

Social entrepreneurs: Transforming business practices

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Abstract: *Social Entrepreneurship (SE) as a field of Scholarly investigation provides a unique opportunity to rethink concepts and assumptions from different fields of business research. Instead of proposing another conceptual approach and yet contributing to the academic literature, the authors have enacted on a deductive journey by examining few relevant cases of successful social entrepreneurs and clustering their strategies, organizational characteristics and personal qualities as the emerging themes of the present study. The basic premise is that if the SE is to become a structured field of research, there must be an effort to clarify and define key concepts and constructs. For that purpose the author draws on practical examples of the social entrepreneurs to elaborate on the essential components of success. The in-depth evaluation of the case studies has helped in arriving at common characteristics to their success. Three major themes emerged out of this qualitative study. They are Strategies, Organizational Characteristics and the Personal characteristics of the social entrepreneurs. Present paper is an attempt to unveil the core of SE in order to guide future research.*

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurs; Business; Transformation; Strategy; organization

Background

Social entrepreneurs have existed throughout the ages but the word “social entrepreneur” has gained popularity in recent years. Most of the attention while referring this term focuses on how business and management skills may be applied to achieve social ends. The present study highlights the Social entrepreneurs in the form of transformative forces. These are people with new and innovative ideas to address the major problems; they are relentlessly in pursuit of their vision until they spread their ideas to the society as much as they possibly can. Ireland and Webb (2007), mention Social Entrepreneurship (SE) as an emerging research field and it has been well received by authors from a variety of disciplines. To arrive at any finding relevant to social entrepreneurship, the authors have followed established procedures of analyzing literature, as demonstrated and seen in literature (Grant and Perren, 2002; Harden and Thomas, 2005; Kyro and Kansikas, 2005).

This would imply that the SE research is distinctive and thus, SE research may well influence the domain of entrepreneurship research as a whole in reflection. Various organizations have sprung up around the world to finance and nurture social entrepreneurs. In New York, for example, Echoing Green, an organization founded by Ed Cohen in 1991, has provided seed capital to 350 young social entrepreneurs in the United States. In 1997 a school was founded in England for social entrepreneurs to nurture entrepreneurial talent outside the

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commercial sector. These changes represent a dramatic shift in the way the “noncommercial” or “social” business of the society is structured and thus provides a lot of scope for future research in this direction.

Quantitative research is often very difficult in emerging sector like social entrepreneurship. Compiling large sets of data with controlled variables is very challenging. But, in order to understand the role of individuals, organizations and communities and their variations in the social enterprises; a lot of mixed methods approaches are being utilized to understand the trends of SE (Creswell, 2013; Short Moss & Lumpkin, 2009). The phenomenon of SE Research can never be understood clearly without getting deeper into its contextual realities, as the nature of research investigation is different across countries. It becomes important to understand its Socio- economic and political complexities through qualitative research methodologies in this sector (Dacin, Ventresca& Beal, 1999).

Present paper is an attempt to unveil the core of SE in order to guide future research. The basic premise is that if the SE is to become a structured field of research, there must be an effort to clarify and define key concepts and constructs. For that purpose the authors draw on practical examples of the social entrepreneurs to elaborate on the essential components of success and the way these social entrepreneurs are transforming business practices.

Objectives

This paper sets out to elucidate the meaning of social entrepreneurs as Transformative forces with the following major objective

1. To highlight the construct in Social Entrepreneurship(SE)
2. To discuss the cases of successful Social entrepreneurs

Methods

Looking at the importance of social entrepreneurs in the society, there was a felt need to capture the essential dimensions of the same. The researchers have made an attempt to thoroughly examine the existing academic literature to bring out the highlights of the existing discussion in Social Entrepreneurship. Data has been collected from relevant secondary sources like various web portals, books, articles, magazines and research papers. For the selection of articles and research reports, the author reviewed peer-reviewed academic journals that are included in the Social Science Citation Index (Six papers). The other databases that were explored for reviewing the articles related to SE Research, included EBSCO (Eight papers), Pro Quest (Three papers) and J-Gate (one paper). Prior to this paper, specific books have been reviewed by the author for the in-depth study of the details related to each social entrepreneur mentioned in the paper. The research design is qualitative in nature and it deploys a case study approach to arrive at the major themes. Each of the case has been described in details capturing the strategies that the social entrepreneurs had practiced, the common characteristics of their organization and the personal qualities that drive them towards success. Six such cases have been randomly selected from the list of Indian “Ashoka Fellows” elected between the years 2004 to 2005. “Ashoka” is a non-profit organization founded by “Bill Drayton”. Ashoka identifies leading social entrepreneurs who work towards identifying solutions for large scale social problems. Social entrepreneurs who pass the selection process are called Ashoka fellows and they receive a financial stipend for three years. Numerous other organizations have been working towards supporting the social entrepreneurs but the researchers have chosen to utilize the “Ashoka” list as this is the only organization that is actively encouraging the process on a world-wide basis.

Constructs Related to SE

The meaning of SE remains different to different people (Dees, 1998). A major group of researchers understands SE as a means to eradicate the social problems and trigger the social transformation (Alvord et al., 2004; Ashoka Innovators, 2000). According to one group of researchers SE is a cross-sector business engagement process which is socially responsible (Sagawa & Segal, 2000; Waddock, 1998). Another group of researchers looks at SE as management schemes for social cause (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006; Boschee, 1998). As a researcher, it becomes extremely challenging to understand the definitional boundaries of the term “Social” (Seelos & mair, 2005). While referring to the term “social”, it is broadly viewed as an initiative that helps weaker sections of society (Prabhu, 1999). At first glance it appears that, SE is thought to be different from entrepreneurship with respect to the motive. SE is driven towards social transformation and entrepreneurship is driven towards profit making (Cole, 1968). It can be argued that SE can include reasons like personal fulfillment and entrepreneurship in the business sector can have various social aspects (Bornstein, 1998; Catford, 1998). In other words, although, profit making could be the driving force of an enterprise but that does not preclude other motivations for general betterment of weaker section of the society (Schumpeter, 1934; Baumol, 1993). There have been various similar researcher in the past that reflect that entrepreneurship is not merely based on wealth accumulation on profit-making. Then what is the “Social” domain of SE? The social domain of the SE implies that there is creative combination of resources. Based on the above discussed construct from the literature; the authors have discussed six cases (Table 1 & table 2) in greater details to identify the strategies and business practices that derive their success.

Table 1: Social Entrepreneurs Cases Part One

Social Entrepreneur		Entrepreneurial Components		
S. No	Name of the person and Enterprise	Organizational Characteristics	Personal Characteristics	Strategies
Case 1	Pradeep Ghosh (Organization for awareness of Integrated social security-OASIS)	Providing social security to India’s most impoverished communities	Thinking outside the box Creativity Empathy Motivation	Creating awareness Community empowerment Technical infrastructure Pilot projects
Case 2	Shanti Raghavan (Enable India)	A Business School approach for disabled employee training. Developing capabilities of the disabled to face the challenges of the marketplace just as any abled employee faces	Goal oriented thinking Empathy Team leader Innovative Motivation	Technical infrastructure Government/ corporate placement projects Incubator employment units people skills Strategic need gap analysis for job opportunities
Case 3	Aman Singh {Krishi Avam Paristhitki Vikas Sansthan (KRAPAVIS)}	Community management of forests through restoring their Orans	Observer Nature Lover Persistent Motivation	Revive Orans Community management Inclusive approach Awareness

Source: Authors Compilation

Table 2: Social Entrepreneurs Cases Part Two

Social Entrepreneur		Entrepreneurial Components		
S. No	Name of the person and Enterprise	Organizational Characteristics	Personal Characteristics	Strategies
Case 4	Vishal Talreja (Dream A Dream)	Creating opportunities for normal childhood development to the most vulnerable children	Networking Empathy Leadership Motivation	Training the volunteers Partnership Fundraising
Case 5	KaustubhPandharipande (Samvedna)	Enabling nomads to attain full economic status with their own cultural identities.	Responsible Nature lover Research oriented Motivation	Multi point strategy Linkage to form matrix Efficient trading system Partner citizen sector
Case 6	Anshu K. Gupta (GOONJ)	Transferring the surplus from the wealthy to the impoverished ones	Responsible Determined Empathy Motivation	Volunteer networks Creative collaboration Demand specific sourcing Logistics management

Source: Authors Compilation

Results/Discussion

Social entrepreneurs have profound effect on the society. They have self-motivation to change things for the betterment of the community. They act as transformative forces and are relentless in the pursuit of their vision. They have powerful and innovative ideas to improve the lives of the needy and deprived segment of the society. Pradeepghosh (case 1) has designed a social security system named OASIS and the team works with him to offer the economically vulnerable communities the chance to take hold of their lives. Team “OASIS” is working towards creating awareness about the importance of social security. This system draws on the community strength to invest the community money back to the community through PURA (Personal Unemployment and Retirement Account). Pradeep lives in Bhopal and is fully dedicated towards his vision of a “socially secure India”.

Shanti Raghavan (case 2) has created a new inclusive market through Enable India. The disabled people like visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically disabled, autism etc. are trained at Enable India to face the challenges of the corporate world. The team is working towards policy change, awareness and acceptance of disabled in the competitive marketplace as well as their families. Confederation of Indian Industries and other forums are utilized for widespread transformation in the society. Shanti believes in things being done differently and the impossible, being made possible. Shanti and her husband are based in Bangalore and fully devoted to redesigning the employment scenario for disabled citizens, making them live with dignity and even becoming the breadwinner of the family.

Aman Singh (case 3) is working towards improving the livelihoods of rural Indians through his organization- Krishi Avam Paristhitki Vikas Sansthan (KRAPAVIS). Aman is working towards reviving the old tradition of community-managed forests (Known as “Orans” traditionally) to protect the access rights of the rural poor and safeguard the natural resources. This grass-roots organization has the vision of community-led revival of village forests, or orans, in the Thar Desert and Aravali hill bio-regions in Rajasthan, with a view to the sustainable livelihoods of rural pastoral communities in Rajasthan. Aman is based in Alwar and is dedicated to KRAPAVIS along with his team and family.

Vishal Talreja (case 4) is working towards childhood development for vulnerable children. He has built a network of Volunteers. His initiative “Dream A Dream” is working towards offering a spectrum of opportunities that ensures the availability of the basic needs for the vulnerable children suffering from fatal diseases. Vishal has grown up in Bangalore and he working full time with his team for the deprived children to realize their dreams.

Kaustubh Pandharipande (case 5) is working through his organization “Samvedna” towards building trade networks and legal frameworks for helping the nomadic communities. He has been working on a step by step plan to provide supportive legal framework for the nomadic community to enable them to carry out their profession and lead lives of dignity. Kaustubh is based in Maharashtra and is working at local level with the nomadic communities spending most of his time experiencing the nomadic life.

Anshu K. Gupta (case 6) is working towards community participation. His organization “GOONJ” is building a nationwide movement to encourage and manage the transfer of second hand clothes and goods discarded by the wealthy to utterly poor people. The operational cost is reduced by active participation of the volunteer networks. Anshu is based in Delhi and is working full time towards managing GOONJ and encouraging other organizations to replicate the same model.

These social entrepreneurs were systematic in their approach and have valued long term considerations over short term gains. A constant and strong motivation to achieve their goals has emerged as the driving force in all six cases under discussion.

Conclusion

The existing discussion on SE brings out the relevant research questions where the future researchers can look forward towards contributing to the existing academic literature. The in-depth details of the case studies have helped in arriving at common characteristics to their success. Three major themes emerge out of this qualitative study. They are - Organizational Characteristics, personal characteristics of the social entrepreneurs and the major strategies followed by their enterprise. The critical analysis of the cases have led to the identification of specific strategies that the entrepreneurs have followed and how they have designed the organizational climate to enrich their employees and thus contribute to the society on a larger scale. It was very interesting to identify and highlight the personal qualities of the entrepreneurs, described in the cases with respect to the existing competencies mentioned in the academic literature.

Clear vision and a decision to take action are two of the most prominent attributes of entrepreneurial competence. Accepting mistakes and correcting oneself is a dominant characteristic of these entrepreneurs. Over the time these people have changed the profit making business strategies to ethically and socially benefitting practices. Presently, Societies across the globe are in great need of many such entrepreneurs and they must be helped and supported in pursuit of their vision by both public and the private sectors units in India. Offering social entrepreneurship courses in reputed management institutes would promote the weaker section of the society to look forward to a decent living with dignity due to their own efforts.

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