



BUILDING A CURRICULUM FOR SOCIAL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Abstract:

In recent years social entrepreneurship has been emerging as a viable alternative to government policies for addressing some of the society's most pressing issues. Academics have also started to take note but only a small number of institutions of higher education offer educational opportunities for students who want to become social entrepreneurs. In this paper I show how business schools are well equipped to offer a coherent curriculum for social business entrepreneurs at a relatively low marginal cost and argue that a business-heavy curriculum is appropriate.

Key words: *Social business, social entrepreneurship*

1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship can be broadly defined as using an entrepreneurial approach to address social problems. In general, entrepreneurs identify and exploit opportunities to create value in a market context. Social entrepreneurs do the same but their central focus is changing society for the better. Today a wide range of social enterprises operate around the world using a variety of organizational structures and strategies from non-profit organizations to purely commercial ones. What they all have in common is their commitment to advancing the social good by tackling extreme poverty, lack of access to healthcare, illiteracy, environmental threats and many other issues that confront our society.

In recent years social entrepreneurship has been emerging as a viable alternative to government policies for addressing some of the society's most pressing issues. Academics have also started to take note but only a small number of institutions of higher education offer educational opportunities for students who want to become social entrepreneurs. Moreover these opportunities are almost exclusively at the graduate level. More than 30 years after igniting the micro-finance revolution through the Grameen Bank, Muhammad Yunus, a pioneer social entrepreneur and winner of the 2006 Peace Nobel Prize, continues to 'hope that, within the next few

years, social business will become a standard part of the curriculum in every college, university and graduate business school in the world'. (Yunus, 2010, p.166). Moreover, research conducted by Paul Light author of 'The Search for Social Entrepreneurship' and cited by Borenstein & Davis (2010) suggests that the success of social enterprises 'depended less on the personality of their founders than on the disciplined application of (teachable) leadership and entrepreneurial skills' (Kindle Locations 1347-1348). In this paper, partly in response to Professor Yunus' call, I argue that business schools are indeed well equipped to tweak their curricular offerings to serve the aspirations of young social change makers and I propose one possible model for building a social entrepreneurship curriculum in higher education. The paper is structured as follows: In the next section I provide background information on the evolution of the social entrepreneurship phenomenon. I then analyze the current status of social entrepreneurship in higher education around the world. Next I discuss in detail a proposed minor or concentration in social entrepreneurship that can be implemented at a low marginal cost for most institutions of higher education. Conclusions are presented in the final section.

2. Defining Social Entrepreneurship and Social Business

Various definitions can be found in the academic literature and not only of what social entrepreneurship is. According to Borenstein and Davis (2010) social entrepreneurship is 'a process by which citizens build or transform institutions to advance solutions to social problems, such as poverty, illness, illiteracy, environmental destruction, human rights abuses and corruption, in order to make life better for many.' Choi and Meehan (2001) focus on the use of business tools as to them 'social entrepreneurs are people who use the techniques of business to achieve positive social change.' Similarly, Dees (2001) also emphasizes the business aspect of the operations since social entrepreneurship 'combines the passion of a social mission with an image of business-like discipline, innovation, and determination commonly associated with, for instance, the high-tech pioneers of Silicon Valley.'

Another way to think about what constitutes social entrepreneurship is to identify examples of successful social enterprises. Media outlets ABC News and Univision compiled a list of top 10 social entrepreneurs of 2012 (Keppel, 2012). The social enterprises featured on this list operate in very diverse areas as follows: providing online learning opportunities for low-income, limited English-speaking Hispanic parents; conserving and restoring coastal and marine environments in low income communities in Peru; helping underprivileged, small-scale farmers with technical support and access to international markets; providing underserved Mexican communities with access to quality educational opportunities and information technologies.

While most of the time when we think of social enterprises we think non-profit organizations but that is not always the case. One particular form of social enterprise is what Muhammad Yunus (2011) calls the 'social business', 'a non-loss, non-dividend

enterprise – dedicated entirely to achieving a social goal – where an investor aims to help others without taking any financial gain for him or herself. At the same time, the social business generates enough income to cover its own costs, any surplus is invested in expansion of the business or for increased benefits to society.’ The distinguishing feature of this model is that it proposes addressing a social goal in a manner that is financially sustainable through income generated by the social business. Without belittling the role of charity in tackling social change ‘A ‘Charity Dollar’ has one life, but a ‘Social Business Dollar’ has endless life.’.

Best known for pioneering the micro-finance phenomenon (i.e. providing small no-collateral loans to very poor people) in the late 70s, Professor Yunus has since launched a number of other social businesses. Some of these include Grameen-Danon (produces very low cost yogurt fortifies with micronutrients that children in developing countries are lacking), Grameen-Veolia Water Company (produces and sells safe drinking water in arsenic contaminated areas in Bangladesh) or Grameen-Adidas (producing low cost shoes for less developed countries). What all these enterprises have in common is that they aim to address a social problem while covering their operating costs. Not all social business have to be backed by large corporations or have to be located in less developed countries like in the case of the aforementioned Grameen enterprises. NW Works, located in Winchester, Virginia, USA is an organization that operates several social businesses by employing individuals with disabilities. Their goal is to provide these individuals with meaningful employment opportunities in a financially viable manner through enterprises that operate on a commercial basis. NESsT is another organization that supports social businesses throughout the world with offices located in the US, Eastern Europe and South America.

3. Educational Opportunities for Social Entrepreneurs

Blackwood et al. (2012) report in an Urban Institute brief that in 2010 the US non-profit sector represented 5.5% of the US GDP. Also, public charities, the largest component of the nonprofit sector, reported \$1.51 trillion in revenue, \$1.45 trillion in expenses, and \$2.71 trillion in assets. Moreover in 2011, 26.8 percent of adults in the United States volunteered with an organization. Volunteers contributed 15.2 billion hours, worth an estimated \$296.2 billion. All these numbers paint a clear picture of how important the social sector is for the US economy.

Given the size of the social sector in the US economy it should not be surprising that there seems to be a growing demand for educational opportunities in this field. This is confirmed by Bloom (2006) who documents how the impetus for the creation of the SE Lab (Social Entrepreneurship Collaboratory Lab) came in part from students who expressed an interest in social entrepreneurship. Anecdotal evidence from conversations the author has had with students also indicates demand is there. Despite this growing demand social entrepreneurship has not yet made it into mainstream academia and Bloom (2006) also identifies some of the reasons.

Therefore educational opportunities for students interested in social entrepreneurship remain limited in particular at the undergraduate level.

In the 2008 Ashoka Social Entrepreneurship Teaching Resources Handbook out of 20 featured academic programs 7 were Masters' level and 3 were at the undergraduate level with the remaining in the form of labs, incubators or centers for social entrepreneurship. Admittedly, the numbers might be different today but there is evidence to suggest that curricular offerings in the field are still relatively limited. Important progress has been made however, as major higher education institutions such as Stanford, Harvard and Duke have taken the lead in creating different models for educating the next generation of social change makers. Existing initiatives in the academia take various forms. Course offerings and coherent curricula in social entrepreneurship remain limited. Social entrepreneurship is more predominantly present in higher education through initiatives such as university-practitioner collaborations and partnerships with organizations promoting social entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. Ashoka, Skoll Foundation, Algernon Sydney Sullivan Foundation, Schwab Foundation have been very active in forging such partnerships with universities. Other vehicles employed by universities include lecture series and business plan competitions for social entrepreneurs.

Bloom (2006) documents how Stanford University and then Harvard University took an alternative integrative approach through the creation of the Social Entrepreneurship Collaboratory (SE Lab). Participating students are provided with 'an opportunity to discover and to focus their intelligence, energy, and passion on identifying and confronting social problems of their choice'. The parameters around which this initiative has been created can be valuable guideposts for any institution of higher education aiming to educate social entrepreneurs. The SE Lab integrates theory and practice and provides participants with 'a broad set of resources' as well as mentorship from practitioners, professors and peers. Students have the opportunity to design and develop solutions and implement organizations for social change. By all accounts the SE Lab model seems to be a successful way to bring up a new generation of social change makers. However, while very effective, it necessitates a large investment in infrastructure that many schools around the world could not afford. Moreover none of the existing initiatives in higher education focus on the concept of social business. In the next section I will argue for a cheaper and hopefully just as effective model: a course based curriculum more accessible and relatively easy to implement.

4. A Curriculum for Social Business Entrepreneurship

Several successful models exist that aim to educate the next generation of social entrepreneurs. Most of them however focus on the non-profit sector and virtually no such program exists that focuses on the social business model proposed by Muhammad Yunus. While non-profit organizations and social businesses both have at their core social change, important differences exist that might warrant distinct

educational strategies for entrepreneurs interested in starting and running the two types of organizations. In what follows I will describe what a formal curriculum would look like for an undergraduate social business entrepreneurship minor or concentration. I will start with a set of guiding principles and then discuss a specific curriculum

Recent research in the area of social entrepreneurship has resulted in proposals for best practices when building a curriculum for social entrepreneurs. The following guiding principles consistent with the Ashoka Campus Starter Kit and Bloom's (2006) in-depth account of how the Social Entrepreneurship Collaboratory Lab was developed at Stanford University. A foundational knowledge acquired through lectures and readings on theory must be complemented by the application of theoretical frameworks to practical problems. Theory and practice must be integrated through case studies and the opportunity for project implementation in a real world setting. In the process, students should be expected to operate in a collaborative environment and have access to continuous feedback from practitioners, professors and peers. Moreover, the curriculum needs to be effectively integrated into the institution-wide curriculum.

The following proposal has in part resulted from participating in a forum organized by the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Foundation. They solicited feedback on designing a curriculum, and the discussion was based on a pre-existing structure including categories or areas within which forum participants would identify suitable courses. I realized that I disagreed substantially with the proposed structure with the main difference consisting in the weight given to courses aimed at building hard business skills.

Table 1 contains a list of courses that would be part of the social business entrepreneurship minor consisting of 18 credit hours, consistent in size with minor programs at most institutions of higher education in the United States.

Table 1 Courses in a Proposed Social Business Entrepreneurship

Curriculum	
1.	Pre-requisites: strong liberal arts foundation
2.	Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship
3.	Applying Business Practices to Social Change: Introduction to Management and Organizational Behavior
4.	Applying Business Practices to Social Change: Accounting and Finance for Entrepreneurs
5.	Applying Business Practices to Social Change: Business and Entrepreneurship Law
6.	Specialized Topics (Elective): Project Management/ Introduction to Marketing/Human Resource Management
7.	Capstone Experience: Venture Creation and Launch in conjunction with participation in Enactus.
Total: 18 credit hours.	

Since we are considering a minor degree this might be implicit, but the outcomes should include aspects pertaining to a strong liberal arts foundation. Areas that are part of the general education curriculum and are relevant to social entrepreneurs (and not only) are: critical thinking, effective communication, moral reasoning, the scientific world, the individual in the world. Specific courses could include: History, Sociology, Psychology, Economics, Geography, Public Speaking, Political Science, International Affairs, Environmental Studies. This liberal arts background would balance out nicely the business related outcomes that follow.

The introductory course in social entrepreneurship is meant to get students excited about the notion of social entrepreneurship. A very theoretical framework would turn-off students whereas focusing on stories of celebrated social entrepreneurs and their models would be highly appropriate. Courses 3.-5. from Table 1 are normally core courses in a business major. Therefore business students interested in social business could replace these with electives such as Innovation and Design Thinking, Market Research, Leadership. The capstone experience can be fulfilled through participation in Enactus, formerly known as SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise), a worldwide organization that provides students with a platform to put their social entrepreneurship ideas into action. Alternatively, a capstone course can be offered such as 'New Venture Creation and Launch' as a practical guide to starting a new business or organization, providing students with exposure to every crucial aspect of the entrepreneurship experience.

Overall, the proposed curriculum might seem too business heavy. Bloom (2006) recognizes the following potential source of tension: 'On one side of the university, many humanities, sciences, and public policy faculties suspect social entrepreneurship as a market-oriented, cooptation of social justice and the public good: a wolf in sheep's clothing. On the other side, many business school faculties see social entrepreneurship as an imprecise, compromised semblance of business practices and not at the core of their mission.' Moreover Dees (1998) warns that it can be 'risky' for social enterprises to 'embrace commercial opportunities', the main danger being the organizations losing sight of their social mission. In addition Dees documents tensions between the business-types employees of non-profits on the one hand and the socially oriented employees on the other.

The following arguments should at least in part alleviate such concerns. The business side of the proposed curriculum can be effectively balanced out by the liberal arts foundation proposed. Also, while world changing ideas do not always come out of business schools it ultimately takes business knowledge to run an operation effectively and reach organizational goals. Moreover, the emphasis on business is better suited to accommodate the needs of the social business model as proposed by Muhammad Yunus. This is a commercial enterprise model where business-related hard skills will prove necessary and valuable. Finally, the aforementioned tensions would actually be mitigated by providing non-business types with business education opportunities that would emphasize the relevance of business skills for the social sector. These arguments have been supported by ongoing conversations the author has had with

practitioners in the field. Further research connecting the voices of practitioners and the academia is needed.

5. Conclusions

Despite the large size of the social sector in the US and a growing demand from students, educational opportunities in the area of social entrepreneurship remain limited. In this paper I showed how business schools are well equipped to offer a coherent curriculum for social business entrepreneurs at a relatively low marginal cost. The differences between social businesses and other types of non-profit organizations might warrant distinct approaches to education for social entrepreneurs. However, contrary to the perception of some faculties in non-business disciplines, hard business skills are vital for all social entrepreneurs.

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