



# Institutional Entrepreneurship: Looking at the EcoToxChip from a social science perspective

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- To support the project team members in promoting the adoption of toxicogenomics in ecological risk assessment (i.e., uptake project deliverables – EcoToxChip and EcoToxXplorer.ca), a team of social scientists produces and utilizes knowledge on institutional entrepreneurship
- Institutional entrepreneurship consists of the activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones (Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence, 2004)

## WHY INSTITUTIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP?

- The social processes underlying the adoption of new practices have long been of interest to social scientists. In particular, researchers have examined how institutionalized practices – those which are widely established, often unquestioned and, hence, relatively stable over time – change.
- Practices are especially difficult to change when they are supported by three institutional pillars: cognitive (i.e. actors think through, and construct reality with, existing practices, and thus have a difficult time imagining alternatives), normative (i.e. actors place a high social value on complying with existing practices) and regulative (i.e. government regulations as well as professional and organizational reward systems create material disincentives for deviating from existing practices).
- Yet, institutional entrepreneurs are sometimes able to change institutions. Institutional entrepreneurs take action from social positions within fields which enable and constrain their entrepreneurial actions, and influence the outcome of struggles over institutional arrangements with other field actors.



## CONCEPTS CAN

- Explain stasis and change dynamics in the field of ecological risk assessment;
- Identify key actors and their strategies;
- Understand the process through which toxicogenomics tools and associated practices are adopted or rejected;
- Determine barriers to the adoption of toxicogenomics tools in risk assessment; and,
- Discern how and why these barriers were overcome (or not).

## TAKE AWAY

The institutional entrepreneurship perspective can enhance our understanding of stasis and change in the field of ecological and chemical risk assessment. From this perspective, risk assessment can be seen as a highly institutionalized field of professional practice. On one hand, cognitive, normative, and regulative pillars perpetuate existing practices. On the other hand, institutional entrepreneurs with an interest in particular institutional arrangements, such as the adoption or rejection of alternative testing methods, mobilize and leverage resources to achieve their preferred outcomes, and change the field accordingly.

## References

- Maguire, S., Hardy, C., & Lawrence, T. B. 2004. Institutional Entrepreneurship in Emerging Fields: HIV/AIDS Treatment Advocacy in Canada. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(5): 657–679.
- Hardy, C., & Maguire, S. 2008. Institutional entrepreneurship. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*: 198–217. London, UK: Sage.

## Notes

Briefing note 1.1 was developed for the Genome Canada-funded project "EcoToxChip: A Toxicogenomics Tool for Chemical Prioritization and Environmental Management"  
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