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Special Issue: The Evolution of Social Enterprise

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Main Point

The study of social enterprise is becoming enriched through the adoption of novel theoretical lenses that are adding greatly to our understanding of this diverse and economically and socially important sector.

Key Points

Globally, the sector remains encumbered by the perennial constraint of finance and funding.

The management and behaviour of human resources, from senior management to volunteers, is qualitatively different in social enterprises compared to for-profit organizations.

The heterogeneity of the social enterprise sector calls for future research that is unconstrained by the real and perceived limits of existing theory, methods and language.

Narrative

We begin this special issue with Professor Ken Peattie's examination of the metaphorical conceptualizations of Social Enterprise. Building upon his considerable previous work, he presents metaphorical representations of Social Enterprises as 'animal', 'car', 'forest', 'farm' and 'brain', and examines how these terms may guide, elucidate and broaden the ways in which we may understand this highly heterogeneous sector. Through this approach the paper aims to provoke further critical discourse. We argue that it is indeed instantly successful in this by challenging the "*most pervasive metaphor within SE discourse, that of SEs as hybrids*", a prevalent term even among the papers presented in this special issue.

Following this, Taylor presents an examination of the CSR activities that have been undertaken by a Community Housing Mutual Association in order to meet the competing demands of their financial and social objectives. A Grounded Theory approach is adopted, drawing upon the expert insight of Board Members and Senior Management, to understand the internal as well as external operationalization of CSR. The study addresses the paucity of research that examines the internal activities of socially responsible organisations and proffers practical measures for social enterprises to embed the philosophy of CSR and thereby improve both their performance and their authenticity.

Next, Mohiuddin, Mazumder, Mamun and Su study the under-researched areas of microenterprises and microfinance. Their quantitative analysis of Malaysian microentrepreneurs shows the benefit of urban microfinance in stimulating social entrepreneurship and economic activities. Support for furthering the reach of

microfinance through policy change can aid with that they term a 'virtuous cycle' of wealth generation in urban areas.

Furthering our examination of the internal machinations of Social Enterprises, Allen provides us with a study of the sources of expertise that social entrepreneurs utilise in their endeavours. Based upon an examination of social entrepreneurs in the Southwest of England, the research presents the array of personal and network expertise that are drawn upon and how the use of those sources changes over time. This research is novel in its use of expertise as a lens through which social entrepreneurs are examined and consequently provides new insight into social enterprise and entrepreneurs.

Continuing the stream of innovative research in this special issue, Thomas explores the socialising influence of community-owned football clubs upon young people. This work uncovers the socially valuable environment that these forms of clubs may imbue that is largely at odds with the hyper-commercial, masculine image of professional football. Drawing upon the methodologically challenging child demographic, the analyses reveal the behavioural effects that may be garnered through deep-immersion in this globally consumed sporting environment.

The subject of 'sustainability' is one that has permeated almost all academic disciplines and Fomina and Apenko extend that discourse into the sphere of social enterprise. Their comparative examination of four dimensions of sustainability in organizations in Russia reveals a surprisingly high degree of similarity between the performance of social and for-profit organizations.

The management of human resources is particularly challenging in social enterprises when those resources are both the 'employee' of the organisation and the 'recipient' of the social good that the enterprise aims to deliver. Magrizos and Roumpi address this issue through examining the 'ethics of care' and the 'ethics of justice' in social enterprises. Through a series of semi-structured interviews with representative of UK social enterprises the study reveals the dominant mode of ethics that guides managerial decision-making.

This Special Issue on 'The Evolution of Social Enterprise' set out to illuminate the intricacies of founding, managing and sustaining Social Enterprises. In doing this, Mohuiddin et al, Allen and Taylor have each helped to evidence the vagaries of the various stages in the lifecycle of social enterprise development. Methodologically, the contributions have spanned a wide range of interpretive approaches to study along with conceptual and quantitative techniques, and global insight has been gained through studies that took place in the UK, Malaysia and Russia. What is particularly interesting is the richness of the theoretical underpinnings to many of the studies. Mohuiddin et al contribute to our understanding of microfinancing, which is most important since finance is a perennial topic of concern for the whole field of Social Enterprise. Allen's use of the lens of 'expertise' is unique among the extant literature, and Magrizos and Roumpi provide novel examination of the ethics of HRM practices in the social enterprise setting. The lead article by Professor Ken Peattie even encourages us to fundamentally rethink the language that we use when engaging with Social Enterprise research.