



Investigating social entrepreneurship: A multidimensional model[☆]

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurship is an emerging area of investigation within the entrepreneurship and not-for-profit marketing literatures. A review of the literature emerging from a number of domains reveals that it is fragmented and that there is no coherent theoretical framework. In particular, current conceptualizations of social entrepreneurship fail to adequately consider the unique characteristics of social entrepreneurs and the context within which they must operate. Using grounded theory method and drawing on nine in-depth case studies of social entrepreneurial not-for-profit organizations, this paper addresses this research gap and develops a bounded multidimensional model of social entrepreneurship. Implications for social entrepreneurship theory, management practice, and policy directions are discussed.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest in social entrepreneurship driven by several changes occurring in the competitive environment faced by not-for-profit organizations (NFPs). Today NFPs are operating in a highly competitive environment that is characterized by increasing needs in their target communities, and a generally tighter funding environment with growing competition for donors and grants. ‘Reinventing government’ initiatives have changed the relationship between government and NFPs and have also attracted commercial providers to markets traditionally served exclusively by NFPs. This has forced

them to adopt a competitive posture in their operations, to focus on outcomes targeted by government policy, and to pursue innovative ways of delivering superior value to the target market, to capture a competitive advantage for the social organization (Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2001). However, while the literature has grown significantly over the last few decades, a substantial controversy remains in the conceptualization of the social entrepreneurship construct. Social entrepreneurship remains an emerging but ill-defined concept. A consensus is emerging that understanding social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurs is important (Cooperrider & Pasmore, 1991; Dees, 1998a). It has been suggested that social entrepreneurs provide innovative or exceptional leadership in social enterprises (Dees, 1998b; Prabhu, 1998). It has also been proposed that social entrepreneurship results in an organization achieving a sustainable competitive advantage, allowing it to achieve its social mission (Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2001). Addressing these concerns we argue that social entrepreneurship should be conceptualized within the broader competitive

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environment within which it operates. Conceptualizations that have originated in for-profit firms, while providing valuable insights into entrepreneurial behavior, do not capture the unique operational characteristics of NFPs, in particular, how NFPs maintain operational efficiency whilst achieving their social mission. We begin with the premise that not all NFPs are socially entrepreneurial. In a similar way, not all for-profit businesses are entrepreneurial. We conjecture that organizations that are socially entrepreneurial display certain behavioral characteristics in their response to the environment. It is their strategic decisions and vision that distinguish them from their NFP counterparts.

The purpose of our research is to advance the conceptualization of the social entrepreneurship construct based on empirical research by using grounded theory method. The study finds that social entrepreneurship is a bounded multidimensional construct that is deeply rooted in an organization's social mission, its drive for sustainability and highly influenced and shaped by the environmental dynamics.

The paper proceeds with a detailed consideration of the literature that provides the rationale for the study. We establish that the literature is fragmented and lacking a coherent theoretical framework, thus reflecting the need to undertake empirical investigation grounded in social entrepreneurial organizations. A research design using qualitative methods was adopted. The remainder of the paper presents the key findings from the analysis, promulgates a multidimensional model of social entrepreneurship and discusses the implications for theory and practice.

2. Literature review

Social entrepreneurship as a focus of academic enquiry has a relatively brief history. A summary of the social entrepreneurship literature presented in [Table 1](#) suggests a number of themes, preoccupations and domains. Social entrepreneurship may be expressed in a vast array of economic, educational, research, welfare, social and spiritual activities engaged in by various organizations ([Leadbeater, 1997](#)). Reflecting this diverse range of activities, researchers have attempted to conceptualize the social entrepreneurship construct in a number of contexts, including the public sector, community organizations, social action organizations, and charities. The majority of literature on social entrepreneurship has evolved within the domain of nongovernment not-for-profit organizations. Some researchers ([Cook, Dodds, & Mitchell, 2001](#); [Wallace, 1999](#)) suggest that social enterprises that carry out for-

profit activity to support other nonprofit activities can be viewed as social entrepreneurs. Others have argued that for-profits that may take some innovative action towards building social capital can be considered as being socially entrepreneurial ([Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship \(CCSE\), 2001](#); [Thompson, Alvy, & Lees, 2000](#)). Providing clarity [Thompson \(2002\)](#) identifies social entrepreneurship as possibly occurring in profit seeking businesses that have some commitment to doing good, in social enterprises set up for a social purpose but operating as businesses and in the voluntary or nonprofit sector. However, he concludes the “main world of the social entrepreneur is the voluntary [NFP] sector”. In the following section we briefly discuss the existing conceptualizations of social entrepreneurship as identified in the dominant domains in which it occurs the public and private nonprofit domains.

Entrepreneurship in the public domain relates to leadership of public organizations (e.g. [Lewis, 1980](#)) or development of public policy (e.g. [King & Roberts, 1987](#)). Researchers in this domain have argued that social entrepreneurs possess several leadership characteristics, namely, significant personal credibility, integrity and ability to generate followers' commitment to the project by framing it in terms of important social values, rather than purely economic terms ([Borins, 2000](#); [Lewis, 1980](#); [Waddock & Post, 1991](#)). Research on social entrepreneurship in this domain has mainly conceptualized the construct in terms of individual qualities of leadership.

There are a number of approaches to social entrepreneurship in the private NFP domain. In community organizations, social entrepreneurship has been identified as playing a role in up-lifting living conditions of the poor and under-privileged (e.g. [Cornwall, 1998](#)) and facilitating community development ([Wallace, 1999](#)). Social entrepreneurship within a social action context has been seen in terms of the catalytic leadership provided in areas of social concern with the purpose of change, both in terms of the area of social concern and in public policy related to that area of social concern ([Hibbert, Hogg, & Quinn, 2001](#); [Waddock & Post, 1991](#)). Hands across America, The Big Issue and Partnership for a Drug-Free America are notable examples of this type of action. Both of these approaches in community organizations and social action context have conceptualized social entrepreneurship within the leadership school (see [Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991](#)). [Shaw, Shaw, and Wilson \(2002\)](#) emphasized the diversity of the social initiatives and the economic and social impact; in effect the achievement of the social mission.

Table 1
Summary of Social Entrepreneurship Literature (chronological order)

Author(s)	Focus or objective(s) of the paper	Domain	How was the SE construct conceptualized (key dimensions)	Definition of social entrepreneurship
King and Roberts (1987)	Describes the impact of public sector entrepreneurs on policy in a state government	Public sector	None	SE defined in terms of innovation and leadership characteristics
Waddock and Post (1991)	To define who SEs are and what they do	Public sector organizations/ social action	(1) Ability to deal with problem complexity (2) Credibility (3) Commitment to collective purpose	Creating or elaborating a public organization so as to alter greatly the existing pattern of allocation of scarce public resources
Campbell (1997)	Prescription for developing new social-purpose business ventures (focus on health care industry)	Social enterprises	None	Social purpose ventures provide communities with needed products or services and generate profit to support activities that cannot generate revenue
Henton et al. (1997)	Outline the contribution of civic entrepreneurs to community growth	Individuals working in either for profit or NFPs	None	Civic entrepreneurs recognize opportunities and mobilize other to work for the collective good
Leadbeater (1997)	Investigate the use of SE to provide services that the UK welfare state cannot or will not	Nonprofit/social action	(1) Ambitious leadership (2) Creative use of minimal resources (3) formation of inclusive organizations that build long-term relationships with clients	Identification of under-utilized resources which are put to use to satisfy unmet social needs
Cornwall (1998)	Describing the social impact of entrepreneurs in low income communities	Nonprofit/community development organization	None	Entrepreneurs have social responsibility to improve their communities
Dees (1998a)	Definition of social entrepreneurship	Public organizations/ nonprofit organizations	Five key dimensions: social mission; pursuing new opportunities; continuous innovation; acting boldly; heightened sense of accountability	
Dees (1998b)	Social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector Outlines strategies for NFPs to obtain funding	Nonprofit organizations	None	NFPs discovering new funding sources and strategies
Prabhu (1998)	Investigation of concept of social entrepreneurial leadership	Nonprofit/social action	None	Entrepreneurial organizations whose primary mission is social change and the development of their client group
Ryan (1999)	Looks at impact of the entry of large for-profit corporations on the operations of nonprofit organizations	Nonprofit organizations	None	Not really defined
Wallace (1999)	Examine role of social purpose enterprise in facilitating community development	Nonprofit community development organizations	None	Entrepreneurs have social responsibility to improve their communities—derives from social and political cohesion in a community
Borins (2000)	Studies two sets of entrepreneurial public leaders to assess characteristics of public entrepreneurship—are they rule-breakers or positive leaders?	Public sector organizations	Measures for (1) the source of innovation (2) the type of innovation (3) conditions leading to the innovation (4) supporters of the innovation and (5) obstacles to innovation	Leaders that innovate in public sector organizations

Table 1 (Continued)

Author(s)	Focus or objective(s) of the paper	Domain	How was the SE construct conceptualized (key dimensions)	Definition of social entrepreneurship
Thompson et al. (2000)	Review of private sector SE	For profit Organizations	None	The process of adding something new and something different for the purpose of building social capital—focuses on actions taken by private sector actors
Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship (2001)	General review of Social Entrepreneurship, in particular looking at the impacts of globalization and the rise of dual bottom line reporting	Nonprofit organizations and corporations	(1) socially oriented private sector activity and (2) entrepreneurial action in nonprofit enterprises	Innovative dual bottom line initiatives emerging from the private, public and voluntary sectors. The 'dual bottom line' refers to the emphasis placed on ensuring that investment generates both economic and social rates of return.
Hibbert et al. (2001)	Measures the attitudes of consumers to a social entrepreneurial initiative (The Big Issue—a magazine that supports the homeless)	Nonprofit/social action	None	The use of entrepreneurial behavior for social ends rather than for profit objectives; or an enterprise that generates profits that benefit a specific disadvantaged group
Smallbone et al. (2001)	Reviews social enterprises in the UK and makes policy prescriptions designed to support the development of SEs	For profits and NFPs	Contributions of SEs: job creation, training provision, provide services that the state does not, finance source, generate social capital benefit, provide physical resources, combat exclusion	Social enterprises defined as competitive firms that are owned and trade for a social purpose (includes NFPs, worker-owned collectives, credit unions, etc.)
Cook, Dodds, and Mitchell (2002)	Attacks the idea that SE can replace welfare state initiatives as misguided and dangerous	Social enterprises	None	Social partnerships between public, social and business sectors designed to harness market power for the public interest
Shaw et al. (2002)	Comprehensive review of social entrepreneurs—looks at characteristics, objectives, actions, and prescriptions for encouraging them	Nonprofit organizations	Primary characteristics of social entrepreneurs: creativity, entrepreneurialism, agenda-setting, ethical	Bringing to social problems the same enterprise and imagination that business entrepreneurs bring to wealth creation
Thompson (2002)	Outline of the scope of SE—looks at who SEs are, what they do and what support is available to them	Nonprofit organization	Four central themes from case studies: Job creation, effective utilization of buildings, developing volunteer support, focus on helping people in need	The process of adding something new and something different for the purpose of building social capital
Sullivan Mort et al. (2003)	To develop a conceptualization of SE as a multi-dimensional construct	Nonprofit organization	(1) driven by social mission (2) show a balanced judgment (3) explore and recognize opportunities to create better social value for clients (4) innovative, proactive and risk-taking	Searching for and recognizing opportunities that lead to the establishment of new social organizations and continued innovation in existing ones

Several researchers (Dees, 1998b; Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena, & Carnegie, 2003) argue that social mission is explicit and central for social entrepreneurial organizations. Dees (1998b) also argues that similar to a for profit firm, the purpose of which is to create superior value for its customer, the primary purpose of the social entrepreneur is to create superior social value for its clients. He argues that a social entrepreneur's ability to attract resources (capital, labor, equipment, etc.) in a competitive marketplace is a good indication that venture represents a more productive use of these resources than the alternative it is competing against. On the funding side, social entrepreneurs look for innovative ways to assure that their ventures will have access to resources as long as they are creating social value.

A number of researchers emphasize the role of innovation in a social entrepreneurial organization (Borins, 2000). Prabhu (1998) and Sullivan Mort et al. (2003) identify the three factors of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk taking (from Covin & Slevin, 1986) as central to social entrepreneurship. Some researchers have advocated social entrepreneurship as a partial solution to the need for radical welfare reform, as a way to meet social and other demands through social innovations led by enterprising people (Leadbeater, 1997; Thompson, 2002). While this approach has attracted considerable interest, it has also attracted criticism as undermining a rights-based approach to social services (Cook, Dodds, & Mitchell, 2002). These approaches represent conceptualizations of social entrepreneurship within a welfare economics domain.

The foregoing discussion identifies a significant inadequacy in the literature in that social entrepreneurship has been developed within different domains, leading to the lack of a coherent approach. Most importantly we identify that approaches to conceptualizing social entrepreneurship do not reflect the competitive environment within which social enterprises operate. For example, an approach that views social entrepreneurs as 'one special breed of leaders' (Dees, 1998b) or reflect an individual traits (Prabhu, 1998; Shaw et al., 2002) hinders capturing the behavioral characteristics of entrepreneurship, in particular how social entrepreneurs achieve their organizational objectives by enacting the social mission, and striving for operational efficiency whilst responding to environmental dynamics. CCSE (2001) state that it is no coincidence that social entrepreneurship is receiving increased attention when the competitive environment is undergoing rapid change and the traditional boundaries between profit and nonprofit

sectors are changing. Ryan (1999) identified a new competitive landscape for NFPs in the light of a market that rewards discipline, performance and organizational capacity rather than simply not-for-profit status and mission. Sullivan Mort et al. (2003) also argue the effect of environmental changes with increased globalization, 'reinventing government' initiatives and the increasing entry of for-profit organizations into markets traditionally served by nonprofits as the context for social entrepreneurship.

We conclude from our review that while there is a substantial body of literature on social entrepreneurship emerging from a number of domains, the literature is fragmented and has not led to the development of an empirically derived coherent theoretical framework. We argue the need to develop a coherent theoretical framework in the field of social entrepreneurship.

3. Method

While grounded theory methodology, "the discovery of theory from data that is systematically obtained from research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 5), is often recommended to investigate uncharted waters, it is also appropriate to use grounded theory method "to gain a fresh perspective" (Stern, 1994, p. 116). In this study, we use grounded theory method to address the need for a coherent theoretical framework in the field and to develop an empirically derived model of social entrepreneurship.

Having reviewed the literature and found it to be theoretically inadequate, we follow the recommendation of Stern (1994). We put the literature aside and turned to the field to focus on the phenomenon of social entrepreneurship to inductively derive a theoretical model from the phenomenon. Consistent with previous research in entrepreneurship (Glancey, Greig, & Pettigrew, 1998), we developed a set of broad questions to capture socially entrepreneurial behavior in an organization setting. A working definition of social entrepreneurship is needed to operationalize this research. We define social entrepreneurship as a behavioral phenomenon expressed in a NFP organization context aimed at delivering social value through the exploitation of perceived opportunities. This working definition guides our research.

The study was carried out in the Australian NFP sector. Preliminary investigation revealed the existence of the Social Entrepreneurs Network Australia (SEN). This is a core group of successful social entrepreneurs who also had links with groups in the UK and US. SEN was established to fulfill a variety of roles including

information sharing, lobbying and training. Membership of SEN resulted from self-nomination and assessment of eligibility by the network leaders; specifically of interest for membership were significant achievements, innovations and impact on the clients and the needs served. A theoretical sampling approach was adopted (Eisenhardt, 1989) where the CEO of SEN initially identified four exemplary social entrepreneurial organizations as possible participants in the research. All these organizations agreed to participate and were subsequently invited to identify other organizations with a social entrepreneurial profile. Sampling proceeded until theoretical saturation, the point where “incremental learning is minimal” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 545), was achieved. Consistent with the guidelines recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and widely adopted (e.g. Beyer & Hannah, 2002), we made systematic, detailed comparisons across all cases, employing matrices to identify the saturation point which was reached after nine cases. In total nine organizations took part in the study, consistent with the suggested range of four to ten cases (Eisenhardt, 1989). The characteristics of the organizations (Table 2) are included for descriptive purposes only, as the sample was collected to fulfill theoretical sampling criteria.

In depth interviews were conducted with key decision-makers in each organization. CEOs and senior managers were chosen because they possess the most comprehensive knowledge of the characteristics of the organization, its strategy and performance (Miller & Toulouse, 1986). The broad focus questions were open-ended with prompts used to expand discussion and to further elicit the views and opinions of the participants (Creswell, 2003). Probes were developed to explore key issues in depth as they emerged in the interview context. Relevant documents and archival data about the organization were collected at the time of interview to provide triangulation of

reference material for thematic analysis and for post-research inquiry (Creswell, 2003). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and subjected to coding and thematic and further analyses as discussed below.

In analyzing data, several techniques were adopted to remain focused on the research problem (adapted from Creswell, 2003; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Yin, 1994). Matrices were employed as an analytical tool to organize and analyze data. The matrix technique promotes pattern matching and the effective categorization of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research also adopted a general analytic approach that prioritizes information through the development of categories of data and the examination of similarities. The transcripts, documentary and observational evidence from each organization were then organized into “chunks”. Each “chunk” was labeled with a term often based on the natural language of the interviewee or document. Documents, observations and interview data were initially recorded separately, crosschecked for consistency and included for further analysis when verified by each source. These “chunks” formed the basis of the coding frame. Next, the codes were used to develop sub-themes and then progressively a smaller number of overall themes. These emerging themes are reported in depth. The grounded themes are developed to arrive at propositions. Next, themes and propositions are integrated into a coherent model of social entrepreneurship. Finally, returning to the literature, the emergent themes and propositions were compared with the literature seeking both conflicting and similar frameworks. As observed by Eisenhardt (1989), tying emergent theory to extant literature enhances the internal validity, generalizability, and theoretical level. The new conceptualization was then discussed and interpreted with implications derived for theory and practice.

Table 2
Characteristics of sample

Case	Size ^a	Person interviewed	Purpose	Location (Australia)
A	Small	CEO	Support for children of drug addicted parents	Melbourne, Vic.
B	Large	State manager	Safety and community recreation on beaches	Brisbane, Qld. National organization
C	Medium	CEO	Housing for disabled	Melbourne, Vic.
D	Medium	CEO	Legal services to disabled	Melbourne, Vic.
E	Large	CEO	Services and advocacy for poor	National organization
F	Medium	Site manager	Aged housing and community services	Brisbane, Qld.
G	Medium to large	Divisional Manager	Aged services	Sydney, NSW
H	Small	CEO	Incubator and social venture funding	Brisbane, Qld.
I	Medium	CEO	Economic and community development services	Sydney, NSW

^a Small 1–3 people employed; medium 4–10 employed; large more than 10.

Validity and soundness of research are important issues in qualitative research and indeed validity, in terms of credibility and authenticity, is often identified as a strength of qualitative research. Five primary strategies (Creswell, 2003) for addressing soundness and validity were implemented in this study: relevant documents and archival data about the organization were collected and analyzed to provide triangulation of thematic analysis; member checking was implemented by providing both a transcript of their own interview to each participant and the matrix of all interview data, allowing for input by participants; rich, thick descriptions are used to convey the findings of the research to improve the shared experience and judgment of the readers; negative case analysis of negative or discrepant information is also included in the overall analysis, an external audit, similar to a fiscal audit, was implemented where the overall research process and analysis was audited by a third party expert researcher.

4. Findings

The findings of the research are presented in two related stages. In the first stage, a narrative incorporating seven emergent themes of the in-depth case study interviews is presented. These themes are environmental dynamics, innovativeness, proactiveness, risk management, sustainability, social mission, and opportunity seeking/recognition. The proposition derived from each theme is presented at the conclusion of the theme. In the second stage we present the integration of the themes into a coherent model of social entrepreneurship.

4.1. Thematic analysis and propositions

4.1.1. Environmental dynamics

We identify the impact of changing social and business contexts, competitiveness, and complexity as well as the impact of government as of importance in the environmental dynamics affecting NFPs. Case B identifies that environmental changes may directly impact on the reason-for-being of the organization “staying relevant as an organization is probably our biggest challenge.” Similarly Case F identifies fast changing client needs as a major challenge:

What are their expectations?[We] are trying to see what our spot is in the community and how do we meet those services. At the moment the whole scene is changing dramatically . . .

Case B identifies new environmental complexities as having a major impact:

We interact across a whole broad range of activities, from government departments to fundraising to youth and junior activities . . . We operate and work in a sensitive area of the environment. We deal with people. We have all the corporate governance and accountability issues.

Case H, a social venture incubator, identifies further complexity:

Sure, [for-profit] businesses fail . . . but the business' models that have been tried time and time again are not that complex. But when you look at social problems [and social ventures] the context around is very complex and you can't solve them without understanding the context.

Similarly Case F, a religion linked NFP organization, also identifies changes in the competitive environment as impacting on their organization. In the most extreme instances this has led NFPs to exit the sector:

The whole industry is becoming competitive . . . and from overseas the experiences of the church [is that they] are getting out of aged care and selling it out to private organizations

There is also evidence of the environmental impact of government policy and the “small government” philosophy on the operation of NFPs. Government policy has changed the mode and target of funding that government provides. These policy changes have also required NFPs to become, in many cases, the service provider arm of government. Second the changed environment of policy has altered the competitive dynamics for organizations with increased intra-sector competition. NFPs compete more with each other and increased inter-sector competition as NFPs compete with for-profits. Most of the NFPs are feeling increased uncertainty in the relationship with government and specifically in relation to continuing funding. Case C is of the view that the government can be a source of uncertainty and NFPs dealing with government must have a sufficient knowledge of the uncertainties involved:

When I go and say to you I'll cut your grass, you sit there and say fine, for \$50 do it every Wednesday. With government, they go to a committee and then depending on the time of the year, well it's not in the budget so you have to wait until February before we put the budget up. Then if there's a political change - oh, we don't do anything whilst the government is elected.

Over the years, most of the sampled NFPs have realized that they cannot solely depend on government sources for project funding and they are compelled to seek alternative ways of funding. For example Case D, a generalized disability service provider with 62 for-profit and NFPs competing with it to provide employment placement services, states that whilst their projects are only partly funded by the government they are compelled to undertake fund-raising activities to meet the shortfall. Similarly, Case C sees the need to become less dependent on government funding to have greater flexibility in their operations and in turn sees the need to adopt a commercial approach in generating funds.

Proposition 1. *Social entrepreneurship is responsive to and constrained by environmental dynamics.*

4.1.2. Innovativeness

We found an important link between the environmental dynamics and the value creating strategies adopted by social entrepreneurial NFPs. The increasingly competitive environment has forced NFPs to place great emphasis on innovation in all their social value creating activities. The majority of cases identified themselves as innovative organizations. The CEO of Case I captures the theme of innovation in NFPs in this discussion:

We are an organization, I guess, that focuses on innovation and sees that as part of our core business - innovating and finding new ways of delivering service and of achieving outcomes.

Extending this view, Case D, a legal service provider to the disabled indicates:

Innovation is important in that we have to constantly think of new ways – across the whole spectrum of our work – we have to look at new ways of marketing, new ways of influencing government, new ways of delivering service, we have to stay up to date with changing trends in relation to theories that are revolving around service provision.

In Case E this need for innovation is extreme and has been adopted as a strong organizational policy that impacts directly on operations:

I don't want to run any service at the (Case E) that just every year do good things the same as they did last year. It is not enough.

Another operational area that requires innovation is fundraising. Social entrepreneurs need to be innovative

in all the fund raising activities undertaken, as indicated by Case H:

If your fundraising campaign is not sexy enough or does not pull the heartstrings in people, don't try to fundraise! Because you're wasting your time! There are professional fundraisers out there and there are a lot of causes that people donate to

We found evidence to suggest that the majority of the cases not only display a high degree of innovativeness in their decisions, but they are actively pursuing innovation in all aspects of service delivery.

Proposition 2. *Social entrepreneurship strives to achieve social value creation through the display of innovativeness.*

4.1.3. Proactiveness

Social entrepreneurial NFPs believe that they need to be proactive to survive, to serve the market and to grow in the market. Case F views social entrepreneurship as:

trying to feel where the place is going, looking at the external as well as the internal forces at play, trying to articulate and then consulting with people and trying to sell it

The proactiveness of Case F is also demonstrated by the heavy reliance on strategic planning.

[We] develop a strategic plan. We have just finished a three-year cycle and now we are underwriting the strategic plan with more detailed operational plans . . . We are trying to look at a [further] three-five year time frame.

Case C believes social entrepreneurs must be skilled with basic forecasting techniques:

We always thought ahead so we did a lot of financial modeling, very conservative in things like rent collection, rent levels so that when anything came up most of it was predicted. When something came up that we hadn't thought about, it was comfortable. It didn't throw us over the deep end.

For Case G, an NFP in the field of aged care, the need for proactiveness and predictive modeling is also compelling. While for Case G in the past demand was much easier to predict as people entered into a retirement village, then moved to a hostel and finally needed nursing home care, in effect stepped on an escalator. Now effective organizations must be proactive in developing services for an unidentified number of people who will need to “go straight into the high

level of care.” The need for proactiveness is also evident in Case B in regard to funding. Case B states:

in an environment where everyone is competing for the same donor dollar [social entrepreneurial NFPs] must be proactive and innovative in their fundraising activities as well as in service delivery.

Proposition 3. *Social entrepreneurship strives to achieve social value creation through the display of proactiveness.*

4.1.4. Risk management

Social entrepreneurial NFPs face great challenges in managing risk to sustain the organization. The majority of the cases appear to adopt a highly cautious approach in dealing with risk having a clear focus on survival of the organization. In fact, it is our observation that the aspect of risk positions social entrepreneurs clearly away from for-profit entrepreneurs. Whilst the for-profits have access to multiple sources of funding, such as share issues and bank borrowings, social entrepreneurs are heavily constrained in generating funds for their operations. Their revenue comes from diverse sources such as client fee for services, government grants, donations, sponsorships and there is great uncertainty associated with government funding, and increased competition for the donor dollar. Social entrepreneurial NFPs find it difficult to forecast their revenue streams with a certain degree of accuracy. In addition the funds invested do not deliver a monetary return on investment, as is the case of for-profits. On the other hand, once a resource commitment is made there is no possibility of revoking that commitment. Therefore social entrepreneurs are compelled to assess the risks involved prior to committing resources to a particular project. As indicated by Case C which is a disability services provider:

If we accepted this – I use the term responsibility – of housing somebody who is disabled we can’t actually stop doing it ... [We calculate] here’s the cost, here’s the outputs, here’s the rent income, here’s the balance and if it didn’t balance we didn’t do it.

These circumstances force social entrepreneurs to be extremely cautious in making resource commitments. What we can see is that the key decision-maker will not undertake any project without ascertaining the cost involved, irrespective of the social value that will be generated by the project. As Case A states:

We have to get the funding first. There is no way I will start a project without the money in the bank. It’s crazy ... it’s crazy to start trying to run a program without, for instance, having the money to pay a skilled person. I won’t go there. I’d rather do what we do properly and not touch other stuff.

Proposition 4. *Social entrepreneurship strives to achieve social value creation through the display of risk management.*

4.1.5. Sustainability

The social entrepreneurial organization’s response to environmental complexity and turbulence has been argued to create the need for innovativeness, proactive behavior and risk management. These are the core drivers of the entrepreneurial venture. The findings suggest that social entrepreneurial NFPs actively pursue innovativeness in all areas of social value creation. In particular, fund-raising and service delivery that are critically important for their growth particularly within a competitive environment. However, we find the dynamic balance of these forces reaches an equilibrium that is unrelated to rapid growth and risk taking aimed at developing the growth stages of the business. In the socially entrepreneurial organizations the dynamic is focused on sustainability of the organization. As Case A states whilst innovativeness is important, it will be bounded by the need for survival:

It’s imperative ... (but) there’s no point being innovative just for the sake of being innovative. You don’t re-invent the wheel.

Case C, which provides housing for the disabled strongly believes that sustainability is the key to the long-term survival and growth:

... organizationally, you can’t say we are not going to do it next year. Go home. This is their home. So we took that on board that the organization had to be robust. It had to be able to say, the government might have changed their mind about backing small institutions but you are living in our house. You are going to stay.

Similarly Case E identified the need for learning directed at new models mentioned in relation to sustainability and funding. Case I addressed the need for a more sustainable business model. Case F said:

That is why we look at – you have got to have approaches in a business sense as a commercial

operation because the bottom line it has got to be sustainable. There is no good in it falling over.

Case I structures the organization so that it is self-financing. The organization focus is on sustained growth over the long term. Though many other IT businesses may have higher growth rates, they have focused on steady sustainable growth.

(Case I) is an organization that over 20 years has grown at about 30% per year on average throughout that 20 year period. That is not bad for any business. We are about long-term sustainable growth so we are trying to build a solid business foundation as the organization grows and develops

The cases interviewed provided ample evidence to suggest that financial viability is a prerequisite for any project undertaken and social entrepreneurs have appropriate procedures within the organization to systematically assess the financial viability of every proposal comes up within the organization. As Case I indicates:

... a full business plan will then be produced and often the Board will endorse a business plan subject to us being able to bring in an agreed level of other support.

Proposition 5. *Social entrepreneurship is responsive to and constrained by the need for organizational sustainability.*

4.1.6. Social mission

The findings support the long held view that the primary purpose of the social organization to achieve its social mission. As Case I states:

I think the fact is that we are deeply committed to being an organization that focuses on its mission as our first priority. Financial performance for us is secondary, very important but secondary, to achieving our mission. That is probably the number one differentiator for us [from for-profits].

Our findings suggest that the social mission is not a sacred goal as traditionally has been believed. Instead the role of social mission must be understood within the competitive environment within which the organizations operate. For example, Case E states:

I have to run a \$45 million business with a clear social aim. My job is to make sure that that aim creates economic benefit to both this organization, and also the broad society, has a good social outcome

for its staff as well as for those people it is serving, and it is to do that in an environmentally strong context.

It is our observation that the role of social mission goes hand in hand with the sustainability of the organization. Sustainability resulting from a balance of the entrepreneurial drivers of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk management is not seen as an end in itself, but sustainability is focused on ensuring the continuation of the organization because of its social mission. In this sense the social mission is central to the organization because it guides overall strategy: what businesses and services are initiated, what services are grown, how fast they are grown, and which linkages, e.g. through board memberships, are pursued. Case C was very clear on this issue:

They might have a good purpose but if you can't pay the rent you can't have an office. So there are certain pragmatics that you got to get to. The bottom line is viability.

Balance between what has been called 'mission and money' finds expression in the following statement expressing the philosophy of a very successful and innovative NFP:

We need people who are both passionate about the mission but pragmatic about the realities of the market place and not so ideologically hide-bound that they are unable to face the business realities, that there are some things that maybe very important to do, but we cannot do them because we cannot find a way that is financial viable to do them.

The emphasis on business skills for sustainability is apparent in the human resource practices actively pursued by the social entrepreneurial organization. First, the majority of cases indicate that employees with business skills are required. As Case I states:

Yes, ... I think 70% of our skills that we require are the same and probably only 30% would be different. ... I think those are a lot about values, are about constantly being able to ask ... how this is achieving the mission.

Case A on the need for business competencies:

I do know that charity is a business. I know it has to be run as a business because we are dependent on money and in every aspect it is a business.

The emphasis on business competencies and expertise is evident in the appointment of members of the boards of directors where board members are handpicked by CEOs on the basis of their skills, experience and areas of specialization. Second, the types of people joining such organizations are a ‘different breed of people’. As viewed by Case C, social entrepreneurs and their employees are driven by a passion for a satisfying job:

In many instances people who work in not-for-profit organizations are highly motivated, relatively speaking, by the outcomes . . . people who want adequate income but are looking for some other satisfaction in their work . . . They want to feel that it’s worthwhile.

Proposition 6. *Social entrepreneurship is responsive to and constrained by the social mission.*

4.1.7. Opportunity seeking/recognition

Social entrepreneurs actively seek opportunities to create enhanced social value to both existing and potential clients. Social entrepreneurs seek market opportunities that will enable them to create better social value to their clients. However, as Case I states opportunity seeking behavior goes hand in hand with the financial viability of the opportunity and the need to consider the sustainability of the organization. Case C states that resource constraints compel social entrepreneurs to tread cautiously particularly in the early stages. Case C:

So in an entrepreneurial term, we took the low apples. We took the ones that were worthwhile getting at the time and only after the first ten years in a sense did we take on board the really hard challenging positions. We had a mindset change to say, look, we now have some resources. We can go out and push boundaries a bit more.

Proposition 7. *Social entrepreneurship opportunity identification is responsive to and constrained by the organizational sustainability, social mission and environmental dynamics.*

4.2. Development of a multidimensional model

In the preceding section rich, thick descriptions of the data were embedded into the text in a process of identifying the major themes emerging from the data analysis. This resulted in the development of propositions that were identified at the end of each section. Now, the emergent themes and propositions are compared with the literature, seeking both conflicting

and similar frameworks (Eisenhardt, 1989), resulting in integration of themes and development of an empirically grounded model of social entrepreneurship.

The findings suggest that social entrepreneurship can be conceptualized as a multidimensional model involving the three dimensions: innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk management. These behavioral attributes are generally consistent with the extant literature in the for-profit domain that identifies entrepreneurship as a behavioral manifestation (Covin & Slevin, 1986), rather than a cluster of traits or individual characteristics (Kets de Vries, 1977) or indeed relying on the ‘great person’ theory of leadership (see Cunningham & Lischeron, 1991). The findings also provide support for the behavioral conceptualization of social entrepreneurship proposed by Prabhu (1998) and Sullivan Mort et al. (2003). Our findings suggest that the behavior of social entrepreneurs towards risk-taking is substantially different from that found in for-profit literature and in the recent NFP literature attempting to conceptualize social entrepreneurship. For example, the for-profit literature suggests that the entrepreneurial function primarily involves risk measurement and risk-taking that distinguishes entrepreneurs from managers (e.g. Palmer, 1971). Similarly, Prabhu (1998) in his attempt to conceptualize social entrepreneurship suggests that ‘the ability to take the risk may be quite high, given that social experiments are conducted in good faith and both success and failures are rich learning experiences’ (Prabhu, 1998, p 4). In contrast, our research finds that social entrepreneurs’ behavior in regard to risk is highly constrained by their primary objective of building a sustainable organization. This behavior was highly evident in their approaches to new service development and in particular in determining the viability of new service development proposals. Our findings do not support the assertion (Dees, 1998b) that social entrepreneurs do not allow the lack of initial resources to limit their options. Indeed we do not find that ‘their reach often exceeds their grasp’ (Henton, Melville, & Walesh, 1997). They are highly oriented towards effective risk management in sustaining the organization.

In addition, the findings suggest the need for a more parsimonious conceptualization of the behavioral characteristics than that proposed by previous conceptualizations (Sullivan Mort et al., 2003), one that also captures more clearly the unique conditions within which social entrepreneurship operates. In a radical departure, our findings suggest that social entrepreneurial behavior is deeply influenced by the concurrent requirements of the environment, the need to build a

sustainable organization and the need to achieve the social mission. Opportunity recognition within social entrepreneurial organizations must operate within these three important constraints. Therefore we do not identify opportunity recognition as a distinct dimension of the social entrepreneurship construct because it is embedded in the sustainability dimension.

Social entrepreneurship strives to achieve social value creation and this requires the display of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk management behavior. This behavior is constrained by the desire to achieve the social mission and to maintain the sustainability of the existing organization. In doing so they are responsive to and constrained by environmental dynamics. They continuously interact with a turbulent and dynamic environment that forces them to pursue sustainability, often within the context of the relative resource poverty of the organization. The competitive environment within which they operate requires them to adopt a competitive posture in the areas of funds acquisition and in the delivery of services, responding in a similar way to for-profits do to turbulent and competitive environments (e.g. Davis, Morris, & Allen, 1991). Social entrepreneurial behavior is not of itself expressed as sacred behavior as is traditionally suggested in the social enterprise literature. Rather we find that they are highly pragmatic while striving for innovation.

The findings further suggest that social entrepreneurship can be conceptualized in terms of a constrained optimization model (Fig. 1.) This relationship can be stated in the following way.

$$\text{SVC} = f(\text{I, P, RM}) \text{ subject to S, SM, E}$$

where SVC: social value creation; I: innovativeness; P: proactiveness; RM: risk management; S: sustainability; SM: social mission; E: environment.

The outcomes of social entrepreneurship are social value creation (consistent with Dees, 1998b). The implications of social value creation are that while a for-profit enterprise operating in aged care would be able to identify its total outcome as superior value creation of

aged services, the social entrepreneurial not-for-profit enterprise aims for a wider, more encompassing outcome. The complexity of social value creation is well known as it acknowledged that it “is difficult to place a single value on the contribution made by social enterprises” (Smallbone, Evans, Ekanem, & Butters, 2001).

The constraint of forces comprising the environment, the social mission and the need for sustainability produces a unique form of entrepreneurial behavior that is conceptualized as social entrepreneurship. Whilst the findings confirm the central role of social mission, the role of the relentless effort for sustainability seems to be equally important. We find that these two factors are interdependent and one cannot exist without the other in social enterprise, balanced also by environmental dynamics.

We also argue that the constraints in the operations of social entrepreneurship are of two types. The first are identified as static constraints: these are the drive for sustainability of the organization and the achievement of the social mission. The second type of constraint is a dynamic constraint: the influence of environmental dynamics. There has been substantial discussion about the influence of the turbulent, dynamic environment on social entrepreneurship. (e.g. Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Weerawardena & Sullivan Mort, 2001). However, there has been no prior attempt to fully integrate this influence within the overall conceptualization of social entrepreneurship. Most notably our model identifies the dynamic nature of the environment and the environmental constraints on social entrepreneurship. The impact of the dynamic environmental constraint is the potentially large effect environmental changes and challenges, such as changing social needs, government policy or competition from for-profit providers, is likely to have on the maximization of social value. Social entrepreneurship is likely to be strongly influenced by environmental dynamics, and policy decisions and management initiatives should be directed towards understanding and managing environmental dynamics.

5. Implications for theory

Increasingly attention has been addressed towards social entrepreneurship from a variety of domains: business strategy, entrepreneurship, public sector management, community development and not-for-profit marketing. Researchers have been drawn to an interesting phenomenon. As we have identified, the research area has suffered from a lack of a unified and coherent framework capturing the unique environment



Fig. 1. Bounded multidimensional model of social entrepreneurship.

and organizational characteristics of social entrepreneurship. We offer the findings of this study, the bounded multidimensional model of social entrepreneurship, as a contribution enabling future researchers to develop a programmed body of research in the field. The findings suggest that social entrepreneurship can be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct with innovativeness, proactiveness and risk management as its dimensions. A construct is referred to as multi-dimensional when it consists of a number of interrelated attributes and dimensions and exists in multidimensional domains. 'In contrast to a set of interrelated unidimensional constructs, the dimensions of a multi-dimensional construct can be conceptualized under an overall abstraction, and it is theoretically meaningful and parsimonious to use this overall abstraction, as a representation of the dimensions' (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998, p 741). Therefore social entrepreneurship can be viewed as an overall abstraction of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk management within the constraints of environment, sustainability and social mission. The emerging model is a parsimonious one that captures the behavioral characteristics of the social enterprise within the broad environmental and operational constraints.

We suggest that research on the apparent paradox of 'business skills' and 'social mission', often summed up as 'money or mission', may be resolved by addressing the issue within the frame of this model. In particular, mission integration, which we have addressed in explaining the operation of the constraint of social mission on social entrepreneurship, appears to provide a potentially fruitful research direction. Similarly our model allows the impact of the environment to be adequately conceptualized and facilitates future work. In identifying social entrepreneurship as a constrained optimization problem we have clearly distinguished it from for-profit entrepreneurship and identified its unique form. We have provided a clear framework and a new lens to view the phenomenon and to guide future research. However, we identify that the model needs to be further refined and tested empirically using cross sector and cross national samples.

6. Implications for management and policy

The constrained model of social entrepreneurship developed here provides a feasible path for practice in not-for-profit organizations. For example, managers should focus on proactive and responsive environmental management strategies, in their competition with for-profit organizations in contested markets. They also

need to constantly monitor policy initiatives undertaken by government with the aim of increasing transparency and competition in service markets. These managerial initiatives require innovativeness, proactiveness and risk management in their social value creating activities. In their operations, NFPs should continue to balance the priorities of social mission and organizational sustainability. They are required to be innovative because of the competitive nature of the market, and this also involves the further development of human resource practices aimed at recruiting and developing staff with business skills and a pragmatic social purpose with a special passion for their work. Recent work on innovative enterprises (Lazonick, 2002) addresses the issue of constrained optimization and innovation. In practice applications of management science methods fall under the category of constrained optimization, where some criterion (e.g. usually profit) has to be optimized subject to various constraints (e.g. budgetary restrictions, availability of raw materials, union agreements). There exist a number of well known techniques, such as linear, integer, nonlinear, multi-objective and dynamic programming, to aid management decision in these contexts (Taylor, 2004).

7. Conclusions

This study has advanced research in social entrepreneurship in a number of ways. The first contribution lies in the development of an empirically derived model of social entrepreneurship identifying the core behavioral dimensions of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk management. The second contribution lies in identifying the optimization constraints within which social entrepreneurs operate and thus how they sharply differ in their operational context from for-profit entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurship is thus identified as a behavioral phenomenon operating within constraints. The model also identifies superior social value as the outcome of social entrepreneurship.

This research has identified key areas where strategy and operations can be aligned in social entrepreneurial service contexts. Social entrepreneurial organizations need to adopt a culture aimed at innovativeness, proactiveness and risk management. They also need to develop decision techniques based on dynamic programming to improve proactive management of the environmental context. In addition, in a contested market, there is likely to be direct competition between organizations aimed at delivering value in a profit taking context and those aiming at maximizing social value creation. Thus social entrepreneurial organizations

must clearly address value-positioning strategies, and take a proactive posture as well as providing superior service maximizing social value creation.

Overall NFPs are in a period of transition. The demands of the marketplace are offering both opportunities and threats to the social entrepreneurial organization. In response, some researchers have advocated the increased ‘marketization’ or the use of market-based models in the management of social organizations. This approach is feared to be harmful to the core ideals and values of the social enterprise. The findings of this study offers a conceptualization appropriate to the unique challenges of organizations that strive to create social value and suggest that social entrepreneurs can indeed remain competitive whilst fulfilling their social mission.

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