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Title

Background of leaders, cross-sector interaction and the rationalization of nonprofits

Abstract

Previous researches about non-profit organizations’ rationalization tended to focus on specific or “net” effect explained by a particular theoretical perspective (Meyer, 2010; Maier et al., 2016; Suarez, 2011; Ragin & Fiss, 2008), thereby rarely considered from the interrelation of various theoretical perspectives or from the configuration perspective and hereby summarizing the effects of different mechanisms in specific environments as well as their connections or alternatives. Based on focus the findings of focus group, we then used QCA to explore the potential combination of different mechanisms that shape the formation of nonprofits’ rationalization. Through the meticulous sorting and analysis of 14 cases from three areas of Zhejiang Province, the following two important new findings can be obtained: First, in terms of facilitating the rationalization of non-profit organizations, the mechanisms of competition, resource, and system are not simply replaceable by each other but complementary in many cases; especially, accordingly configurations are formed between system-related mechanism and resource mechanism and between system-related mechanism and competition mechanism, which constructs the critical path of non-profit organizations’ rationalization. This helped us solve the controversy of whether it is competition or complementation between system analysis, traditional resource dependence and economic analysis (Guo, 2006), that is to say that at least in the field of rationalization of non-profit organization, these three perspectives can be references of each other, and thereby, instead of picking a superior one from the three, people can form a more systematic and synergic framework of analysis and explanation (Powell & Steinberg, 2006). Certainly, according to the results of this study, system mechanism, compared with the other two mechanisms, plays a more fundamental role in terms of creating rationalization of organizations, which is in accordance with the theoretical discussion in the case section of this study.
Second, this study also indicates that the relationship among the different (sub) mechanisms of the same theory is relatively complicated. For example, in promoting non-profit organization rationalization there should be a certain competition mechanism (or quasi competition), therefore, when system mechanism exists, both bottom-up market “emergence” and top-down “public-private partnership” can generate conditions of rational complementary. Compared with the configuration with market competition, the configuration with government support has more explanatory power, which is in accordance with the basic reality that there is still no effective field formed in most nonprofit realm under the larger scope of government influence (Hsu & Jiang, 2015). At the same time, as a supplement to the previous studies (Powell & Hwang, 2009), this study observed that system mechanisms tend to be complementary to each other rather than replaceable by each other, which means that a leader/an important member of an enterprise with certain management training experience will be more helpful for the organization performing rational structure and behavior.

Keyword