

WARREN O. NILSSON

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Summary

- Associate Professor of Social Innovation at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business
- My research focuses on the organizational dynamics of deep institutional transformation with a particular emphasis on social and environmental innovation. My article “Positive Institutional Work” in the *Academy of Management Review* received that journal’s Best Article Award for 2015.
- Founding Faculty Associate, UCT Bertha Centre for Social Innovation
- Former Academic Director of the UCT GSB MPhil in Inclusive Innovation Program
- Former Co-director of the Rockefeller Foundation Global Fellowship Program on Social Innovation in partnership with the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the University of Victoria, and the University of Waterloo. Raised \$1,400,000 of research and program funding.
- Co-developer of the Coursera MOOC “Becoming a Changemaker: Introduction to Social Innovation,” which has engaged over 100,000 total learners.
- Co-Director of the Institute for Organizational Wellbeing (formerly the Institute for Collective Wellbeing) – a new nonprofit developing organizational pedagogies for collective wellbeing
- Co-founder, with Tana Paddock, of Organization Unbound (organizationunbound.org), a global community of inquiry exploring ways for social purpose organizations to more strongly connect their internal practices with their external missions.
- I have received multiple awards for my teaching and have taught more than 70 courses at the undergraduate, graduate, and executive levels in subjects ranging from organizational strategy and development to social innovation and sustainability. I have worked with very diverse, international groups of students of all ages.
- I have significant professional experience in community development and a passion for connecting my academic research to practitioner-driven social initiatives.

Education

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

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

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

Master of Business Administration – 1999

University of Baltimore, Baltimore, Maryland

Bachelor of Arts (College Scholar)– 1990

Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Associate Professor of Social Innovation (2017-)

University of Cape Town, Graduate School of Business

Cape Town, South Africa

- **Academic Director**, MPhil in Inclusive Innovation (2017-2021)
- **Co-Director**, Rockefeller Global Fellowship Program on Social Innovation (2015-2017)

Senior Lecturer in Social Innovation (2011-2016)

University of Cape Town, Graduate School of Business

Cape Town, South Africa

Sessional Lecturer in Strategy and Sustainability (2003-2010)

McGill University, Desautels Faculty of Management

Montreal, Canada

Research Assistant in Social Innovation (2001-2003)

McGill University, Desautels Faculty of Management

Montreal, Canada

Research & Publications

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

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

Publications

- Hamann, R., Nilsson, W., Drimie, S., & Freeth, R. (Forthcoming – Conditional Acceptance). Researchers Convening Dialogue to Address Grand Challenges: Affordances, Tensions, and the Shift to Deep Dialogue. ***Strategic Organization – Special Issue: “Impact Driven Strategy Research for Grand Challenges”***
- Nilsson, W. (2023). The Future of Teaching and Learning Social Innovation. ***Stanford Social Innovation Review*** Spring: 52-54
- Kantor, L., April, K., & Nilsson, W. (2020). The Transformative Leadership Capacities of Mindfulness. ***Effective Executive***, XXIII(3), 27.
- Hamann, M., Biggs, R., Pereira, L., Preiser, R., Hichert, T., Blanchard, R., Coetzee, H., King, N., Merrie, A., Nilsson, W., Odendaal, P., Poskitt, S., Sanchez Betancourt, D., & Ziervogel, G. (2020). Scenarios of Good Anthropocenes in Southern Africa. ***Futures***, 118.

- Hamann, R., Luiz, J., Ramaboa, K., Khan, F., Dhlamini, X., & Nilsson, W. (2020). Neither Colony nor Enclave: Calling for Dialogical Contextualism in Management and Organization Studies. *Organization Theory*, 1(1), 1.
- Nilsson, W. (2019). Social Innovation as Institutional Work. In G. George, T. Baker, P. Tracey, & Joshi, H. (Eds.), *Handbook of Inclusive Innovation: The Role of Individuals, Organizations, and Communities in Social Innovation*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Moore, M.-L., Olsson, P., Nilsson, W., Rose, L., & Westley, F. (2018). Navigating Emergence and System Reflexivity as Key Transformative Capacities: Experiences from a Global Fellowship Program. *Ecology and Society*, 23(2), 38.
- Nilsson, W. (2015). "Positive Institutional Work: Exploring Institutional Work through the Lens of Positive Organizational Scholarship." *Academy of Management Review*, 40: 370-398. Received the **AMR Best Article Award**.
- Nilsson, W., Bonnici, F., & Wosu Griffin-EL, E. (2015). "The Social Innovation Lab: An Experiment in the Pedagogy of Institutional Work." In V. Bitzer, R. Hamann, M. Hall, & E. Griffin-EL (Eds.), *The Business of Social and Environmental Innovation: New Frontiers in Africa*: 201-212. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Methner, N., Hamann, R., & Nilsson, W. (2015). "The Evolution of a Sustainability Leader: The Development of Strategic and Boundary Spanning Capabilities in Woolworths." In V. Bitzer, R. Hamann, M. Hall, & E. Griffin-EL (Eds.), *The Business of Social and Environmental Innovation: New Frontiers in Africa*: 87-104. Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2014). "Social Innovation from the Inside Out." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* Winter: 46-52
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2013). "Inscaping: Exploring the Connection Between Experiential Surfacing and Social Innovation." *NESTA Conference Proceedings: Social Frontiers – The Next Edge of Social Innovation Research*. London. Available at: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/192022484/Inscaping-Exploring-the-Connection-Between-Experiential-Surfacing-and-Social-Innovation>
- Nilsson, W. (2009). "The Giving Field." *Ascent Magazine*, Spring.
- Bento, R. F. and Nilsson, W. (2009). "Visual Metaphors: A New Language for Discovery and Dialogue." *Transformative Dialogues* 2(3): 1-12.
- Nilsson, W. and Janzen, E. (2008). "The Expressive Organization." *Livraison* 9: 48-50. Spring.
- Nilsson, W. (2006). *The Southern Wall: Organizational Engagement at Santropol Roulant*. Montreal: J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.
- Bento, R. and Nilsson, W. (2005). Beyond Words: Visual Metaphors and Dialogue in Management Education and Development. *Changing the Way You Teach: Creative Tools for Management Educators*. T. Torres, M. Gascó and A. Coelho. Oviedo, Spain: Septem.

Presentations

- Litrico, J., Azevedo, G., Louche, C., & Nilsson, W. (2023). "The Kitchen, the Garden, the Lab, and the Mountain: A multiple case study of how generative organizations sustain human flourishing." *European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium*. Cagliari.
- Hamann, R., Nilsson, W., Drimie, S., & Freeth, R. (2021). "The Institutional Agency of Dialogue in Social Innovation." *European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium*. Amsterdam.

- Nilsson, W. and Burger, A. (2016). "Institutional Archeology: History, Disruption, and Social Innovation." *European Group for Organizational Studies Colloquium*. Naples.
- Nilsson, W. and Burger, A. (2016). "Institutional Archeology: History, Disruption, and Social Innovation." *University of Edinburgh Business School Paper Development Workshop on Organizational and Institutional Change*. Edinburgh.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2015). "Exploring the Experiential Dimension of Social Innovation and Institutional Change." *University of Michigan Centre for Positive Organizations Research Incubator*. Ann Arbor (remote link).
- Nilsson, W. (2014). "Positive Institutional Maintenance: Sustaining Engagement in a Social Purpose Organization." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Philadelphia.
- Nilsson, W. (2014). "Paying Attention to the Good Anthropocene." *Seeds of the Good Anthropocene: A Southern African Perspective*. Stellenbosch.
- Nilsson, W., Paddock, T., & Parker, M. (2014). "Social Innovation from the Inside Out." *Stanford Social Innovation Review Webinar*. Palo Alto (remote link).
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2013). "Inscaping: Exploring the Connection Between Experiential Surfacing and Social Innovation." *NESTA Conference: Social Frontiers – The Next Edge of Social Innovation Research*. London.
- Nilsson, W. (2012). "Positive Institutional Work: Rethinking Institutional Work through the Lens of Positive Organizational Scholarship." *Business of Social and Environmental Innovation Conference*. Cape Town.
- Nilsson, W. (2012). "Positive Institutional Work: Rethinking Institutional Work through the Lens of Positive Organizational Scholarship." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Boston.
- Nilsson, W. (2012). "Sustaining Social Change." *TEDx Cape Town*. Cape Town.
- Paddock, T., Glencross, J. and Nilsson, W. "Making Organizations Work." *The Change Collective*. Cape Town.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2010). "Changing the World by Changing Our Organizations." *Centre for Social Innovation*. Toronto.
- Nilsson, W. (2010). "Universities as Social Purpose Organizations." *McGill-Milton Parc Café Conversations*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. (2008). "Organization Unbound: Organizing for Sustainability." *McGill Business Conference on Sustainability*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. (2007). "The Expressive Organization." *Centre des Arts Actuels SKOL*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. and Rabinowicz, J. (2006). "The Re-Enchantment of Organizational Life." *Concordia University Institute in Management and Community Development*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2006). "Organizations as Social Movements." *Concordia University Institute in Management and Community Development*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. and Paddock, T. (2006). "Educating for Sustainability." *McGill Business Conference on Sustainability*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W., Paddock, T. and Rabinowicz, J. (2006). "The Art of Organizational Engagement." *Lanark County Early Childhood Education Network*. Lanark, Ontario.
- Nilsson, W. (2005). "Re-Imagining the Service Organization." *Family Resource Programs Canada Conference*. Ottawa.

- Nilsson, W. (2003). "Organizational Engagement at Santropol Roulant." *McGill-DuPont Social Innovation Initiative*. Montreal.
- Nilsson, W. (2003). "Giants and Windmills: Rethinking Institutional Strategy." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Seattle.
- Nilsson, W. and Bento, R. (2001). "Gateways to the Mind: Visual Metaphors in Management Development." *Academy of Management Meeting*. Washington, D.C.

Teaching

Areas of Instructional Expertise

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

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

Course titles:

- Global Leadership (MIM)
- Inclusive Innovation (MPhil)
- Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship (MBA)
- Organizational Development for Social Innovation (MBA)
- Social Innovation Lab (MBA)
- Company Analysis (MBA)

Additional program contributions:

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

Supervisions

- PHD: Graduated (1), Current (5)
- MPhil/MComm: Graduated (21), Current (11)
- MBA: Graduated (24)

University of Vermont (2022, 2023)

Course Titles:

- Cultivating Inclusive Organizations (MBA)
- Driving Innovation from the Base of the Pyramid (MBA)

Marlboro College (2018, 2019)

Course Titles:

- Social Innovation Field Course (MBA)
- Literature Review: History and Theory (MBA)

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

Instructor for 32 classes. Course titles:

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

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

Additional program contributions:

- International Master's in Health Leadership (IMHL)
- Advanced Leadership Program (ALP)
- International Master's in Practicing Management (IMPM)

École des Hautes Études Commerciales (HEC) (2010)

Course titles:

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

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

Course titles:

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

Community Involvement/Administrative Activity

Academic Director, UCT MPhil in Inclusive Innovation Program (2017-2021)

A cohort-based degree by dissertation program focused on inclusive innovation, emphasizing both theoretical contributions and the development of novel praxis prototypes. Transdisciplinary content and pedagogy.

Co-Director, Rockefeller Foundation Global Fellowship Program on Social Innovation (2015-2017)

Raised funding of \$1,400,000 for the UCT Graduate School of Business's Bertha Centre for Social Innovation as the lead partner of this fellowship program. Partnered with the Stockholm Resilience Centre, the University of Victoria, and the University of Waterloo. The program focused on system entrepreneurship and brought together experienced social innovators from around the world for four learning modules over the course of a year.

Co-founder, Organization Unbound (2009-2023)

A global community of inquiry experimenting with ways that social purpose organizations can live out in their daily practices the changes they are trying to create in the world and by doing so seed deeper patterns of institutional transformation. Curated a blog of over 40 authors from both academia and practice. Produced a short film called "Changing the Way We Change the World" which was accepted into the Addis International Film Festival and has been viewed over 10,000 times online. Sponsored dialogues and workshops and developed self-guided training materials free for use in organizations and classes.

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

As part of UCT's ongoing MOOC project, I collaborated with the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and with local NGO RLabs to produce a MOOC on social innovation via the platform Coursera. The course is unique in its approach. We partnered with local practitioners as well as academics to

create a practical, action-oriented learning experience appropriate for potential innovators from a wide variety of educational and cultural backgrounds. The MOOC has engaged more than 100,000 total learners.

Convener, *ScaleShift* (2013-2015)

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

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

Diversity and inclusion at the Graduate School of Business.

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

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

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

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

Related Work Experience

Co-Director, *Institute for Organizational Wellbeing*

Madison, Wisconsin (2024-)

Stewarding a nonprofit dedicated to developing collective pedagogies for organizational wellbeing. Our approach complements traditional leadership development and organizational intervention approaches by offering long-arc, organization-wide courses of collective reflection and experimentation. The organization was previously known as the Institute for Collective Wellbeing, but changed its name in 2024 to reflect its increasing focus on organizations.

Team Learning Designer, *Global Round Table Leadership*

Keane, NH (2022-)

Serve as one of the lead designers of learning journeys for management teams interested in developing their capacity for shared leadership.

Director, *Baltimore Caregivers* (under the auspices of South East Community Organization)

Baltimore, Maryland (1997-2000)

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

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

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

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

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