

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE MARKETING CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship is the citizen-sector application of entrepreneurial dynamics in the context of social reform. This paper will first offer an overview of the emergence and importance of social entrepreneurship. Next, the relationship of social entrepreneurship and marketing processes will be discussed. Finally, a specific implementation of social entrepreneurship dynamics in a "conventional" entrepreneurship course is outlined and discussed.

THE EMERGENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Social entrepreneurship is the application of entrepreneurial dynamics in the context of social reform. It involves entrepreneurship not by the business sector, nor by the public sector, but by the *citizen sector*—individuals or groups who work for social change independent from commercial or governmental interests. The term "social entrepreneurship" is credited to Bill Drayton, founder of a social entrepreneur investment organization called Ashoka: Innovators for the Public, based in Arlington, Virginia (Hsu 2005). Social entrepreneurship is closely related to non-profit marketing and/or management, and the term is indeed often used to describe basic efforts by non-profits to use marketing and managerial principles to raise money, solicit volunteers, etc. However, the process can be extended and enriched by a conceptualization in which social entrepreneurs are seen as transformative forces whose efforts result in systemic changes in societal patterns and policies (Bornstein 2004). In addition, social entrepreneurship differs from non-profit marketing in that social entrepreneurship is focused on the "venture creation" aspects of the social marketing process.

Both the demand for and supply of social entrepreneurial efforts have increased in recent years (Bornstein 2004). On the demand side, the global spread of communication technology has made people increasingly aware of the existence and extent of social problems. In addition, the perceived inability of governments to effectively address societal needs has increased frustration in many areas, including within the developed world.

On the supply side, socio-political changes (e.g., the end of the Cold War), economic changes (e.g., growing middle-classes in many countries), and socio-cultural changes (e.g., global women's movements, diminishing racial discrimination) have given more people the freedom to address social problems (Bornstein 2004).

These dynamics are increasingly recognized by academia in general, and by business schools in particular. More than thirty business schools in the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. offer coursework in social entrepreneurship (Dahle 2004), including many top-shelf MBA programs, such as Harvard, Stanford, the University of Chicago, and Duke (Hsu 2005). Social entrepreneurship coursework at the undergraduate level exists in a plethora of disciplines, ranging from management/general business, urban studies, public policy, social work, engineering, and interdisciplinary studies. Special topics courses in Non-profit Marketing appear to be the only places in which social entrepreneurship is significantly addressed in the marketing curriculum.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE MARKETING CONTEXT

Social entrepreneurship represents a direct application of the *social marketing concept* (Kotler and Roberto 1989). The social marketing concept involves the conceptualization and implementation of marketing programs with the objective of increasing the acceptability of some idea or practice. Social marketing advocates emphasize that the real difference between social and "conventional" marketing lies in objective, not in the methods used.

In general, social entrepreneurship involves the application of conventional entrepreneurial dynamics—such as recognizing opportunities and managing innovation and risk—in the creation of social value (Mair and Marti 2006; Peredo and McLean 2006). Mort, Weerawardeena, and Carnegie (2003) discuss the relationship between social entrepreneurship and marketing, beginning by conceptualizing social entrepreneurship as a multidimensional construct that, because of the moral complexities inherent in the overriding social mission, requires coherence of purpose and action. Alvord, Brown, and Letts (2004) discuss the broad

objectives of social entrepreneurship, calling for undertakings that lead to significant changes in the social, political, and economic contexts for poor and marginalized groups. Spear (2006) discusses the strategic context of social entrepreneurship, developing a model that emphasizes collective and/or volunteer-based social entrepreneurial organization

Despite this spate of recent scholarly emphasis on the strategic context of social entrepreneurship, it should be emphasized that the *execution* of ideas is more important than the mere the conception of ideas or the general call for socially beneficial programs (Bornstein 2004; Zietlow 2001). In this light, the basic marketing mix variables can be applied in the social entrepreneurial context. The "customer benefit" associated with social entrepreneurship most often involves the development of a service or set of services that address social needs (Roberts and Woods 2005). But while service may be the core of the social entrepreneurial benefit, there can often be products (e.g., the Lance Armstrong bracelets) and/or experiences (e.g., benefit concerts) associated with the socially beneficial service. While "pricing" is perhaps not a directly relevant concept in the social entrepreneurship context, it is nonetheless important to consider the *costs* to beneficiaries (e.g., opportunity costs). "Distribution" is extremely important in social entrepreneurship, particularly with respect to projects that target impoverished areas that have poorly-developed infrastructure. Finally, "promotion" or marketing communication can be a crucial element of the success of social entrepreneurial projects. Given that social entrepreneurship is commonly undertaken under low-budget conditions, such communications efforts often involve non-traditional forms and channels. Indeed, among the factors found to be associated with social entrepreneurial success are social networking and forming cooperative networks among for-profit and non-profit organizations (Sharir and Lerner 2006). Municipal governments also often provide resource support for social entrepreneurial endeavors, including assistance with marketing communication efforts designed to solicit funding, donation, and volunteer support (Korosec and Berman 2006).

CASE EXAMPLE: IMPLEMENTATION OF SE DYNAMICS IN A TRADITIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP COURSE

Given the important relationship between social entrepreneurship and marketing, it follows that social entrepreneurship can and should be incorporated

into the marketing curriculum. This section will outline an application of social entrepreneurship in a senior-level Entrepreneurship course offered as an elective in the Marketing department of a northeastern U.S. college. The specific class to be discussed here was held in the fall semester of 2006, with a class size of twenty-six.

The application of social entrepreneurship took three main forms: the textbook, in-class case discussions, and the final project. Before discussion of this application, it should be noted that, despite the significant social entrepreneurship elements of the course, traditional entrepreneurship topics also were introduced throughout the semester. These were drawn from several entrepreneurship texts, and included such topics as feasibility analysis, industry/competitor analysis, developing business models, financial viability, and entrepreneurial management. In-class cases in traditional entrepreneurial contexts were used to help students understand these concepts. Ultimately, however, these concepts were also applied in the social entrepreneurial context.

The textbook for the course was *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas* (2004) by David Bornstein, cited several times earlier in this article. This book offers a combination of chapters that outline important general issues in social entrepreneurship, and chapters that profile successful social entrepreneurs. A striking aspect of the book is the degree to which the importance of marketing is acknowledged and emphasized. Indeed, this book provides extraordinary insights into marketing concepts and applications. Consider, for example, this quotation from Bill Drayton: "I don't believe that *conceiving* an idea and *marketing* it are different. Every day you're modifying the idea. You're seeing new opportunities. You're seeing new nuances of problems. It's a continuous process." (Bornstein 2004, p.119, emphasis in original).

In-class case discussions helped students connect traditional entrepreneurial concepts and practices with the context of social entrepreneurship. The cases involved both creative vision (e.g., brainstorming sets of potential solutions for social problems) and creative problem-solving (e.g., development of marketing-based implementation of solutions to problems). Emphasis was placed on the application of marketing principles throughout these discussions, from the broad application of the social marketing concept to specific factors such as value-chain dynamics, market research, and integrated marketing communication.

The most significant social entrepreneurship aspect of the course was the final project, for which students prepared a marketing plan/proposal for a new social entrepreneurial venture. A written report and oral presentation were required. The "idealized" objective of the project was to develop a marketing plan of such a compelling nature that it could be considered for funding from Ashoka or a similar organization. Again, the structure of the project reflected the overall course integration of traditional and social entrepreneurship dynamics, as reflected in the general project outline:

Part One: Feasibility Analysis

1. Description of the Social Entrepreneurial Project and its Value (identification of problem, target beneficiaries, proposed benefits, costs to beneficiaries)
2. "Market" Feasibility (competitive dynamics and positioning)
3. Organizational Resource and Infrastructure Requirements and Feasibility
4. Financial Resource Requirements and Feasibility

Part Two: Implementation Plan and Value-Delivery Dynamics

1. Beneficiaries: Method of Value-Delivery and Logistical Details
2. Marketing Dynamics for Resource Acquisition
3. Integrated Marketing Communication Plan
4. Risk Analysis and Contingency Plan

Students formed groups of three or four members. The groups then decided on a social problem to address in their project. To facilitate this, students were assigned a short homework assignment in which they outlined three social problems that they as individuals found compelling and especially relevant. This made the subsequent group discussions quite rich, and all of the groups quickly agreed on project topics. The completed project topics were:

- Alternative athletics infrastructure in inner cities
- Infrastructure support for low-income housing
- Support services for AIDS victims in India
- Alternative medicine services for senior citizens
- Job-training and work support services for the teenage ex-convicts
- Access to computer technology for low-income households
- Improved logistics for food donation services

In general, the projects were rigorous regarding the application of both feasibility analysis and implementation. Also, perhaps because almost all of the students were marketing majors, their discussions of value-delivery and marketing communication were insightful and creative. In addition to the regular course evaluation, students were solicited for feedback specifically regarding the project. Students reported that the social entrepreneurial nature of the project (1) helped them feel good about the social impact of their proposals, in contrast to purely for-profit entrepreneurship; (2) helped them understand the application of social responsibility in marketing; and (3) added to the overall challenge of the project, because of the multiple stakeholders involved and the intangible nature of benefits in some cases.

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the incorporation of social entrepreneurship dynamics in a traditional entrepreneurship course proved to be a natural match, other marketing courses are certainly amenable to such implementation. We recommend that marketing educators look for opportunities for social entrepreneurial applications across the marketing curriculum. For example, Principles of Marketing, Marketing Management, and other courses that either introduce or enhance students' understanding of marketing strategy and implementation have the potential for social entrepreneurial application. More specialized courses such as Integrated Marketing Communication, Consumer Behavior, and Marketing Research can include discussion and/or application of those aspects of social entrepreneurship relevant to those areas.

Ultimately, the potential for a distinct Social Entrepreneurship course based in the Marketing department certainly exists, perhaps even within the format of Special Topics or Advanced Topics in Marketing. Based on the extraordinary learning experiences associated with the implementation described herein, we strongly recommend that marketing departments consider such an offering.

Regardless of the particular form of implementation, social entrepreneurship can provide unique learning experiences and outcomes for marketing students. Understanding social entrepreneurship makes ethics and social responsibility a real-world, applicative aspect of the marketing curriculum. In addition, exposure to social entrepreneurship provides marketing students with an understanding of the

broader scope in which marketing principles can be applied, and can orient students toward non-traditional marketing employment opportunities in the citizen sector (e.g., idealist.org, etc.).

Perhaps the most poignant validation of the importance of social entrepreneurship came in October 2006 when Muhammed Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank, a micro-financing institution that provides grass-roots funding for entrepreneurial efforts in poverty-stricken regions of Bangladesh,

was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. This award contributes greatly to the overall perception that business processes can indeed change the world in positive ways, and should serve to enlighten marketing educators as to the great potential for the infusion of such notions into our curricula.

References Available on Request