out intake activities, suggested they take on the lead role in the network intake development process. In so doing, they referred to their existing competencies, experience and repertoire of methods to coordinate the care planning of people with complex needs (scanning boundaries 2). To get other top managers on board, they also stressed governmental recognition of such methods and competences (scanning boundaries 3).

The example above is indicative of wider behaviors where actors engaged and re-engaged in courting activities to bridge underlying tensions between individual organization-specific interests (here, funding for organizations) and the network interest (here, helping vulnerable people). However, courting activities to bridge organization-network tensions were not always successful. In the example cited above, top managers who proposed taking the lead role were suspected of prioritizing organizational interests. This is illustrated by the reaction of a senior representative of another organization: "*Other network partners also have process-based methodologies and competences to complete coordination tasks. The coordination tasks are a shared responsibility for all network partners.*" (top manager of home help provider A, concept paper, version August 2013). To address this concern, the top managers invited external consultants to chair meetings of representatives of each HomeNetwork organization (setting the scene 1). Actors gathered information about organization-specific interests and intake procedures during these meetings (scanning boundaries 1). The inclusion of external consultants was then taken up more widely. Taken together, the establishment of inter-organizational legitimacy was enabled when courting among top managers was supplemented by the inclusion of independent actors. These actors were able to transcend conflicts of interests.

MULTILEVEL LEGITIMACY. In this social NSC legitimation building block, not only top managers and external consultants but also middle managers, frontline employees, and

a project coordinator engaged in the courting pattern. At the end of 2014, for instance, the top managers organized a workshop for all frontline employees and middle managers engaged in intake procedures to further develop the new network intake model designed by external consultants (setting the scene 1). After a short presentation about the new model and its benefits for all the organizational network members (scanning boundaries 2), frontline employees were invited to give feedback (scanning boundaries 1). Here, a number of frontline employees questioned the relevance of the network intake model (setting the scene 3). They felt there was a misfit with their daily routines. This is reflected in the following recorded observation "*all roles/tasks in the network intake process are already fulfilled by the employees of all organizations*" and "*our employees often refer to partners that do not belong to [the HomeNetwork].*" – observation report HomeNetwork workshop, December 2014).

Tensions between frontline employee interests of defending regular work and routines and the organization/network interests in changing routines became evident. These were overcome through the activities of a project coordinator. He was previously appointed by the top manager group and was tasked to set up local group meetings for frontline employees operating in the same region (setting the scene 1). He also carried out enquiries with these employees about the network intake (scanning boundaries 1). However such courting activities did not always help bridge employee-organization/network tensions, as illustrated by the project coordinator: *"A lot of frontline employees contacted me after the first meeting to inform me that participation in the project – and especially the expectations that the project is shaped via a bottom-up approach – is not realistic if they are not exempted from a part of their regular work."* (interview project coordinator, November 2015). It transpired that a lack of authority restrained the project coordinator from pulling frontline employees out of their regular work. Hence, the project coordinator signaled this issue to senior managers (setting the scene 3) and asked them about the amount of time that employees could spend on developing the network intake (scanning boundaries 1). Such employee-organization/network tensions were only bridged when project coordinators and top

managers separately engaged in courting activities with the employees. In so doing they were both able to reinforce the importance of the network intake for the HomeNetwork organizations by sharing the same information. In other words, establishment of multilevel legitimacy was enabled by aligning the courting activities of independent actors (here, project coordinator) and actors with a managerial role (here, top managers). This enabled transcendence of conflict of interests.

EXTERNAL LEGITIMACY. Courting activities to establish legitimacy among end users, referrers, and governmental actors were initiated by back-office employees along with the HomeNetwork actors mentioned in the previous building blocks. A number of frontline employees, for instance, invited local referrers to one of the local group meetings (setting the scene 1). Here they introduced the idea of a network intake (setting the scene 2) and asked local referrers to give their opinion (scanning boundaries 1). A concern was aired in relation to the freedom of choice for clients (setting the scene 3). For instance, one referrer commented: "*A client cannot be referred to an organization if they prefer another organization*" (interview referrer, March 2017). In response to these concerns, a number of local group members proposed bringing non-HomeNetwork organizations into the network intake development process (setting the scene 2). However, they were aware of the potential drop-out of HomeNetwork actors who were in favor of limiting partner organization numbers. These actors felt a particular element of the service, integrated care, might be adversely affected. Hence the local group members gathered information about the conditions under which incorporation of non-HomeNetwork organizations would be accepted by others (scanning boundaries 1) and used this information to encourage actors to adopt an alternative perspective (scanning boundaries 2). Here again, actors re-engaged in courting activities to bridge tensions between organization/network interests (here, offering integrated care) and those of external actors (here, client choice).

Once again HomeNetwork actors were not always able to bridge such tensions. Indeed, some external actors perceived the HomeNetwork as a set of market-leading organizations who

wanted to push competitors out of the market under the guise of developing a social NSC. In those situations, HomeNetwork partners who re-engaged in courting were suspected of prioritizing organizational interests rather than the social objective. To enable the establishment of external legitimacy, the HomeNetwork actors engaged in courting patterns with external actors who perceived the HomeNetwork as a reliable partner, while they withdrew from courting patterns with other external actors. By doing so, the HomeNetwork actors were able to bridge organization/network-external actor tensions and hence contribute to establishing external legitimacy.

SUMMARY. The establishment of inter-organizational, multilevel, and external legitimacy was characterized by respectively organization-network, employee-organization/network and organization/network-external actor tensions. Further illustrative case evidence in Appendix 3 supports these findings. These conflicting tensions explain why HomeNetwork actors engaged in courting activities with each other as evident across all types of social NSC legitimacy. By re-engaging in courting activities, conflicting tensions were bridged. Hence this established (1) inter-organizational legitimacy when courting between top managers was joined by independent actors, (2) multilevel legitimacy when courting activities of independent actors were aligned with those of actors with managerial roles, and (3) external legitimacy when courting was restricted to external actors who considered the HomeNetwork as a reliable partner (see Table 3).

The enactment of "demonstrating commitment" and its underlying mechanisms

To ensure that the establishment of different types of social NSC legitimacy was not interrupted, the findings show that individual actors made efforts to practice what they preach. The second dominant pattern (denoted as demonstrating commitment) hence comprises actions of 'investing' and 'developing'. The findings show that this pattern tends to follow courting. Investing refers to individuals spending time, money, or committing other tangible resources to

social NSC development, whether or not in consultation with one another. It includes actions to release budgets and appoint critical personnel (see investing 1 [releasing budget] and 2 [appointing] in Appendix 2). The second action set is developing. This embraces the generation of observable social NSC deliverables – whether or not as a group – through actions such as documenting and designing (see developing 1 [documenting] and 2 [designing] in Appendix 2). These actions, in relation to attainment of the different legitimacy types, are discussed below. Again, specific social NSC legitimation actions, which support the discussion, are referred to in Appendix 2.

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY. Subsequent to courting activities, top managers engaged in demonstrating commitment to the new service. Before 2013, two top managers committed several months to the project (investing 1). These time investments resulted in a concrete project plan (developing 1) and a draft model for the network intake (developing 2). These top managers wanted to prove their commitment towards addressing the social objective of the new service, as illustrated by the following quote: "*I really wanted to go for it. During home visits, I was confronted with poignant situations. The network intake would allow me to do something about it*" (interview top manager, August 2014). The need to promote their role as a social innovator was an important mechanism driving commitments from these top managers. However, this type of role promotion was not shared by all top managers in the early stages of the new service development: "*At the start, our collaboration agreement was very new, but few changes were realized at the network level. We were all market leading organizations. There was no need to engage in additional innovations. In more recent years, all network partners are individually and collectively weakened, as a consequence of which the network activities - such as the development of a network intake - gets more attention.*" (observation report top management group meeting, June 2014).

However, the notion of a network intake responded, in parallel, to a growing interest in integrated care among the parent organizations and the government. Thus, top managers were eager to associate themselves with the network intake as it was perceived as a relevant and

topical social innovation and likely to engender positive reputation effect. This role as social innovator proved attractive and each top manager allocated €4.000 to the development of the network intake (investing 1). This investment was used to hire external consultants who helped with the design of the network intake model (investing 2). Specifically, these external consultants contributed to the establishment of a roadmap for the HomeNetwork members (developing 1). Hence, the desire by top managers to promote themselves as social innovators induced widespread engagement in tangible displays of commitment. This supported the establishment of inter-organizational legitimacy at the top management level.

MULTILEVEL LEGITIMACY. The top managers also engaged in tangible commitments to establish legitimacy at multiple levels of the network of partners. Specifically, the senior managers funded the hiring of a project coordinator (investing 2). The project coordinator prepared a tangible plan of action to engage frontline employees in the design of the network intake procedure at the local level (developing 1). By taking the lead role in committing to the project, the project coordinator really wanted to make progress. This reflected his identification with a role as the overall champion of the project. Nevertheless, the project coordinator noticed that frontline employees were not convinced that the development of the network intake at the local level was a key priority for top and middle managers, thereby necessitating courting patterns between the project coordinators and the top and middle managers. Top and middle managers feared losing face by not being able to motivate employees. Hence, they exempted those frontline employees participating in the project from their ordinary duties (investing 1). This encouraged them to engage in the development of a network intake model (developing 2). Taken together, this evidence suggests that multilevel legitimacy is established when independent actors take the lead role in demonstrating commitment, whilst also involving top managers and employees.

EXTERNAL LEGITIMACY. Several HomeNetwork actors engaged in displays of commitment in interactions with end users, referrers, and governmental actors. Specifically, most of the top managers relieved the IT and communication specialists, within their organizations, from their normal duties to allow engagement in inter-organizational teams (investing 1). This assisted the further development of the network intake and resulted in the development of a new IT support system for information exchange between the HomeNetwork partners and referring organizations (developing 2). This investment also supported a plan for communicating the network intake project at the local level (developing 1).

The desire to be seen as fulfilling a role as connector acted as an important mechanism driving commitments in this legitimation building block: "*We will have to work together in networks – whether it is a good idea or not. From that point of view, we can only strengthen the ties with other organizations and engage in the provision of integrated care.*" (observation report top and middle management meeting, September 2015). As background to this quote, the HomeNetwork actors anticipated policy reform of primary care which would favor integrated care initiatives developed by inter-organizational networks. Hence the role of social innovator was a strong propeller of action.

The case evidence, however, demonstrated that this type of commitment was only significant in influencing external legitimacy when external actors, especially referrers, also perceived the HomeNetwork as a reliable partner. Several referrers assumed that the network intake was a way to strengthen ties among the organizations in the network, rather than addressing the social objective. This is encapsulated in the following argument: "*It is no longer the time to strengthen ties among home care providers with similar ideological roots.*" (interview referrer, April 2016). In this context, the communication team decided to downplay the role of the HomeNetwork[ii]. To achieve this end, a PR consultant was hired (investing 2) who developed a new name with a new logo and a separate website (developing 2). The local group members also invited a range of local actors to attend an event in the beginning of 2016 (investing 1). During this event, the network intake procedure was launched (developing 2). Taken together,

commitment display was found to contribute to establishing external legitimacy by downplaying the role of the HomeNetwork during interactions with external actors.

SUMMARY. The findings suggest that role promotion is a dominant mechanism driving behaviors to establish different types of social NSC legitimacy. In this case, roles as social innovator, project champion, and connector were prominent. These are further supported by illustrative case evidence in Appendix 3. Specifically, these types of role promotion are pivotal in explaining why HomeNetwork actors engaged in various demonstrations of commitment. Overall, demonstrating commitment was critical in establishing (1) inter-organizational legitimacy when all top managers were involved, (2) multilevel legitimacy when the independent actor took the lead role while involving top managers and employees, and (3) external legitimacy when the HomeNetwork actors demonstrated commitment under a new identity. In those situations, the social NSC deliverables were used to set the scene in courting patterns with new audiences (see Table 3).

The process of establishing social NSC legitimacy

The case study findings unravel three types of legitimacy; inter-organizational, multilevel and external legitimacy, which were critical to the establishment of social NSC legitimacy. The establishment, over time, of these legitimacy types was decisive in the successful development of the social NSC. As illustrated by the case evidence, establishing one type of legitimacy supported another type of legitimacy and this continued over time. Hence, the establishment of a specific type of legitimacy is referred to as a building block, which forms the basis for establishing other types of legitimacy. Figure 3 visually depicts the three building blocks. In doing so, it highlights the mechanisms that underpin the way social NSC legitimation patterns lead to the establishment of a specific type of social NSC legitimacy.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Figure 3 also shows that the three legitimation building blocks did not occur simultaneously within the case studied. From 2008 until end-2014, efforts were focused on achieving inter-organizational legitimacy among top managers of the organizations which comprised the focal network (HomeNetwork partner organizations). Towards the end of 2014, the focus broadened to actors operating at different levels of the organizations within the network, which comprised frontline employees, middle managers, and staff members in the parent organizations. As such, multilevel legitimacy was achieved. From mid-2015, external legitimacy was built up and finally achieved with actors outside the network, including end users (e.g., elderly people and homeless people) and referrers (e.g., social service departments in hospitals and general practitioners).

Yet, the process of establishing legitimacy moved from one building block to another, shifting the audience target once legitimacy with one audience type had been achieved. It is to be noted that the process of establishing legitimacy started with the smallest audience, namely top managers, and gradually broadened in scope. In this way, the legitimizing actors were able to gradually scale-up the process and hedge against losing face, early on, at an organization or network-wide level. This is illustrated by the following quote: *"Our employees are not eager to innovate our service. We have just completed a major re-organization. We must ensure that our partner organizations are really motivated to go along with the development of the network intake. Otherwise, our employees will not take us seriously."* (interview top manager, August 2014). To establish the different types of social NSC legitimacy over time, different actors were found to engage in courting and demonstrating commitment. However, the case evidence shows that these patterns manifest themselves in different ways across the different building blocks due to variety in underlying mechanisms. Table 3 synthesizes the major similarities and differences in terms of social NSC legitimation patterns and their underlying mechanisms across the different building blocks.

Insert Table 3 about here

As shown in Table 3, courting was triggered by conflicting interests of the various actors. These conflicting tensions created a recurrent atmosphere of competition, whereby actors defended and promoted the interests of the groups to which they belong. To bridge these tensions, actors were found to (re-)engage in courting activities. The enactment of courting activities, however, differed across the social NSC legitimation building blocks, as each social NSC legitimation building block involved a specific audience characterized by a specific type of conflicting tensions. Inter-organizational legitimation goes along with organization-network tensions, multilevel legitimation with employee-organization/network tensions, and external legitimation with organization/network-external tensions (see Table 3).

Next, the findings show that social NSC development created flux and fluidity in roles. This induced actors to protect and propel the role that they identified with. The identification of actors with particular roles and protection of such roles was a dominant mechanism driving engagement in demonstrating commitment. Here again, the enactment of demonstrating commitment differed across the social NSC legitimation building blocks, because different types of audiences induced actors to promote different roles. Inter-organizational legitimation was complemented with promoting the role of social innovator, multilevel legitimation with promoting the role of project champion, and external legitimation with promoting the role of connector (see Table 3).

Taken together, social NSC legitimation is a dynamic process of establishing different types of social NSC legitimacy through courting and demonstrating commitment, but the enactment of these patterns determines whether respectively conflicting tensions are bridged and desired roles are promoted.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical implications

Drawing on a longitudinal case study in the home care sector, the present research has explored how legitimacy is established in the development of social innovation within inter-organizational networks. By depicting the process of legitimation of social innovations in networks, this research contributes to a better understanding of how social innovators can gain access to resources. It builds on previous research that has indicated that accessing resources is not only one of the most important concerns for social innovators in the pre-launch stage (Weeravardena and Mort, 2008) but is also associated with establishing legitimacy for the innovation (Bunduchi, 2017). However, previous research on establishing legitimacy for innovation has focused on either internal audiences (e.g., Bunduchi, 2017; Ito, 2018) or external audiences (e.g., Laïfa and Josserand, 2016; Wilner and Huff, 2017). In relation to social innovation, this research demonstrates the need to seek and attain legitimacy with both audiences, although the boundaries between internal and external audiences are blurred in a dynamic network context. In our case, for example, a lack of legitimacy among employees almost halted the development of the social NSC, even though it was concurrently supported by their managers and the government. In other words, managers and governmental actors acted as allies, even though they operated within and beyond the network boundaries.

Further, the study provides novel insight into the process of establishing legitimacy for innovations developed in inter-organizational networks. So far, networked innovation processes have attracted widespread research attention and show that the involvement of different organizations adds complexity to innovation processes (Dhanaraj and Parkhe, 2006; Dougherty, 2017). Innovation legitimation in the context of inter-organizational networks, however, is not well understood. In contrast with studies on the legitimation of innovation initiated by a single organization (van Dijk et al., 2011; Bunduchi, 2017; Ito, 2018), the study findings show that early attention should be paid to scoping legitimation at the network level and achieving inter-

organizational legitimacy. The development of the network intake in the case, for instance, could only start when organizations with different expertise were willing to join forces. This adds novelty beyond existing legitimation research that proposes early focus on the functional diversity of actors within organizations (Bunduchi, 2017). The findings suggest a challenging shift in mindset and focus from the single organization to the network perspective. In other words, the findings suggest it is at the network, not the individual organization, level where early favorable judgements about the social innovation should be sought.

Next, the findings show how the scope of social NSC legitimation gradually broadens to a larger audience of actors operating at different levels of the network organizations (multilevel legitimacy). Social NSC legitimation, in this sense, takes the form of network mobilization around a common issue (Ritvala and Salmi, 2010). This is a critical step in achieving legitimacy within inter-organizational networks, as it precedes and also contributes to establishing legitimacy among an even larger audience of end users and referrers (external legitimacy). Through this process, members of different audiences can turn – in line with the idea of network mobilization – into legitimizing actors themselves. By gradually building up legitimacy with different audiences within and beyond the network boundaries, critical mass can be established over time, until overall legitimacy is attained. Specifically, this research shows how the achievement of social NSC legitimacy with one audience (macro-level outcome) contributes to individual actions to establish legitimacy among another one (micro-level actions) and explicates how this continues over time. By showing the interplay between micro-level actions and macro-level outcomes across different audiences, this research contributes to the multilevel theory of establishing legitimacy (Bitektine and Haack, 2015).

The study also adds to the body of research seeking to understand micro-level actions associated with establishing legitimacy for innovation (Lee and Hung, 2014; Bunduchi, 2017). This line of research is advanced in this study by eliciting critical patterns of individual

legitimation actions in relation to social innovation. Complex combinations of sets of actions with diverse actors are discerned as patterns of courting and demonstrating commitment. These patterns resonate with studies on how humans build and maintain relationships with one another (Holmberg and MacKenzie, 2002; Goodfriend and Agnew, 2008). As such, these findings build upon other studies that draw parallels with human relationship development when explaining organizational or business phenomena in a network context. In particular, it adds to scholarly work in the area of business relationship formation (Wilkinson et al., 2005) and network evolution (Paquin and Howard-Grenville, 2013). The findings augment these studies by suggesting that the courting pattern (Holmberg and Mackenzie, 2002; Wilkinson et al., 2005) contributes to establishing early stage legitimacy within a relationship, whereas demonstrating commitment (Goodfriend and Agnew, 2008; Paquin and Howard-Grenville, 2013) supports relationship continuation and the tangible securing of legitimacy across different audiences. Hence, courting precedes demonstration of commitment.

The study also shows variability in legitimation patterns. Holmberg and MacKenzie (2002) also emphasize variability, but within relationship formation patterns: "after all, actual relationships do not always follow a uniform course of development" (p. 780). The extant research finds substantial variation in how actions within a pattern are sequenced and/or combined. Courting, for instance, involves scene setting and scanning boundary actions, but the findings show that different combinations of scene setting and scanning boundary actions occur. Variability is also present in investing and developing actions, which constitute the pattern of demonstrating commitment. Such variability is inherent to the way legitimation patterns address different audiences. The study demonstrates this variability along the process of establishing different types of legitimacy, thereby uncovering underlying mechanisms to explain this variability over time. By unpicking dominant mechanisms to explain this variability, the extant research is able to show their criticality in influencing such patterns.

Mechanisms manifest themselves in different ways and drive the way legitimation patterns are enacted differently along the process of establishing legitimacy.

Specifically, the findings firstly show that courting is associated with dialectical mechanisms. Dialectical mechanisms are concerned with opposing forces (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995). Conflicting tensions among different actors acted a critical mechanism in this study. The study shows that conflicts in interests underpinned the way courting patterns were carried out differently in interactions with the various audiences. Since the type of tensions differed across audiences, social NSC legitimation was enabled when courting met specific requirements in terms of the enactment of the pattern (see Table 3). In parallel with studies on courting within human and business relationship development (Holmberg and MacKenzie, 2002; Wilkinsin et al., 2005), the study findings suggest that the presence of conflicting relational norms – if inappropriately addressed – can impede the way courting patterns are tailored to diverse audiences within the process of establishing legitimacy.

Additionally, the study findings show that engagement and variety in the legitimation pattern - demonstrating commitment – is also underpinned by a dominant mechanism. Here, teleological mechanisms – which refer to goal-driven mechanisms (Van de Ven and Poole, 1995) – explain the engagement in patterns of commitment demonstration. More particularly, the findings point to the powerful influence of the desire of actors to present their role in a favorable way towards an audience, labeled as role promotion. This explains and drives combinations of actions to demonstrate commitment. It also explains variation across the different types of legitimacy building, as the need for role promotion was stronger or weaker dependent on the different audiences who were interacting. The findings put attention to the importance of role promotion in legitimation of innovation. The process is not only driven by dialectical mechanisms, as suggested in previous research (van Dijk et al., 2011; Lee and Hung, 2014; Thyroff et al., 2018), but also inherently entangled with personal goals and ambitions.

In all, the study puts attention to the need to establish widespread legitimacy, beyond single organizations, in social innovation undertaken through inter-organizational networks. It provides novel insight into the process of establishing legitimacy and shows how this process can scale up legitimacy and reach the right audiences to attain overall favorable judgements about the innovation. New knowledge is developed by unravelling and articulating critical types of legitimacy and specifying patterns and mechanisms that underpin legitimation.

Managerial and policy implications

This research has implications for policy makers and managers of social innovations. Both parties need to be cognizant of the need to establish three types of legitimacy when developing social innovations in inter-organizational networks: inter-organizational, multilevel, and external legitimacy. They should understand who needs to be targeted for each type, respectively top managers of the network organizations, employees operating at different layers of the network organizations, and actors outside the network. Managers, responsible for developing the social innovation, are advised to shift their attention from one audience to another. As shown by the case study, managers can encourage the legitimized audience to engage in courting and demonstrating commitment to establish legitimacy among other audiences. By starting with the smallest audience and gradually broadening the scope, social innovators can scale-up the process while hedging against losing face with their own or other organizations.

To establish these legitimacy types, social innovators are advised to iteratively engage in combinations of actions akin to courting and demonstrating commitment. As these patterns involve going back and forth between different sets of actions until legitimacy among a target audience is established, social innovators need to bear in mind that legitimation can take a long time. In fact, the findings suggest that managers should avoid attempts to speed up the development of the social innovation, for instance by skipping feedback requests from diverse

actors, as this can cause resentment and ultimately slow down the legitimation. Similarly, the study alerts policy makers to the fact that legitimation takes time. If policy makers want to stimulate social innovation in inter-organizational networks, they should launch incentives for iterative re-engagement in courting and demonstrating commitment by key bodies. This likely contrasts against more common innovation incentives oriented towards speedy development of new socially oriented services, such as short-term project funding. Instead, policy makers should encourage innovators to take time and not to give up their social objective too quickly, for instance by offering longer term structural funding for actions associated with courting and demonstrating commitment within their network context.

To ensure that courting and demonstrating commitment do not unnecessarily take up scarce resources, this research also suggests managers tailor their actions towards different audiences. To establish inter-organizational and multilevel legitimacy, the research suggests that managers engage independent actors, such as project managers or external consultants. Such actors can help bridge conflicting tensions among top managers of network organizations and between employees operating at different levels of the network organizations. The research shows that such actors are seen as unbiased and are not suspected of prioritizing the interests of specific organizations or functional groups. Managers should likely find that the establishment of external legitimacy, in turn, is facilitated when patterns are enacted under a new identity. This has implications for policy makers. Firstly, it suggests they should provide the financial means for social innovating organizations to hire project managers or external consultants to help endorse the legitimacy of the social innovation. Secondly, by promoting and branding inter-organizational networks as the social innovation entity, policy makers can support social innovation within inter-organizational networks.

Limitations and future research opportunities

This research relies on retrospective data before the start of data collection in 2014 (documents and interviews). From 2014 onwards, real-time data and retrospective data were combined (documents, interviews, and observations complemented with informal conversations). This sequential approach is very common in process studies in a network context, in that network processes occur over extremely long periods (Bizzi and Langley, 2012). Although the researchers had opportunities for data triangulation before and after the point of entry in 2014, the data before 2014 were less rich than those after the point of entry in 2014. The most important limitation of this research, however, is its reliance on a single case, more particularly the legitimation of a specific social NSC from ideation to launch. Although this approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the legitimation of a specific social NSC over time, the researchers cannot exclude that this process differs, in detail, from the legitimation of other social NSCs in the focal network, social NSC legitimation in other networks, and the legitimation of other types of innovations in networks. Based upon the case characteristics, however, the researchers are confident that the insights derived from this research are also applicable to other networks engaged in developing social innovations in a changing network, market and policy context. The researchers did not aim to develop generalizable findings. Rather, the study's focus was on generating concepts that contribute to theorizing about the legitimation of social innovations originating from inter-organizational networks. To move such theorizing forward, several opportunities to develop more nuanced understanding of the manifestation of the concepts developed in the extant research. Specifically, future research could investigate the impact of the characteristics of actors engaged in these legitimation patterns for establishing legitimacy among different types of audiences. Such characteristics were not explicitly studied in this research. Additionally, whilst this research identified the nature of dominant underlying mechanisms, further research could investigate the way different

types of conflicting tensions and/or role promotion influence the way legitimation activities are carried out. To do so, future research could draw on the institutional logics literature. The identification of conflicting tensions as an underlying mechanism, for example, suggests integration of the legitimation literature with the literature on institutional logics could be valuable. Institutional logics literature draws on notions of conflicting beliefs, rules, and practices which could add crucial theoretical understanding to knowledge of the process of establishing legitimacy for social innovations (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Voltan and De Fuentes, 2016). The importance of role promotion, in turn, calls for further investigation of personal goals and ambitions of actors engaged in the development of social innovations. Finally, future research could investigate the impact of legitimation dynamics beyond the network and examine its effect on wider social objectives related to health and well-being. Here, a key question revolves around whether social benefits in the public domain depend on a long and winding road to build legitimacy.

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Appendix 1. Different types of social NSC legitimacy

TYPE	ILLUSTRATIVE CASE EVIDENCE
Inter-organizational legitimacy = social NSC legitimacy among top managers in inter-organizational network	**Support for developing a social NSC among top managers**: "*At the start, our collaboration agreement was very new, but few changes were realized at the network level. We were all market leading organizations. There was no need to engage in additional innovations. In more recent years, all network partners are individually and collectively weakened, as a consequence of which the network activities - such as the development of a network intake - get more attention.*" (observation report top management meeting, June 2014). **Enthusiasm about achieving milestone in social NSC development among top managers**: "*This network intake perfectly fits with the existing organization-specific intake practices (...) who would have thought – that after so many years of blablabla, we can finally put a model on the table that we all support?*" (interview top management meeting, October 2014)
Multilevel legitimacy = social NSC legitimacy among actors operating at different levels of the inter-organizational network	**Support for developing a social NSC among HomeNetwork actors**: "*It's nice to see that we finally have everyone on board. The employees have spent a lot of time to the development of the intake sheets since their supervisors agreed to exempt them from part of their regular work to engage in the development of the network intake.*" (observation report local group, January 2016) **Enthusiasm about achieving milestone in social NSC development among HomeNetwork actors**: "*It has cost blood sweat and tears, but we have been able to persuade them [middle managers and frontline employees] to contribute to the development of the [social NSC]. And look, today, they are presenting [the social NSC] to our local partners.*" (observation report meeting local group, February 2016)
External legitimacy = social NSC legitimacy among actors outside the inter-organizational network	**Support for developing a social NSC among external actors:** "*It [the network intake] is not bad for social service departments in hospitals. Hospitals experience pressure to reduce hospital stay to a minimum. A network intake would imply that a single phone call can help patients with complex needs.*" (interview referrer, March 2017). **Enthusiasm about social NSC development among external actors:** "*Until today, people who are in need of care need to tell their story to different service providers and again people need to explain what their specific needs are. The network intake finally puts an end to this practice.*" (press release, February 2016)

Appendix 2. Set of actions associated with social NSC legitimation patterns

COURTING	
SET OF ACTIONS	ILLUSTRATIVE CASE EVIDENCE
Setting the scene = creating an atmosphere in which social NSC development is welcomed	**1 - Aggregating**: HomeNetwork actors or external actors involved in the development of the network intake by HomeNetwork actors sitting together with one another to discuss the network intake and/or present the progress, often preceded or followed by a sandwich meal: top managers meeting with one another and with external consultants, top managers meeting with middle managers and employees within their organizations, top managers, middle managers, and employees of different organizations meeting with one another, several HomeNetwork actors meeting with external actors, employees operating in the same local region meeting with one another and external actors, and HomeNetwork actors connecting with end users, referrers, and other local stakeholders during launching events in the three local regions (observation reports of meetings and meeting reports) **2 - Introducing or sharing ideas:** HomeNetwork actors or external actors involved in the development of the network intake by HomeNetwork actors presenting the progress and/or (intermediate) deliverables to one another or new audiences (e.g., *"the project coordinator and a delegate from the top manager of the HomeNetwork organizations present the progress of the project during PlatformHome meetings* - observation reports PlatformHome meetings, November 2014, February/April/June/September/November 2015 and *"We got introduced to the project for the first time during the workshop at the end of last year. During this workshop, it was explained why a network intake was needed and how the network intake would be developed"* - observation report project group meeting, October 2015 and *presentation of network intake during launching events for end users, referrers, and other local stakeholders in three local regions* – observation reports of launching events in February/March 2016) **3 - Signaling problems or concerns:** HomeNetwork actors or external actors involved in the development of the network intake by HomeNetwork actors sharing stories with one another and external actors to highlight the importance of a network intake (e.g., *"Top manager of health insurer shares harrowing stories from visits to people's home last summer – such as a drug-addicted mother with 5 children – and explains how involving a coordinator would help to avoid that these people fall through the cracks of healthcare and welfare provision"* - observation report top management group meeting, September 2014) or reporting problems associated with developing a network intake (e.g., *"We often refer to partners that do not belong to the HomeNetwork if offerings of HomeNetwork partners are insufficient to meet the clients' needs. These practices are not incorporated in the conceptual model."* - top manager from home help provider A, HomeNetwork concept paper 2013 and *"A lot of frontline employee contacted me after the first meeting to inform me that participation in the project – and especially the expectations that the project gets shape via a bottom-up approach – is not realistic if they are not exempted from a part of their regular work."* - interview project coordinator, November 2015)
Scanning boundaries = identifying and addressing restraints for social NSC development	**1 - Feedback-seeking**: HomeNetwork actors and external actors involved by the HomeNetwork actors asking individuals for feedback (e.g., *project coordinator inviting external consultant to share insights from survey among end users and referrers* - e-mail from project coordinator to external consultant, November 2015) or collecting feedback from different actors during meetings or events (e.g., *top managers asking feedback about social NSC model and development method during meeting with middle managers and frontline employees* - observation report HomeNetwork workshop, December 2014)

| (continued) | **2 - Reframing:** HomeNetwork actors and external actors involved by the HomeNetwork actors encouraging one another to adopt an alternative perspective on the network intake – whether or not by referring to existing rules, norms, practices, and interests (e.g., "*The conceptual model always starts from the home and care decree, but if we start from [an alternative model for chronic ill] then you see that the role of case manager also is entrusted to the nurse*" - top manager, HomeNetwork concept paper 2013 and "*This [alternative] model fits with the cooperation principles as described in the concept paper authored by PlatformHome (version 12-02-2013).*" - top manager from home help provider B commenting on HomeNetwork concept paper 2013) and/or using tools to guide discussions among groups of actors (e.g., "*Home help and home nursing providers hold plea for a shared network file, whereas health insurers argue - based upon their experience of owning the IT infrastructure for [another project] - that sharing network files involves several IT complexities and are therefore in favor of involving coordinator to share network intake information.*" - observation report top management group meeting, September 2014) |
| | **3 - Searching for agreement**: HomeNetwork actors and external actors involved by the HomeNetwork searching for agreement within groups of actors who meet with one another (e.g., "*Top managers discuss pros and cons of both options [replacing organization-specific intake procedures by network intake versus adding network intake to organization-specific intake procedures), but do not come to a conclusion.*" - observation report top management group meeting, July 2014) or between groups of actors (e.g., "*I see myself as a mediator between the different steering groups. I attend all these meetings and make sure that the different steering groups understand each other.*" - project coordinator, April 2015) |

DEMONSTRATING COMMITMENT

SET OF ACTIONS	ILLUSTRATIVE CASE EVIDENCE
Investing = spending time, money, and/or other resources to social NSC development	**1 - Releasing budget:** HomeNetwork actors investing money in the development of the network intake (e.g., *each of the top managers allocating a starting budget of €4.000 to the network intake project*) **2 - Appointing:** HomeNetwork actors appointing other actors within HomeNetwork organizations to participate in the development of the network intake (e.g.,*"Top managers agree to define the required competencies for each of the roles/tasks in network intake process and then check who is most competent to fulfill these roles/tasks in interaction with the middle managers and employees.*" - observation report top management group meeting, October 2014) and also hire external actors to participate in the development of the network intake (e.g., "*This morning, the HomeNetwork partners officially agreed to involve you in the development of a network intake. We would like to schedule a first meeting with you in short notice to discuss our project.*" - e-mail from top manager from home help provider A to external consultants, May 2014)
Developing = generating observable social NSC deliverables	**1 - Documenting:** HomeNetwork actors and external actors involved by the HomeNetwork actors writing plans to develop the network intake (e.g., *project plan November 2008, roadmap for further model development, September 2014)* or making notes of the agreements made (e.g., *summary of key principles of a network intake in HomeNetwork concept paper 2013, proposal to be accepted as pilot project for integrated care by PlatformHome)* **2 - Designing:** HomeNetwork actors and external actors involved by the HomeNetwork actors designing network intake models (e.g., *concept paper, version May 2013 and version August 2013),* the network intake procedures and supporting systems (e.g., *network intake procedure with network intake sheets and new ICT system, January 2016)* and the launch of the network intake (e.g., *new logo and website, January 2016,* and *launching events in three local regions in February/March 2016*)

Appendix 3. Mechanisms underlying social NSC legitimation patterns

CONFLICTING TENSIONS	
TYPE	**ILLUSTRATIVE CASE EVIDENCE**
Organization-network = conflicts of interests between inter-organizational network and its member organizations	*"At the start, our collaboration agreement was very new, but few changes were realized at the network level. We were all market leading organizations. There was no need to engage in additional innovations."* (observation report top management group meeting, June 2014).
Employee-organization/network = conflicts of interests between employees and organization/ network	*"Our top management is in favor of intensified collaboration among HomeNetwork members. People doing the field work - such as central intakers - are rather hesitant towards these plans."* (interview with frontline employee, February 2015). *"We felt - notwithstanding the lack of enthusiasm for developing a network intake among our employees - pressure to continue the development of the network intake [with HomeNetwork partners]. PlatformHome – who accepted [the social NSC] as a pilot project – expected us to report our progress during a peer supervision session in February."* (interview top manager, April 2015)
Organization/network-external actors = conflicts of interests between external actors and organization/network	*"Why are the logos of the partner organizations in the brochure? We are also collaborating with other partners if this benefits the client. The brochure should focus on what we offer for people with complex needs instead of promoting our organizations."* (observation report local group meeting, December 2015) *"We cannot refer patients to the HomeNetwork if they do not want home care or prefer another home care organization. Moreover, if patients do not have preferences for specific home care organizations, we typically refer these patients to the home care providers associated with their health insurer."* (interview referrer, March 2017)
ROLE PROMOTION	
TYPE	**ILLUSTRATIVE CASE EVIDENCE**
Promotion of role as social innovator = the need to present oneself as a social innovator	*"I really wanted to go for it. During home visits, I was confronted with poignant situations. The network intake would allow me to do something about it"* (interview top manager, August 2014) *"As market leaders, we must take our responsibility. We have to make an extra effort for people who fall through the cracks of healthcare and welfare provision."* (observation report top management group meeting, July 2014)
Promotion of role as project champions = the need to present oneself as a project champion	*"I try to steer the project in the right direction. It is really important to me that we succeed. If the network intake fails, they will look at me. I'm the project coordinator."* (interview project coordinator, November 2015) *"Our employees are not eager to innovate our service. We have just completed a major re-organization. We must ensure that our partner organizations are really motivated to go along with the development of the network intake. Otherwise, our employees will not take us seriously."* (interview top managers, August 2014).
Promotion of role as connector = the need to present oneself as a connector	*"We will have to work together in networks – whether it is a good idea or not. From that point of view, we can only strengthen the ties with other organizations and engage in the provision of integrated care."* (observation report top and middle management meeting, September 2015). *"the HomeNetwork should ensure that hospitals see the value of a network intake: contacting one organization (the HomeNetwork) instead of all home care providers separately to ensure that the complex needs are met."* (interview project coordinator – November 2015)

Table 1. Overview of key papers on the legitimation of innovations

Paper	Focus	Process of establishing legitimacy = legitimation	Outcomes of legitimation = legitimacy	
			Internal audiences	External audiences
Zimmerman and Zeith, 2002	Conceptual paper about the legitimation of **new ventures** and its impact on venture growth	**Legitimation strategies**: conformation, selection, manipulation, and creation strategies of new ventures were found to contribute to establishing legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (governments, society, professional and scientific bodies, industry members, …)
Humphreys, 2010	Discourse analysis about the legitimation of **new consumption practices** (casino gambling between 1980 and 2007)	**Legitimation strategies and mechanisms**: semiotic categories in discourses in the media – which were driven by competing meanings – were found to shape legitimacy through selection (determining what is known about practices), valuation (coloring the way in which practices are judged by language choice), and realization (making practices newsworthy)		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (consumers, public, government)
Van Dijk, Berends, Jelinek, Romme and Weggeman, 2011	Grounded theory about the legitimation of **radical innovations** (5 radical innovation trajectories in an electronics and chemicals company in Europe)	**Legitimation strategies and mechanisms:** conformance, transformation, selection, and tolerance-seeking strategies of innovation teams within the firm – which were driven by respectively ambiguity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity – were found to contribute to establishing legitimacy	Legitimacy among **internal audiences** (different stakeholders within the firm: people from R&D, marketing/business development, and senior management)	
Van Driel and Koene, 2011	Discourse analysis about the legitimation of **new business** (temporary work agencies in the Netherlands between 1961 and 1996)	**Legitimation strategies:** rhetorical strategy of self-restraint by temporary work agencies (i.e., emphasis on supplementary nature of new business rather than threat for other businesses) was found to contribute to establishing legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (government and labour union)
Giesler, 2012	Case study of legitimation of **product innovation** (Botox Cosmetics between 2002 and 2010)	**Legitimation strategies:** developing the new brand image that resolves contradictions (story development), validating the new brand image through socially sanctified experts (authorization), enacting new brand image - creating representatives who specify new image's consumer roles (identity performance), and ensuring that all other consumers in the network adopt the new brand image (diffusion) by the producing firms were found to contribute to establishing legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (market)
Garud, Schildt and Lant, 2014	Conceptual paper about the legitimation of **new ventures**	**Legitimation actions:** projective storytelling by entrepreneurs to set, maintain, and repair expectations were found to contribute to establishing legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (stakeholders)
Lee and Hung, 2014	Case study about the legitimation of **illegal products** (Shan-Zhai mobile phones in China)	**Legitimation actions, patterns and mechanisms:** combinations of renaming, articulation, and dissemination (framing), combinations of convergence, value chain formation, and cluster building (aggregating), and combinations of outside marketers, technological partners, and political linkages (bridging) of entrepreneurs and sympathizers – which were driven by institutional conflicts and ambiguities – were found to contribute to establishing legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (community, public, and state)

Laïfa and Josserand, 2016	Case study about the legitimation of a **new business model** (digital library for French business schools)	**Legitimation strategies:** strategies of the <u>firm</u> that differ in terms of legitimacy dimension (moral, pragmatic, cognitive), aspect of practice (offer configuration, value system, and revenue model), and context (grandes écoles or small vocational business schools) were found to contribute to establishing legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (clients and publishers)
Bunduchi, 2017	Case study about the legitimation of **product innovations** (3 product innovations in a large consumer technology company)	**Legitimation actions, patterns and mechanisms:** <u>innovators within the firm</u> engaging in conformance strategies by seeking feedback, lobbying, and building internal and external relationships, selection strategies by seeking feedback and building internal relationships, and manipulation strategies by lobbying – which were driven by contextual changes - were found to contribute to establishing legitimacy	Legitimacy among **internal audiences** (different stakeholders within the firm)	
Wilner and Huff, 2017	Case study about how changes in product design have contributed to the legitimation of **product innovation** (sex toys covered in mainstream media over a 25-year period)	**Legitimation strategies and mechanisms:** strategic design work by <u>producing firms</u> – which was driven by contested cultural meanings – was found to establish and reinforce mainstream media frames, which establishes and reinforces legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (market)
Ito, 2018	Case study about the legitimation of **new business development projects** (5 projects at Canon and 1 project at Marukome)	**Legitimation strategies:** interorganizational endorsement (i.e., endorsement by prominent <u>external firms or organizations</u>) contributed to establishing legitimacy, but this was dependent on (1) the credibility of the evaluation of the new business technology or products by a prominent firm or individual, (2) the credibility of the evaluation of a need for, or the commercial potential of, the new business due to a prominent firm initiating business discussions or becoming a customer, and (3) referencing and use of an endorser's economic and/or social status	Legitimacy among **internal audiences** (stakeholders within the firm)	
Thyroff, Siemens and Murray, 2018	Conceptual paper about the legitimation of **technological innovation** (nanotechnology)	**Legitimation strategies and mechanisms:** interactions and negotiations among <u>industry</u>, <u>academia</u>, <u>government</u>, and <u>NGOs</u> – which were driven by varying discourses – were found to establish legitimacy		Legitimacy among **external audiences** (market)
This study	Case study about the legitimation of **social NSC** (network intake in the home care sector)	**Legitimation actions, patterns and mechanisms**: combinations of setting the scene and scanning boundaries (courting) and combinations of investing and developing (commitment display) by <u>managers</u>, <u>employees</u>, and <u>independent actors</u> – which were driven by respectively conflicting tensions and role promotion – were found to contribute to establishing social NSC legitimacy	Legitimacy among **internal audiences** (different organizations in the network and its constituent members)	Legitimacy among **external audiences** (end users, referrers, and governmental actors) => inter-organizational, multilevel, and external legitimacy

Table 2. Overview of informal conversations and interviews

INTERNAL ACTORS		Type of interview
HomeNetwork	Project coordinator 1	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Project coordinator 2	2 in-depth interviews + informal conversations
HomeNetwork organization 1: health insurer A	Top manager	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Middle managers	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Frontline employees	informal conversations
	Back-office employees	informal conversations
HomeNetwork organization 2: health insurer B	Top manager	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Middle managers	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Frontline employees	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
HomeNetwork organization 3: home help provider A	Top manager (until mid-2014)	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Top manager (as from mid-2014)	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Middle managers	informal conversations
	Frontline employees	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Back-office employees	informal conversations
HomeNetwork organization 4: home help provider B	Top manager (until end-2014)	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Top manager (as from 2015)	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Middle managers	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Frontline employees	informal conversations
HomeNetwork organization 5: nursing provider	Top manager	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Middle manager	1 in-depth interview + informal conversations
	Frontline employee	informal conversations
	Back-office employees	informal conversations
Nursing homes added to HomeNetwork	Top managers	3 in-depth interviews + informal conversations
	Frontline employees	2 in-depth interviews + informal conversations
EXTERNAL ACTORS		Type of interviews
Governmental actors	Advisor to Minister	1 in-depth interview
PlatformHome	Representatives of member organizations	informal conversations
	Coordinators of integrated care projects	informal conversations
External agencies	External consultants	informal conversations
	Communication experts	informal conversations
Referrers	Head of social department of hospital	3 in-depth interviews
	Social assistants in hospitals	4 in-depth interviews
	Social welfare employee	1 in-depth interview
End users	Elderly people	7 in-depth interviews
	Family members	6 in-depth interviews

Table 3. Enactment of patterns across building blocks and underlying mechanisms

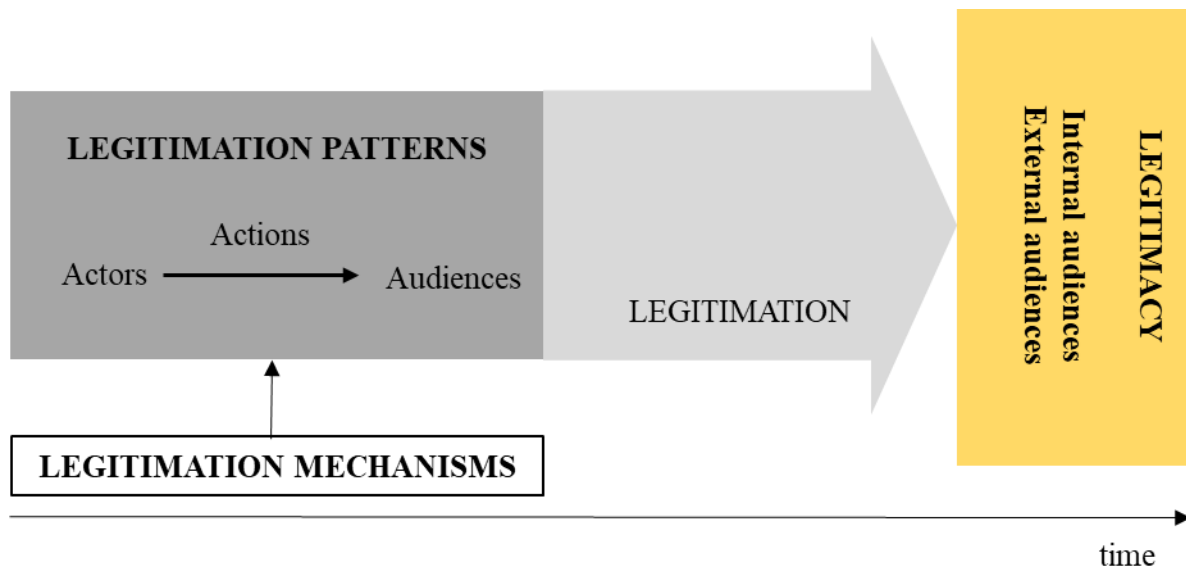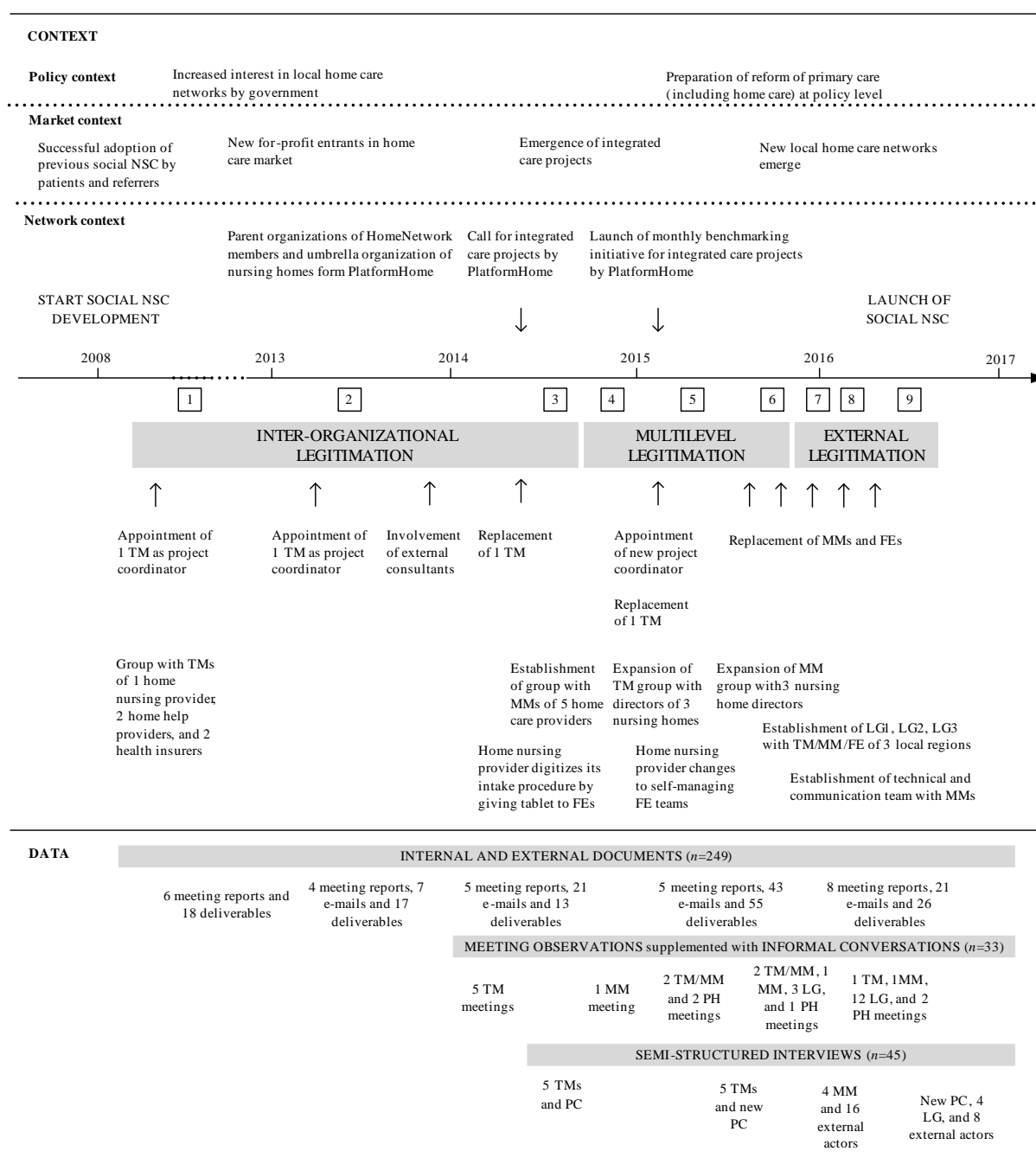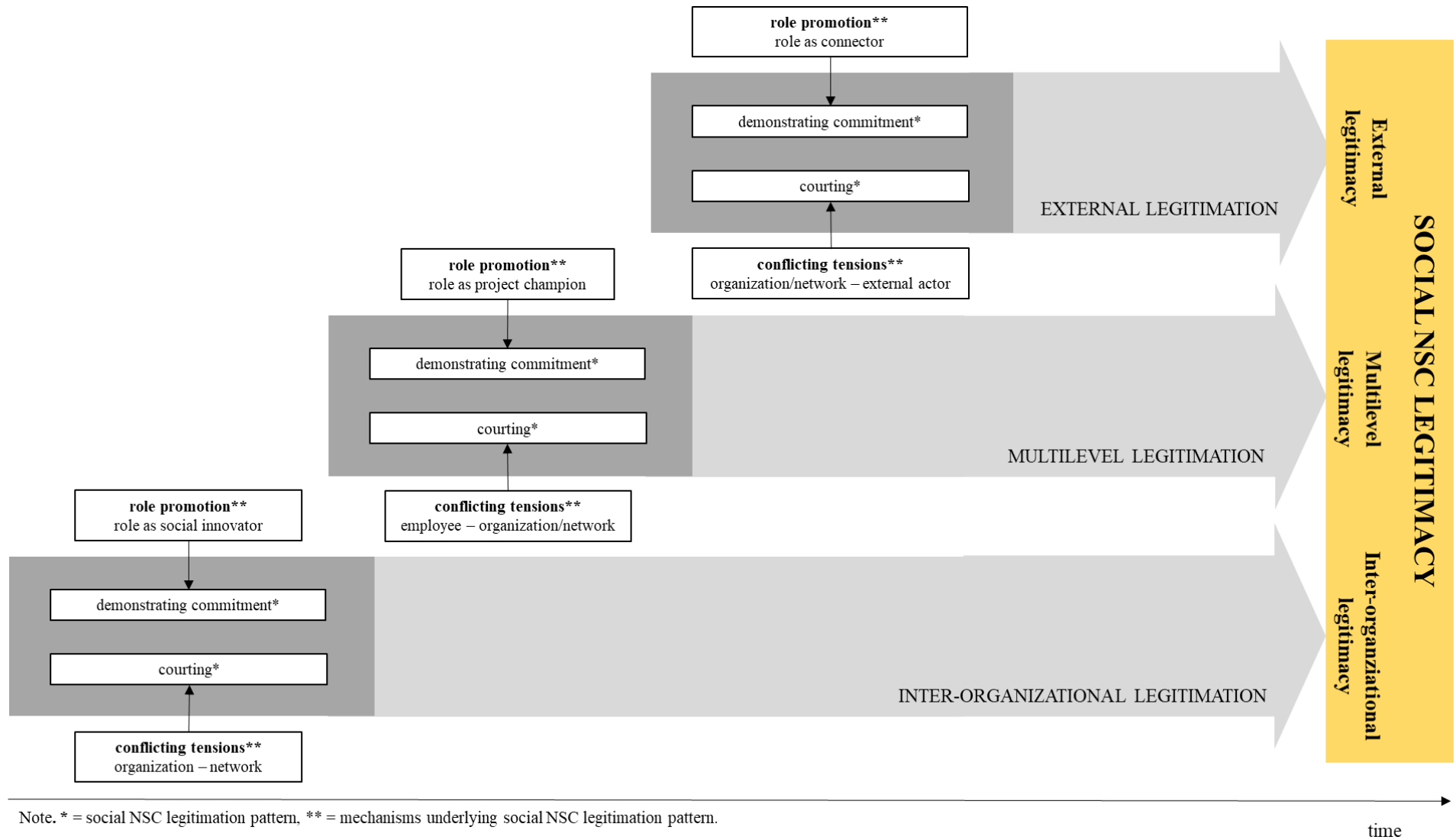|	COURTING	DEMONSTRATING COMMITMENT
Inter-organizational legitimation	**Audience**: top managers of the HomeNetwork organizations **Enactment**: courting among top managers joined by independent actors **Underlying mechanism**: conflicting tensions between organization and network interests	**Audience**: top managers of the HomeNetwork organizations **Enactment**: joint engagement in demonstrating commitment at the top management level **Underlying mechanism**: promoting role as social innovator
Multilevel legitimation	**Audience**: actors operating at different layers of the HomeNetwork: employees, middle managers, and members of parent organizations **Enactment**: aligning courting of independent actors with those of actors with a managerial role **Underlying mechanism**: conflicting tensions between employee and organization/network interests	**Audience**: actors operating at different layers of the HomeNetwork: employees, middle managers, and members of parent organizations **Enactment**: independent actor taking the lead role in demonstrating commitment, but always involving managers with a managerial role and employees **Underlying mechanism**: promoting role as project champion
External legitimation	**Audience**: actors beyond the boundaries of the HomeNetwork: end users, referrers, and government **Enactment**: HomeNetwork actors engaged in courting activities with external actors who perceived the HomeNetwork as a reliable partner, while they withdrew from courting with other external actors **Underlying mechanism**: conflicting tensions between organization/network interests and those of external actors	**Audience**: actors beyond the boundaries of the HomeNetwork: end users, referrers, and government **Enactment**: demonstration of commitment enacted by HomeNetwork partners under a new identity, thereby downplaying the role of the HomeNetwork **Underlying mechanism**: promoting role as connector

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Figure 2. Case overview

CONTEXT

Policy context   Increased interest in local home care networks by government

Preparation of reform of primary care (including home care) at policy level

Market context

Successful adoption of previous social NSC by patients and referrers

New for-profit entrants in home care market

Emergence of integrated care projects

New local home care networks emerge

Network context

Parent organizations of HomeNetwork members and umbrella organization of nursing homes form PlatformHome

Call for integrated care projects by PlatformHome

Launch of monthly benchmarking initiative for integrated care projects by PlatformHome

START SOCIAL NSC DEVELOPMENT

LAUNCH OF SOCIAL NSC

2008   2013   2014   2015   2016   2017

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMATION   **MULTILEVEL LEGITIMATION**   **EXTERNAL LEGITIMATION**

Appointment of 1 TM as project coordinator

Appointment of 1 TM as project coordinator

Involvement of external consultants

Replacement of 1 TM

Appointment of new project coordinator

Replacement of MMs and FEs

Replacement of 1 TM

Group with TMs of 1 home nursing provider, 2 home help providers, and 2 health insurers

Establishment of group with MMs of 5 home care providers

Home nursing provider digitizes its intake procedure by giving tablet to FEs

Expansion of TM group with directors of 3 nursing homes

Home nursing provider changes to self-managing FE teams

Expansion of MM group with 3 nursing home directors

Establishment of LG1, LG2, LG3 with TM/MM/FE of 3 local regions

Establishment of technical and communication team with MMs

DATA

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DOCUMENTS (*n*=249)

| 6 meeting reports and 18 deliverables | 4 meeting reports, 7 e-mails and 17 deliverables | 5 meeting reports, 21 e-mails and 13 deliverables | 5 meeting reports, 43 e-mails and 55 deliverables | 8 meeting reports, 21 e-mails and 26 deliverables |

MEETING OBSERVATIONS supplemented with **INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS** (*n*=33)

| 5 TM meetings | 1 MM meeting | 2 TM/MM and 2 PH meetings | 2 TM/MM, 1 MM, 3 LG, and 1 PH meetings | 1 TM, 1MM, 12 LG, and 2 PH meetings |

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS (*n*=45)

| 5 TMs and PC | 5 TMs and new PC | 4 MM and 16 external actors | New PC, 4 LG, and 8 external actors |

Note. NSC=new service constellation, TM=top managers, MM=middle managers, FE=frontline employees, LG=local group, PC=project coordinator, PH=PlatformHome.

1   Finalization of project plan for developing network intake in November 2008

2   Draft paper with model for network intake in May 2013

3   Visualization of network intake model and roadmap for further model development in September 2014

4   Workshop for middle managers and frontline employees about the network intake in December 2014

5   HomeNetwork members sign declaration of commitment in June 2015

6   Visualization of network intake model and development of network intake sheets in December 2015

7   Implementation of IT system associated with network intake in January 2016

8   Launch of logo/website for network intake and trainings for network intakers/referrers in February 2016

9   Launching event for external actors at the local level in February/March 2016

Figure 3. The process of establishing social NSC legitimacy

role promotion**
role as connector

demonstrating commitment*

courting*

conflicting tensions**
organization/network – external actor

EXTERNAL LEGITIMATION

role promotion**
role as project champion

demonstrating commitment*

courting*

conflicting tensions**
employee – organization/network

MULTILEVEL LEGITIMATION

role promotion**
role as social innovator

demonstrating commitment*

courting*

conflicting tensions**
organization – network

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMATION

External legitimacy

Multilevel legitimacy

Inter-organziational legitimacy

SOCIAL NSC LEGITIMACY

Note. * = social NSC legitimation pattern, ** = mechanisms underlying social NSC legitimation pattern.

time

i The names of the inter-organizational network and its members and geographical location have been disguised to protect the confidentiality of the market-leading organizations and do not affect the proposed theoretical propositions for social NSC legitimation in inter-organizational networks.

ii The new identity was disclosed to external actors who perceived the HomeNetwork as a reliable partner.