SEARCHING FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS:
WHO THEY MIGHT BE, WHERE THEY MIGHT BE FOUND, WHAT THEY DO

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There is plenty of evidence that social entrepreneurs exist, particularly measured by the rapidly increasing number of scholars, case studies, and funders interested in the topic.

Social entrepreneurs clearly exist in widely-read magazines such as *Fast Company* and are featured in nationally-recognized documentaries such as the Public Broadcasting System's "New Heroes" documentary hosted by Robert Redford. They meet in rapidly-growing associations such as the Social Enterprise Alliance, Social Venture Network, and Young Women Social Entrepreneurs.

Their work is sparked and expanded by long-standing fellowship programs sponsored by the Ashoka Society and Echoing Green Foundation, incubated by small organizations such as the Blue Ridge Foundation, and supported by philanthropies such as the Catherine Reynolds Foundation, Draper Richards Foundation, Ewing Marion Kaufman Foundation, Skoll Foundation, and Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.[1]

They can also be identified by name in books such as David Bornstein's *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas* and Charles Leadbeater's *The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur,* and in case studies by scholars such as J. Gregory Dees, Jed Emerson, and Peter Economy. And they can be found in undergraduate and graduate programs across the globe, including New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service.[2]

The question for this paper is not whether social entrepreneurs exist, however, but whether the field of social entrepreneurship is too exclusive for its own good. The field has mostly defined social entrepreneurs as individuals who launch entirely new social-purpose nonprofit ventures. In doing so, the field may have excluded large numbers of individuals and entities that are equally deserving of the support, networking, and training now reserved for individuals who meet both the current definitional tests of a social entrepreneur and the ever-growing list of exemplars.

Not only does this definition deny the possibility that the intensity and quantity of social entrepreneurship might vary over time and across individuals and entities, it also substantially reduces the population of entrepreneurs who might form the basis for the kind of evidence-based, large-sample, control-group research needed to determine what truly matters to successful social entrepreneurship.

DEFINING TERMS

The field of social entrepreneurship has not come to complete closure on the basic definition of social entrepreneurship. Indeed, the field continues to mix and match a range of terms to describe social entrepreneurship, including nonprofit ventures, social enterprise, social-purpose endeavor, corporate social responsibility, and social innovation. Although it has been almost three decades since the Surdna Foundation's Edward Skloot first used the term "nonprofit venture" and the Ashoka foundation's Bill

Drayton adopted the term "social entrepreneurship," there is still considerable debate about when and where the term applies.

The field of business entrepreneurship has struggled with similar definitional challenges. According to Murray Low, one of the fathers of the field, the study of entrepreneurship is still in its adolescence. While acknowledging that "it is much easier to be a critic than a producer of quality research," Murray (2001) concludes that his field has not come far enough, fast enough: "Today, as the field struggles with the challenges of adolescence, it is time for straight talk. Students of entrepreneurship need to make something of this field, or face the reality that we have missed the opportunity" (p. 17).

Murray's greatest concern is the continued lack of a fully-developed definition of entrepreneurship. As Murray and Ian MacMilan wrote in a 1988 literature review,

> The phenomenon of entrepreneurship is intertwined with a complex set of contiguous and overlapping constructs such as management of change, innovation, technological and environmental turbulence, new product development, small business management, individualism and industry evolution. Furthermore, the phenomenon can be productively investigated from disciplines as varied as economics, sociology, finance, history, psychology, and anthropology, each of which uses its own concepts and operates within its own terms of reference. Indeed, it seems likely that the desire of common definitions and a clearly defined area of inquiry will remain unfulfilled in the foreseeable future (p. 141).

Murray quotes this passage in full in 2001 because "it remains as true today as when it was written" (p. 19).

Early Research on Social Entrepreneurship

As the number of scholars, funders, and opinion leaders has grown, the field of social entrepreneurship is currently confronting its own definitional conundrum, albeit one that is moving forward with each research contribution. The field of social entrepreneurship is hardly new, however.

In 1986, for example, Dennis R. Young distinguished the nonprofit entrepreneur from the ordinary manager as one who "is engaged in breaking new ground in his administrative or organizational role rather than engaging simply in customary managerial practices or ordinary decision-making. Thus, entrepreneurs are the innovators who found new organizations, develop and implement new programs and methods, organize and expand new services, and redirect the activities of faltering organizations" (p. 162).

Young's definition was merely the precursor to a long discussion of the nature of a potential field that screened entrepreneurs by field/industry and sector. But by field/industry, he focused exclusively on nonprofits, reliance on hierarchy, the service ethic embedded in volunteerism, charity, and community, and career mobility. For Young, nonprofit entrepreneurs can gain important experience in government or nonprofits for future income-generating endeavors in the private sector.

Young's primary interest was not just in defining a possible typology of nonprofit entrepreneurs, but in laying out a framework for future research. His questions are still relevant twenty years later, and will be raised in one form or another later in this chapter:

> For example, it remains to be determined what specific conditions are responsible for igniting such initiative, what kinds of boundaries are set on enterprise by constituent and regulating groups, and how the initial intent of entrepreneurs becomes dispersed or diffused over time. But the screening and motivation processes described here may be a reasonable starting point. In particular, each variety of entrepreneurs—potentially selected into or out of the nonprofit sector— has been seen to imply a particular behavior pattern (i.e., one that is less inspiring of trust and sensitive to current exigencies as expressed by economic demands.) (p. 182).

Although Young mixes terms here and there—e.g., enterprise versus entrepreneurship—his work is well worth reading as a starting point in the history of the field.

Five years later, in 1991, Sandra Waddock and James E. Post advanced the field with a tighter definition of entrepreneurs as private-sector leaders "who play critical roles in bringing about 'catalytic changes' in the public sector agenda and the perception of certain social issues" (p. 393). Using the leaders of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and Hands Across America as their cases, both of which were blended government/nonprofit initiatives, Waddock and Post, argued that there are three characteristics essential for successful social entrepreneurs:

> First, and probably most significant, is that the social problem is characterized by extreme *complexity*, which the social entrepreneur is somehow able to bound into a "vision" that has the potential to reshape public attitudes when implemented. Second, the social entrepreneur is an individual with significant personal *credibility*, which he or she uses to tap critical resources and actually build the necessary network of participating organizations. Third, the social entrepreneur generates followers' *commitment* to the project by framing it in terms of important social values, rather than purely economic terms, which results in a sense of *collective purpose* among the social entrepreneur and those who join the effort (p. 394).

The field has advanced significantly since these early contributions, driven in large measure by case studies of successful social entrepreneurs.

In 2001, for example, John Thompson, Geoff Alvy, and Ann Lees defined the term as a form of business entrepreneurship by arguing that the traits and behaviors of successful social entrepreneurs closely mirror characteristics of successful business entrepreneurs, but require an extra dose of visionary ideas, leadership skills, and a commitment to helping others. As such, social entrepreneurs are "people who realize where there is an opportunity to satisfy some unmet need that the state welfare will not or cannot meet, and who gather together the necessary resources (generally people, often volunteers, money and premises) and use these to 'make a difference'" (p. 328).

The focus is not on incremental adjustment, however, but what they call the "True entrepreneurs who create sea-change movements, either quickly over time, and have a major impact" (p. 336). Although the authors did argue that "micro-entrepreneurs have limited, but still valuable impacts," the primary focus remains on large-scale change, which yields a significant task for researchers: "The challenge we face is one of blending people with ideas with people with the will, as is the case for entrepreneurship generally. Training and development for this sector needs to include a focus on confidence building and leadership skills, probably using people who have already achieved in the field—and (which would be typical) who are happy and willing to share their learning" (p. 337).

A year later, Thompson (2002) extended his definition of social entrepreneurs to include "people with the qualities and behaviours we associate with the business entrepreneur but who operate in the community and are more concerned with caring and helping than 'making money'" (p. 413). Using a database of organizations funded by the Duke of York's Community Initiative, Thompson found significant differences between activities involving "outstanding creativity" and impact and those involving "less ambition and little true entrepreneurship," thereby augmenting the growing list of traits and behaviors that are essential for defining social entrepreneurs from their non-entrepreneurial peers (p. 433).

Peter Frumkin advanced the field in the same year with the publication of his award-winning *On Being Nonprofit.* Having distinguished between the expressive and instrumental dimensions of nonprofit and voluntary action, Frumkin (2002) defined social entrepreneurship as a combination of the supply-side orientation and the instrumental rational, providing "a vehicle for entrepreneurship" that "creates social enterprises that combine commercial and charitable goals" (p. 130). It is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Via this definition, social entrepreneurs operate within the nonprofit sector as the "place where new projects can be designed and implemented by people who are willing to take a chance. Almost anyone with an idea or vision can found a nonprofit or voluntary organization quickly" (p. 129). With such a low barrier for entry, entrepreneurs can easily find alternative financing tools. As such, Frumkin's definition of social entrepreneurship feels much more like recent definitions of social enterprise, which is primarily an alternative to dependency on government or charitable giving. "Instead of relying on private grants or government assistance, many new organizations are conceived from the start as self-supporting operations that generate fees and commercial revenues to support their charitable missions. In this sense, the rise of nonprofit entrepreneurship has been followed closely by a rising tide of fee-for-service and commercial enterprises of all sorts" (p. 130).

Two years later, in 2004, Sarah Alvord, David Brown, and Christine Letts drew upon a sample of seven well-established organizations to define social entrepreneurs in an entirely different way as catalysts for social transformation.[3] This exploratory work suggested that leaders of successful social entrepreneurships need two types of skills: the capacity to bridge diverse stakeholder communities, and long-term adaptive skills in response to changing circumstances.

According to Alvord, Brown, and Letts, most of the organizations in their small sample of cases were led by individuals or groups with "backgrounds and experiences that enabled them to build effective links with very diverse actors" (p. 274). Similarly,

many of these leaders "expanded their own repertoires to provide new visions for growing their organizations over many years"

Finally, and most recently, Lynn Barendsen and Howard Gardner (2004) ask whether the social entrepreneur is a new type of leader. Arguing that social entrepreneurship is a new version of long-existing terms such as "changemaker," the authors suggest that entrepreneurs are both similar and different from their peers. "Like many of us, social entrepreneurs have deeply rooted beliefs, and like many of us, these beliefs are formed early. Social entrepreneurs are exceptional, however, in *what* they believe and *how* these beliefs originate" (p. 44). Building upon deep interviews with very small samples of social, business, and healthcare entrepreneurs, Barendsen and Gardner highlight the notion that social entrepreneurs are unusual "in terms of their compelling personal histories, their distinctive profile of beliefs, and their impressive accomplishments in the face of odds" (p. 50).

BUILDING A RESEARCH BASE

Unfortunately, the field of social entrepreneurship has yet to emerge from its infancy, let alone reach the adolescence that Murray sees in the study of business entrepreneurship.

Much of the difficulty surrounds two basic questions that have yet to be fully resolved. First, what exactly is social entrepreneurship, and how is it different from entrepreneurship more generally? Second, how would researchers know a social entrepreneur if they saw one? The field must tackle these questions if it is to move beyond collections of rigorous case studies, regardless of how interesting and provocative such studies can be.

Defining Terms Again

The field of social entrepreneurship does not suffer from a lack of definitions. The Skoll Foundation defines social entrepreneurs as "the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss, and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating sustainable solutions to change society for the better." In turn, the Schwab Foundation defines a social entrepreneur as a different kind of leader who "identifies and applies practical solutions to social problems by combining innovation, resourcefulness, and opportunities." In turn again, the Ashoka society defines social entrepreneurs as individuals with "the committed vision and inexhaustible determination to persist until they have transformed an entire system" who "go beyond the immediate problem to fundamentally change communities, societies, and the world."[4]

These definitions are echoed the exemplary entrepreneurs identified by Ashoka, the Blue Ridge Foundation, Draper Richards Foundation, Echoing Green, and the Ewing Marion Kauffman, Schwab, and Skoll foundations. Using these exemplars to enrich their funding guidelines, six of the seven mostly celebrate ideas that embrace innovation, show resourcefulness, and demonstrate a commitment to growth and widespread impact. One also focuses exemplars who take fully accountable action, another on those who take risks even in the absence of resources, another on those who adopt research-based initiatives and technology, another on those who tackle the root causes of social

problems, and a last on individuals who connect people to the opportunities, resources, and support they need to improve their lives and fulfill their potential.

This focus on exemplars with certain characteristics and operating styles are easy to identify elsewhere in the social entrepreneurship community. As one might expect, for example, business schools that teach social entrepreneurship tend to emphasize the use of business skills to create innovation. New York University's Stern School focuses on innovative approaches to solving social problems, for example, but also stresses the use of successful business practices, identification of market opportunities, taking of bold action without regard for resources currently in hand, and continuous improvement to bring the concept to reality.

Despite the generally tight focus on creating social change, the available definitions and exemplars operate from several starting points that may limit the search for a broad sample of social entrepreneurs that might support deeper analysis:

1. Social entrepreneurs are almost always defined as individuals, no doubt in part because individuals are easier to find and are so visibly committed to social change. Relatively few exemplars are groups or teams of individuals, networks, organizations, or even communities, although the Washington, D.C., Maya Angelou school was founded and continues to operate with two co-founders.

2. Social entrepreneurs almost always reside in the nonprofit sector, perhaps because private foundations must give their dollars to tax-exempt public charities and therefore celebrate the grantees therein. However, at least some scholars have come to focus on the world in-between private and nonprofit, most notably the Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. In their seminal article on "sector bending," for example, J. Gregory Dees and Beth Battle Anderson (2003) write of the increasing number of profits and nonprofits that are moving into social entrepreneurship by linking the market to social missions, a point more forcefully made in Dees' reconceptualization of social entrepreneurship as "enterprising social innovation" that is presented earlier in this volume.

3. Social entrepreneurs are almost always defined as the starting point of the change process. Most definitions and examples focus on the supply-side of entrepreneurs by asking how to identify and encourage individuals to make the leap into making change, while generally ignoring the demand-side of entrepreneurship that might create the incentives for individuals and other entities to take advantage of the available opportunities to make a difference. Hence, Wendy Kopp remains one of the great exemplars for starting Teach for America and bringing it "to scale," a phrase the field uses to define widespread impact.

4. Social entrepreneurs are almost always seen as interested in new solutions to intractable problems, meaning that they focus on the programmatic, or "what"

side of innovation. Although there are examples of entrepreneurs who focus on organizational or administrative change, meaning the technical, or "how" side of innovation, the primary interest is on addressing intractable social problems through new ideas and their scale-up to maximum impact. Whatever is new to an individual is not necessarily new to a field. For every study of the use of traditional micro-finance by the Grameen Bank to solve poverty, there seem to be dozens of studies of new interventions for changing individual behavior and improving job readiness.

5. Social entrepreneurs are almost always defined as using high-performance management practices such as continuous improvement, quality management, strong financial controls, and a general focus on high accountability, but few definitions or examples embed such practices as essential ingredients of early success. The exceptions to this rule are organizations such as the Local Initiative Support Corporation, which uses closely-monitored housing finance to attack homelessness, and other long-established organizations that have used the market to generate revenues for social entrepreneurship.

6. Social entrepreneurs are generally seen as building programs and organizations from scratch, not as individuals who might refine an existing program or overhaul an organization, and only rarely as an existing organization that might recruit a change agent(s) for a specific initiative. Although the field does recognize such efforts as a form of "intrapreneurship," such organizational transformation is rarely considered a socially-entrepreneurial goal. Even scholars who focus on the demand-side of entrepreneurship tend to do so in an effort to understand the pre-conditions of start-up.[5]

7. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, most social entrepreneurs are seen as all entrepreneurial, all of the time. Few of the most visible definitions and examples of social entrepreneurs focus on individuals who might accelerate and decelerate their entrepreneurial activities over time—one only rarely, if ever, finds examples of social entrepreneurs who are only somewhat entrepreneurial, for example, nor of those that have a fair amount of entrepreneurial energy, but not a great amount. The question, of course, is whether a small group of somewhat entrepreneurial individuals or entities might actually equal or exceed the impact of one greatly entrepreneurial individual.

Given these constraints, it is not surprising that social entrepreneurs are seen as the rare exception to the rule, which is perhaps why so many funders look for the kinds of individuals that Ashoka founder Bill Drayton describes as "the ones who will have a giant impact, leave a scratch on history, and be role models for the field. If all goes well, we will have a relationship with them throughout their careers" (Holmstrom, 1999).

Nor is it surprising to think that social entrepreneurs might be hard to find and study. Although many scholars start their search for entrepreneurs with organizations

such as Teach for America, Share Our Strength, the Grameen Bank, and so forth, most eventually wind their way back to the founding leader and what he/she/they did to launch the idea, build organizational capacity, and achieve impact.

Identifying Social Entrepreneurs

This focus on the high-committed, "happy-and-willing-to-share" exemplars has led many researchers to search for certain life experiences, demographic differences, entrepreneurial intent, tactics and strategies, cognitive biases, and idea-management skills that might distinguish social entrepreneurs from their less entrepreneurial peers. Although some of the research discussed below involves large and small samples of business entrepreneurs, the body of work does provide a foundation for those interested in both finding social entrepreneurs and providing the resources needed for maximum impact.

If social entrepreneurship comes from early life experiences, for example, researchers may be right that social entrepreneurs are rare, indeed. However, if it involves specific behaviors that can be illustrated, simulated, taught, and rehearsed after leaving home, they could be quite wrong. If social entrepreneurship comes from demographic differences based on gender and race, they could be right. However, if it comes from motivations and behaviors that can be identified and encouraged, they could be wrong. And so it goes down the possible sources of entrepreneurial activity. Some sources appear almost impossible to change, while others appear to be quite malleable. Table 1 illustrates the potential variation.

Table 1: Sources of Entrepreneurial Intent

Source of Entrepreneurial Activity	Impact on the Pool of Potential Entrepreneurs	Impact on Spread of Socially-Entrepreneurial Activity
Life Experiences	Decrease (difficult to alter as experiences accumulate over the life span)	High (depends on size of initial pool of individuals with needed experiences)
Demographic Differences	Decrease (reflects prevailing social conditions that may change)	High (depends on size of initial pool with requisite demographic experience)
Entrepreneurial Intent	Decrease (identity and motivation are often established in childhood, but may be changeable with opportunity, and incentives)	High (depends on size of initial pool with requisite intent)
Tactics and Strategies	Increase (can be illustrated, simulated, taught, and rehearsed)	Moderate (depends on access to education and training)

Cognitive Biases	Increase (can be identified and altered, but may be essential at different stages of entrepreneurial activity)	Moderate (depends on access to education and training, and avoidance of unintended consequences of reducing risk taking)
Idea-Management Skills	Increase (can be illustrated, simulated, taught and rehearsed)	Low (depends on access to education and training)

If the table is correct, the level of social entrepreneurship at any given time in any given society will depend in large measure on a relatively fixed pool of potential entrepreneurs. Where there is a smaller pool of potential social entrepreneurs, advocates would be well advised to focus on questions of emergence and early career choice; where there is a much greater pool, advocates might focus on questions of picking and supporting the very best ideas. However, as the following pages suggest, societies have at least some tools that may increase the odds that any pool, no matter how limited, will yield the greatest number of social entrepreneurs possible.

Life Experiences. Much of the early work on business entrepreneurship focused on basic personality traits such as achievement motivation, tolerance for ambiguity, optimism, intelligence, talent, and so forth. The focus was not on what the entrepreneur does, but who the entrepreneur is (Gartner, 1988). In 1991, for example, J. Barton Cunningham and Joe Lischeron argued that the "personality school of entrepreneurship" looks for generally stable characteristics such as honesty, duty, responsibility, and ethical behaviors essential for ultimate success. Almost by definition, these characteristics cannot be taught in the classroom. Rather, they develop over time "primarily through relationships with parents and teachers early in life" (p. 49). As the authors write:

> Values and ideals, fostered in one's family, school, church, community, and even culture, stay with the individual and guide him or her for a lifetime. These values are learned and internalized, and reflect the process of socialization into a culture. Personal values are basic to the way an individual behaves and will be expressed regardless of the situation (p. 49).

Unfortunately for those in search of easily-measured criteria for giving awards and fellowships, the early search for personality differences produced little supporting evidence. Although more recent work has revealed differences in self-efficacy and overall "proclivity" for entrepreneurship, these characteristics are not necessarily embedded in deep personality dispositions.

Despite this mixed record and need for further research, the role of personality has anchored a number of recent conversations about the future of social entrepreneurship, some serious, some playful. In the playful category, consider the five questions *Alliance Magazine* asked of its readers in 2005:

- Do you regularly take three weeks of vacation?

- Do you give any thought to what you will do when you retire, looking longingly at the time when you will no longer be in the office from nine to five—or often much later?
- Does the thought of not having a regular monthly pay cheque drive you to the medicine cabinet in search of a tranquilizer?
- Do you need to feel that your friends and co-workers approve of what you are doing?
- Do you spend any less than 24 hours a day obsessing over new ways to transform society? (Hartigan and Billimoria, 2005, p. 1)

As the authors conclude, "If you have answered 'yes' to at least two of those questions, chances are that you are not a social entrepreneur. But before you put down this issue of *Alliance* because you have decided it obviously has nothing to do with you, we want to assure you that very few people are social entrepreneurs" (p. 1).

In the more serious category, Howard Gardner and his Good Work Project at Harvard University assume that specific experiences, many of them early in life, help explain social entrepreneurship. Although the effort is based on very small sample sizes and deep interviews, early results suggest that social entrepreneurs have a much higher incidence of childhood trauma and parents with high levels of social and/or political engagement. Arguing that business skills can be taught, but the entrepreneurial mindset cannot, Barendsen and Gardner argue that the feeling of isolation is a foundation for the outsider role that many social entrepreneurs take.

Barendsen and Gardner (2004) also argue that many social entrepreneurs experienced some kind of trauma in early life.[6] "Priorities suddenly become clear when life seems short or when one faces a stark choice," they write. "Under such circumstances, a calling may be discovered" (p. 44). Thus, half of the social entrepreneurs in the study sample, which is not well described, had what the authors describe as "a traumatic or deeply transformative experience at an early age" (p. 45), be it the loss of a significant other or a troubled family environment. "This is not true of business entrepreneurs" (p. 450, they argue.

Similarly, many of the social entrepreneurs in their sample expressed an interest in social issues at an early age, whether through politically-active parents, or volunteer work with voluntary organizations. "By contrast," the authors write, "fewer than half of the business entrepreneurs mention early evidence of their entrepreneurial tendencies" (p. 45). Barendsen and Gardner's study does not end with early experiences, however. They also examine personality traits, noting that social entrepreneurs are "energetic, persistent, and unusually confident, with an ability to inspire others to join them in their work" (p. 45). They are also deeply committed to their cause, very independent, and able to explain the link between their specific goals and a broader picture of an alternative world. Almost all are also spiritual or religious, and "believe in human potential, or the possibility of change" (p. 47).

<u>Demographic Differences</u>. Personal experiences do not provide the only markers of interest in finding social entrepreneurs, however. Scholars rightly care about demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, class, income, marital status, and

so forth, particularly when these characteristics are related to broader economic and social context.

Gender is seen as so important to entrepreneurship, for example, that the U.S. National Science Foundation set aside additional funds to assure an over-sample of women in the path-breaking 1998-2003 Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics, which involved a sample of 64,000 adults.[7] According to further analysis of the voluminous database, gender helps explain access to individual assets such as human and financial capital, as well as access to opportunity. In turn, these assets help explain social networks, which in turn again, help explain the success of new ventures.

Moreover, gender helps explain differing entrepreneurial intentions, behaviors, biases, and skills. As Nancy M. Carter and Candida G. Brush (2004) explain, there are a number of reasons why women might be less likely to become entrepreneurs, which the Panel Study defines as anyone who starts a new business. Although women's self-efficacy, work values, financial capital, access to opportunity and entrepreneurial intensions may present the greatest barriers to engagement. "Gender differences occur not in the composition of opportunity structures," Carter and Brush write, "but in access to those structures….In addition to education and experience disparities, women are more likely to have careers frequently interrupted or work only part-time. These labor force interruptions can disadvantage an individual and they miss opportunities to gain new job skills or incur erosion in previously attained skills" (p. 16).

Similarly, women's intentions to launch and manage decision making also vary with men. "Research shows that men stress the desire to be their own boss in starting a new business, women stress the desire to be personally challenged or to create employment in which they can balance work and family. Women tend to deal with career or manage a business and family simultaneously, often with mixed success" (p. 16).

Somewhat different patterns hold for race and ethnicity. On the one hand, earlier research on entrepreneurial intent showed that Blacks and Hispanics were starting new businesses at rates that far exceeded Whites. On the other hand, Whites were much more likely to own an operating business. Although it is too early to know what causes so many Blacks and Hispanics to drop out before their businesses actually reach operating velocity, the initial research suggests that these nascent entrepreneurs face many of the same barriers as women. According to Patricia G. Greene and Margaret M. Owen (2004) strong social networks and fewer existing job opportunities within minority communities may encourage higher levels of entrepreneurial intent, while lower-levels of education, less access to start-up capital, and limited markets for small businesses may act as significant barriers.

These are hardly the only demographic differences that shape entrepreneurship, however. Age, marital status, household income and net worth, residential tenure, family background, and early work experience all work their will on start-ups of new ventures. But the research on why these demographic differences matter is only the beginning of a much more effective research strategy—scholars must also ask how the early start-ups could have made a difference if only they had received essential early investments.

Assuming that these patterns hold for social entrepreneurship, the question is not why so many ventures fail, but whether the failed ventures are fundamentally different in their pattern-breaking potential than those that succeeded. Were they more innovative?

Could they have made a bigger difference? How much initial funding would have increased the odds of success? By focusing so much attention on the survivors, the field may be missing the tremendous value of saving more start-ups.

<u>Entrepreneurial Intent</u>. Two interrelated schools of research have focused on entrepreneurial intent.

The first school deals with social identity, which Shalei V. K. Simms and Jeffrey Robinson (2005) have define as an individual's core answer to the question, "Who am I?" According to the authors, social entrepreneurs have at least two identities: the entrepreneur and the activist.

Although the two identities can and do co-exist, social entrepreneurs must decide which comes first. "They must answer the question 'how can I make a living enacting social change?' In some ways, they must decide whether they are profiting from a problem, or contributing to the solution" (p. 12). Simms and Robinson hypothesize that founders with a primary activist identity will be more likely to create nonprofit organizations, while those with a primary entrepreneurial activity are more likely to create for-profit entities.

Presented with an opportunity, entrepreneurs and activists alike ask a series of questions: "What are the risks of going after this opportunity for me and others? Do I have the resources to take advantage of the opportunity? What are the risks? Are there any barriers to me pursuing this opportunity?" (p. 16-17). But the perceptions of benefits and risk are driven by very different goals—i.e., income and financial independence or social impact and recognition. Moreover, as the authors suggest, social entrepreneurs who view themselves as activists first may miss important opportunities for change, particularly the opportunities that involve financial gains and market tools that they deem as secondary or unimportant.

Whether social entrepreneurs put activism or entrepreneurship first may well depend on where society has put them—if they are denied opportunities through gender, race, and class, they may be more likely to seek them through activist-identity social entrepreneurship. But if they are denied resources and the chance to earn income through the same demographic identity, they may be more likely to emphasize entrepreneur-identity social entrepreneurship. Only further research will tell.

This first school is closely related to a much deeper body of work on entrepreneurial motivation, which is rooted in Joseph Schumpeter's distinction between entrepreneurs and ordinary managers in the drive for new ideas, David C. McClelland's research on how societies inculcate the need for achievement, and more recent studies that focus specifically on social entrepreneurs. As Schumpeter argued, entrepreneurs are motivated first by "the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, although not necessarily, a dynasty….", then by "the will to conquer, the impulse to fight, to prove oneself superior to others to succeed for the sake not of the fruits of success, but of success itself…., and finally, by "the joy of creating, of getting things done, or simply exercising one's energy and ingenuity" (1952, p. 72).

In contrast, McClelland (1961) looked to broad social forces that deepen the pool of entrepreneurs in society as a whole. Defining the achievement motive as the driving force for entrepreneurship, McClelland argued that a society's need for achievement is rooted in childhood experiences. Measuring the amount of achievement imagery in

childhood textbooks, McClelland predicted that high-achievement societies would experience more rapid economic growth than low-achievement societies, largely because children with high achievement would become entrepreneurs. As McClelland wrote, "The achievement motive should lead individuals to seek out situations which provide moderate challenge to their skills, to perform better in such situations, and to have great confidence in the likelihood of their success. It should make them conservative where things are completely beyond their control, as in game of chance, and happier where they have some opportunity of influencing a series of events by their own actions and of knowing concretely what those actions have accomplished" (p. 358-39).

Although Schumpeter and McClelland focused almost entirely on business entrepreneurship, Young laid the groundwork for much of the contemporary research on social entrepreneurship in his 1986 framework. According to Young, there are at least seven types of nonprofit entrepreneurs, each with a somewhat different motivation for action.

1. Independents who seek small organizations in corners of the sector where new entry is relatively easy.
2. Searchers who want their freedom from cumbersome organizations and inflexible rules.
3. Power seekers who value the opportunities for advancement provided by large organizations.
4. Conservers who concentrate on large, stable, and mature organizations that provide security and established traditions.
5. Professionals who search for organizations with the resources to pursue their endeavors.
6. Artists who pursue organizations large enough to support their work, yet small enough to give them a chance to be recognized.
7. Income seekers, who have no goals other than to enhance their income potential, be it in a large organization or small.

These goals obviously lead in very different entrepreneurial directions—some would produce intentionally high levels of social innovation through goals such as freedom, professional advancement, and artistry, while others would produce innovation to the extent it is instrumental to a primary goal such as power, security, or income. As with social identity, the choice of sector, organization, and specialty varies greatly with the primary goal. For social investors, the lesson is clear: beware the folly of rewarding one goal while hoping for another.[8]

Tactics and Strategies. Compared to the personality research, the work on the behavioral tactics and strategies of social entrepreneurs is mountainous. Virtually every paper, article, and definition contains at least some behavioral indicators of social entrepreneurship. As the Skoll Foundation notes, for example, social entrepreneurs are ambitious, mission driven, strategic, resourceful, and result oriented. "Ultimately, social entrepreneurs are driven to produce measurable returns," Skoll's website notes of a core behavior. "These results transform existing realities, open up new pathways for the marginalized and disadvantaged, and unlock society's potential to affect social change."

In turn, Dees (2001) identified five characteristics as essential to successful social entrepreneurship:

- Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value),
- Recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission,
- Engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning,
- Acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and
- Exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created (p. 4).

According to Dees, "social sector leaders will exemplify these characteristics in different ways and to different degrees. The closer a person gets to satisfying all these conditions, the more that person fits the model of a social entrepreneur" (p. 3). Dees is no doubt right that behaviors such as relentlessly pursuing new opportunities, engaging in continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning, and acting boldly without worrying about resources currently in hand are "exceptional." "Social entrepreneurs are one special breed of leader, and they should be recognized as such" (p. 5).

The question, however, is whether these behaviors have to exist in just one individual to create the needed effect. If so, social entrepreneurs are likely to remain what Dees describes as a "rare breed," a conclusion built in part on the field's early belief that social entrepreneurship should be a term restricted to truly catalytic change, not whatever happens to be new to an organization or industry.

Some scholars have argued otherwise, however. According to the work by Thompson, Alvy, and Lees (2000) cited earlier, social entrepreneurship requires a combination of different kinds of individuals who compliment each other. Writing of natural and latent entrepreneurs, the authors argue that "social entrepreneurship requires a combination of people with visionary ideas, people with leadership skills and a commitment to make things happen, and people committed to helping others" (p.332).

This mix of behaviors and skills can exist in what these authors called the "true entrepreneur," but can also emerge when "enterprising or intrapreneurial people are linked up with the visionary idea and opportunity. Arguably, if the idea or need is strong enough, the appropriate champion will be attracted" (p. 332).

The notion that ideas might emerge before champions is a staple of the agenda-setting literatures in political science. As John Kingdon has argued, the policy-making environment consists of a number of "streams" that move through institutions such as Congress and the presidency simultaneously. Some contain solutions, others contain participants, and still others contain problems, resources, and organizations. The agenda gets set as these streams come together. Focusing on "ideas whose time has come" (2002, p. 1), Kingdon refers to a primeval soup that produces opportunities for action in which ideas, participants, and problems finally join.

Social entrepreneurship might follow a very similar track in which ideas find champions, or vice versa, or in which solutions find resources, or vice versa. If true, the most effective social entrepreneur might be one who simply ties the streams together and stands aside—e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has married available ideas, markets, researchers, and institutions to address long-standing global problems

such as malaria. The key behavior is not in creating the organization and developing the idea, but in recognizing the need and creating the opportunity.

This is not to argue that the individual or group is unimportant to agenda-setting. Indeed, they may well be the "stuff" that holds the various streams together. This notion is clearly part of Young's 1986 description of entrepreneurial motivations, which in turn may be related to life experiences, demographics and identity, which in turn may be related to opportunities.

Cognitive Biases. Frustrated by the lack of progress in identifying stable personality characteristics that might explain business entrepreneurship, researchers have turned to cognitive biases as a source of entrepreneurial energy (e.g., the tendency to underestimate risk, over-rely on small samples of exemplars for inspiration, and avoid counter-factual thinking that might weaken confidence).

Building on very large samples of entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, this research has provided some of the most promising insights to date on what makes the entrepreneurs different. As Daniel J. Forbes summarized the research in 1999, scholars had already produced a number of important insights on how entrepreneurs think.

First, Forbes notes that business entrepreneurs do, in fact, base their decisions to act on real information about perceived feasibility. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that entrepreneurs are born, not made, the literature actually suggests that educators, civic leaders, and investors can strengthen the demand-side of entrepreneurship by increasing the odds of success.

Second, Forbes concludes that entrepreneurs prefer informal sources of information, which may explain why some may never apply for awards and fellowships, or seek management assistance. The lonely life of the social entrepreneur could be made far less lonely by building stronger networks among entrepreneurs through events such as the Skoll World Forum.

Third, Forbes finds that entrepreneurs use a distinctive set of thought processes to interpret data, some of which may lead to self-destructive behaviors. Business entrepreneurs tend to interpret equivocal situations favorably, for example, and under-estimate risk. Entrepreneurs also overestimate their chances for success, and over-use what scholars call the representativeness heuristic, or rule of thumb, by relying on small sample sizes to inform decisions and simple extrapolations of past experience to predict the future.

These biases can be corrected by training and more structured decision systems, but may be essential for taking the first step toward social impact. It is little wonder, for example, that entrepreneurs might under-estimate risk or avoid second-guessing. If they were truly rational about the odds of success, social entrepreneurs might never launch their efforts at all. Similarly, if social entrepreneurs actually engaged in aggressive counter-factual thinking, they might discover so many threats that they would never launch.

Idea-Management Skills. Many of the definitions discussed above contain either implicit or explicit lists of management skills for successful entrepreneurship, including the ability to activate the public, raise capital, negotiate results, and manage the difficult transitions involving scale-up to full maturity. Although skills cannot create ambition

and perseverance, for example, they can lower the thresholds governing just how much ambition and perseverance are necessary for success.

Despite relatively little research on which skills matter most to success, there is tantalizing evidence that skills can be both defined and taught, thereby raising the possibility that social entrepreneurship need not be so rare in the future.

There is equally tantalizing work in the field of business entrepreneurship where scholars are increasingly interested in the relationship of social skills to financial success. According to Robert Baron and Gideon Markman (2003), both professors at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Lally School of Management, social competence in interacting with others was an important predictor of success in two very different industries, cosmetics and high-tech.

This work is less about *who* becomes an entrepreneur, and much more about *why* some entrepreneurs are more successful than others. Hypothesizing that "all other factors being equal, the higher entrepreneurs' social competence, the greater their financial success," Baron and Markman surveyed 230 entrepreneurs using a questionnaire containing 30 items designed to assess mastery of four different skills: (1) social perception (e.g., "I can usually read others well—tell how they are feeling in a situation."), (2) social adaptability (e.g., "I can adjust to any social situation," "I can talk to anybody about anything."), (3) expressiveness (e.g., "What I feel inside shows outside."), and (4) impression management (e.g., "I'm good at flattery and can use it to my advantage.") (p. 49).

The research suggests that social perception is a significant predictor of financial success in both industries, while social adaptability was only significant in the cosmetics industry and expressiveness only significant in the high-tech industry. Social adaptability was an insignificant predictor in both industries.

The importance of social skills is echoed in the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics. Looking at the range of data generated by the huge sample of entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, Baron (2004) found that accuracy in understanding others, the "fine art of looking good," persuasiveness, and influencing the emotions of others are all significant predictors of entrepreneurial success. Baron also suggests that existing training programs might be modified to help "entrepreneurs avoid the costly social errors that can result in failure even when their ideas are sound and their motivation, talent, and experience are high. Given the importance of entrepreneurs in creating wealth for their societies as well as themselves, this would appear to be a highly desirable outcome and one with important social benefits" (p. 231).

This kind of exploratory research is particularly important for building the field of social entrepreneurship, especially given the burgeoning number of undergraduate and graduate programs. Social skills can be taught, as can entrepreneurial behaviors. So can financial and managerial skills such as fundraising, results-based evaluation, continuous improvement, and strategic planning. Even if the number of contemporary social entrepreneurs is as low as Drayton and others suggest, the number of future entrepreneurs may be quite elastic as the research and training base expands.

As Gillian Mort, Jay Weerawardena, and Kashonia Carnegie (2003) caution, however, skills alone do not make the entrepreneurship. Instead, social entrepreneurship resides in the intersection of a Venn diagram that combines virtuousness (life experiences?) social opportunity recognition (demographics and identity?), judgmental

capacity (behaviors?), risk tolerance (biases?), and innovativeness (skills?). Opportunities cannot yield social entrepreneurship absent judgment and virtue, just as risk tolerance cannot yield social entrepreneurship without innovativeness.

FINDING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

Social entrepreneurship may be the most exciting and frustrating field in public service today. On the one hand, it offers the excitement of breakthrough thinking, compelling life stories, and potentially dramatic progress against daunting global problems such as hunger, poverty, and disease. It also offers the kind of research opportunities described above.

On the other hand, the field offers few evidence-based insights on how social entrepreneurs can improve the odds of impact. Given few tools for separating the wheat from the chaff, social entrepreneurs are left with long menus of advice. As a result, they often reinvent the wheel as they struggle to discern lessons from a relatively small number of exemplary peers.

By often defining social entrepreneurs as a rare breed, advocates may have created a self-fulfilling prophecy in which these rare breeds toil in relative isolation and obscurity for decades hoping for scale-up and full impact. Although entrepreneurs can find plenty of colleagues at international meetings such as the Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship, the supply of high-quality research base has not kept up with the demand, in part because the demand has accelerated much faster than research rewards such as academic recognition and tenure.

Toward a Broader Definition of Social Entrepreneurship

It is not yet clear whether there is more social entrepreneurship in the U.S. and the world today than one might assume given the contemporary focus on a relatively small number of exemplars. What is clear is that past exemplars have mostly been solo entrepreneurs who launch, nurture, and grow a programmatic innovation into full impact.

One way to broaden the number of exemplars is to expand the definition of social entrepreneurship to expand the locus of socially-entrepreneurial activity, while being more explicit about the kinds of activity that qualify as entrepreneurial. The following definition attempts to do both:

> *A social entrepreneur is an individual, group, network, organization, or alliance of organizations that seeks sustainable, large-scale change through pattern-breaking ideas in what and/or how governments, nonprofits, and businesses do to address significant social problems.*

This definition contains eight basic assumptions about the sources, goals, and strategies of social entrepreneurs, the socially-entrepreneurial organizations they either build or inherent, or the less-entrepreneurial organizations they change to full-blown socially-entrepreneurial purposes.

1. Social entrepreneurs do not have to be individuals—they can also be small groups or teams of individuals, organizations, networks, or even communities that band together to create pattern-breaking change. This assumption moves the field away from individual-centered study, while expanding the number of potential social entrepreneurs that might already exist.

2. Social entrepreneurs seek sustainable, large-scale change. This assumption, which adopts the prevailing goal-oriented nature of the contemporary debate, nonetheless moves the field away from questions about *who* becomes an entrepreneur to *what* they seek, while again expanding the number of potential social entrepreneurs that might exist.

3. Social entrepreneurship can involve pattern-breaking ideas in either how or what gets done to address significant social problems. This assumption moves the field toward a broader definition of social entrepreneurship that includes organizational and administrative reforms, as well as "using old stuff in new ways."[9] It also embraces Dees definition of "enterprising social innovation" as a blend of the social enterprise (or market-driven) school of thought with the "social innovation" school presented in this volume.

4. Social entrepreneurs exist in and between all sectors. This assumption opens the discussion beyond nonprofits to include other sectors and multi-sectoral entities. Social entrepreneurship may be more difficult to launch and sustain in government, for example, where the penalties for risk taking are immediate, but it exists nonetheless. Again, it also embraces Dees and Anderson's notion of "sector-bending" organizations that use elements of nonprofit and for-profit thinking.

5. Social entrepreneurs need not engage in social enterprise or use market-based tools to be successful. This assumption breaks the necessary-but-not-sufficient relationship between social enterprise and social entrepreneurship by rendering earned income as one of many possible means to a social-purpose end. As Dees (2004) recently writes, "Successful social entrepreneurs will use the most effective structures, strategies, and funding mechanisms to achieve their social objectives. Social entrepreneurship should not be seen as a funding strategy, and it should not be tied to the idea of business ventures….At its heart, entrepreneurship is about establishing new and better ways to create value" (p. 17). It is important to note that Dees' more recent work suggests that the use of market-driven tools such a micro-finance may be a way of distinguishing between different types of social innovation.

6. The quantity of social entrepreneurship can vary greatly across individuals and entities. Some social entrepreneurs will be very entrepreneurial compared to others, while others may restrict their entrepreneurial activity to a particular program or unit. This assumption allows for comparisons across individuals

and entities that are very, fairly, or only somewhat entrepreneurial, which may yield valuable knowledge on the conditions that might permit greater activity, as well as the conditions that might make lower levels of entrepreneurship quite appropriate.

7. The intensity of social entrepreneurship can and does ebb and flow over time as circumstances change. This assumption allows further study of the economic, political, social, and organizational conditions that might explain stall points, pauses, stops, and restarts in socially-entrepreneurial activity. Under this assumption, social entrepreneurs can occasionally look very non-entrepreneurial as they consolidate, retrench, or respond to inevitable external pressures. Challenge the conventional wisdom, and the conventional wisdom will almost always challenge back—that is, after all, how the conventional wisdom survives.

8. Social entrepreneurs sometimes fail, though at as-yet-to-be-determined rates. Much as they may *seek* to create pattern-breaking change, they face serious barriers to success, not the least of which is the tendency of the status quo to push back against pattern-breaking change. That is, after all, the way the status quo endures.

It is easy to see how this definition might produce a longer list of both successful and less-successful cases. Not only does the definition assume social entrepreneurship occurs in many places (governments, nonprofits, businesses, and in between), it is also quite explicit about the potential role of technical innovation such as low-cost, wireless, crank-powered computers for citizens in less developed countries through partnerships between nonprofit funders and for-profit businesses.

Large federations such as Habitat for Humanity, Girl Scouts, and the Red Cross have very entrepreneurial chapters and non-entrepreneurial chapters alike, sometimes in contiguous districts. In turn, large, multi-purpose organizations such as Chicago's Heartland Alliance, Minneapolis' Project for Pride in Living, and New York's Environmental Defense may have a blend of entrepreneurial and non-entrepreneurial activities underway at any given time. In addition, long-established organizations such as CARE International can change directions under new leaders such as Peter Bell, while others such as the Nature Conservancy may stop entrepreneuring for a time as they face external pressures such as the recent congressional investigation of land conservation policies.

Consider, for example, a simple two-by-two table that compares the level of support for social entrepreneurship with the intensity of commitment at the individual, group, organizational, network, and/or community level. As Table 2 suggests, such a classification scheme would allow for empirical investigation of what moves individuals and organizations upward toward the highest level of entrepreneurship, and what might explain movement downward toward slowdowns and pauses:

TABLE 2: COMPARING INTENSITY AND SUPPORT FOR ENTREPENEURSHIP

Intensity of entrepreneurial activity	Support for entrepreneurial activity	
	High	Low
High	Full-entrepreneurship	Rebellious-entrepreneurship
Low	Diffuse-entrepreneurship	False-entrepreneurship

It may be, for example, that rebellious entrepreneurship despite organizational resistance is an essential first step toward full organizational commitment or a future spin-off, that false entrepreneurship not worth the trouble, let alone the funding, encouragement, or training, and that top-down diffuse entrepreneurship can ignite an organization toward great social impact, especially given the resources that a large organization might invest. Understanding movement within such a classification scheme requires analysis of the markets in which entrepreneurs operate, as well as the barriers to success.

Some researchers are already engaged in just such work. As Jeffrey A. Robinson (2006) argues in his emerging work on markets and institutional barriers, the field will not advance beyond "journalistic accounts" until it confronts the economic, social, and organizational structures that surround entrepreneurial opportunities:

> First, social entrepreneurship opportunities are different from other types of opportunities because they are highly influenced by the social and institutional structures in a market/community.
> Second, social entrepreneurship is not only a process by which social problems are solved using entrepreneurial strategies but it is also a process of navigating social and institutional barriers to the markets/community they want to impact. Social entrepreneurs are successful because they are able to *execute* and *navigate*. The ability to do both well is part of what makes social entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurship so special.
> Third, social entrepreneurs find opportunities in areas and under circumstances they understand. I argue that an interaction takes place between the personal experiences and/or work experiences of the social entrepreneur and the characteristics of the market/community they are attempting to enter. This navigation process is one that is not understood by entrepreneurship scholars but is clearly an essential step toward the establishment of the venture (p. 14-15).

Such patterns will not emerge until scholars collect enough cases and conduct the needed histories to sort social entrepreneurs appropriately. Assuming that such a sorting can be done, one can easily imagine how the resulting knowledge might lead toward the development of signposts of impending change, and appropriate hedging and shaping actions that might help social entrepreneurs choose the right strategies to achieve the hoped-for pattern-breaking impact.

This sorting would also help answer the kinds of questions that Alvord, Brown, and Letts (2004) posit in their study of the seven well-established social entrepreneurships, including "when or how strategically timed financial support can make a pivotal different to the emergency of a successful social innovation" and "what contextual patterns encourage or hinder the emergence of different kinds of innovations…" (p. 280).

A Research Methodology

The problem with my expanded definition of social entrepreneurship is clear. Suddenly, social entrepreneurship can be found almost everywhere. Although award and fellowship programs might yield long lists of names and organizations for possible study, such lists would not contain the 'sometimes-entrepreneurs' or 'on-hold entrepreneurs' out there. Similarly, case studies might miss the moribund organizations that have suddenly rediscovered themselves, or the self-effacing, non-media savvy entrepreneurs who prefer to remain anonymous.

By adding these social entrepreneurs into the sample, the study of social entrepreneurship can move beyond search for the proverbial needle in the haystack to methodologies for sorting piles and piles of hay. Some of those piles would clearly contain individuals and entities that are definitely *not* social entrepreneurs, while others would contain partial or transitional entrepreneurs, and still others would contain the ideal type defined in the more restrictive definitions discussed earlier in this paper.

One way to sort this entrepreneurial hay is by using what some social scientists call a modus operandi approach. Simply asked, what kinds of clues do social entrepreneurs leave as they do their work? How do they operate? What do they emphasize? How do they change over time?

The first and most important clue that social entrepreneurs leave is a commitment to solving significant social problems through pattern-breaking ideas, even if that commitment is currently on hold due to changing conditions. These pattern-breaking ideas should be visible through actual endeavor, and revealed in innovative programs or methods for solving a given problem.

Pattern-breaking may be in the eye of the beholder, however. Must it focus on a dramatic innovation, or a relatively small, but significant change in existing procedures? Must it be entirely new, or a blend of old ideas used in new combinations? Must it be shockingly novel, or merely a small variation? For now, the search should remain inclusive. After all, some of the most important breakthroughs can involve relatively small adjustments at the front-end of a program process that yield dramatic impacts far down the chain of results.

The second essential clue is a commitment to sustainable, large-scale impact. The individual or entity should be unmistakably committed to taking the pattern-breaking idea to scale, which means moving beyond research and development to full execution and evaluation. This commitment must be evident in efforts to grow the idea, and measurable through tangible indicators such as budget, organizational size, outputs, and ultimate outcomes.

Scale is also in the eye of the beholder. Must the goal be to change the world, or just a few city blocks? Must the idea have a global reach, or focus on a single

community? Must it be to change laws, regulations, and prevailing practices within an entire field, or alter the wisdom in a relatively narrow band of endeavor? For now again, the search should be inclusive. Certainly large-scale change focuses first and foremost on the idea, not the organization that holds it. The more replicated, grown, or copied through what institutional sociologists call isomorphism, the larger the scale.

Next Steps

Assuming that these two markers can be found in enough ideas, including successes, near-successes, and failures, researchers might consider a mix of approaches for explaining variation in social entrepreneurship. And it is variation that should produce insights on what might be done to increase the odds of success.

Although many of the key questions involve standard inventories of how individuals and organizations manage themselves, such questions are useless without a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial idea and its impact. Such variables constitute the who, what, where, when, and how of the entrepreneurial idea.

1. The entrepreneur. Was the generator an individual team, organization, network, and so forth? How much demographic diversity was involved? What is the entrepreneur's primary social identity? What are the key life experiences, biases, and skills in the development, launch, and ongoing expansion of the idea? Is the entrepreneur charismatic, decisive, curious, smart, spiritual, honest, ethical, skeptical, trustworthy, innovative, risk taking, physically and emotionally fit, and so forth?

2. The idea itself. Does the idea focus on administrative (how), technical (what), or blended innovation? What is its theory of change—e.g., use of the market, advocacy, or social movement? Who are its targets—e.g., individuals, communities, or nation-states? How much can it grow over time? Can it be sustained, disseminated, and protected over time? What were and are the barriers to change? What is its history both in its current form or earlier variations? If it has been tried before, what makes it different now? How much momentum has it gained?

3. The organizational home. Where did the idea emerge—e.g., the nonprofit, governmental, or for-profit sector, among one or more, or in-between two or more? What is its current home—e.g., an organization as a whole, a separate unit, a skunk works designed to generate new ideas, or an outside incubator of some kind? And is the current home its original home? How tolerant is the organization toward new ideas? How much interest did it express? How does it scan its environment and plan its future? How is it structured—e.g., tall or flat, centralized or decentralized, and so forth? How does it delegate authority, motivate employees, and manage itself? And how strong are its governance, finance, evaluation, training, information, and planning systems? Where is it in organizational time—e.g., at the organic or start-up phase, the

enterprising or expansion phase, the intentional or focusing stage, or the robust or smoothly operating phase?

4. The preparation for change. Were the entrepreneurs prepared for pattern-breaking change? How much capacity building/technical assistance have they received? Are they receiving help now? Did they receive any accelerants from the external environment such as fellowships, mentoring, and venture funding? How was the idea launched? Were there any transitions, spin-offs, mergers, departures, and so forth involved? And how long will the idea last—e.g., was it designed as a short-, medium-, or long-term effort, or designed to last in perpetuity?

5. The development and launch. How was the idea financed, who financed it, and how has the source of funding changed? Did it begin as an experiment, the use of old ideas in new ways, and so forth? Did luck or accidents play a positive and/or negative role? How long or was the start-up phase? Has the idea expanded, how fast, and how broadly? Was the idea developed on a 24/7/365 time-line or during spare time? Has it ever been put on hold?

6. The impact. Was the idea successful? And how is success measured?

As this list suggests, the larger the sample, the more varied the investigation. Moreover, the larger the sample, the more likely researchers can find and compare high-performing social entrepreneurs with their high-performing, non-entrepreneurial peers. The key for now is to start with an ecumenical approach to developing the sample, build careful records on each entrepreneur in the sample, then proceed with a rigorous search for differences and similarities.

The key to research success lies in the last question about the idea, was it successful? Unless researchers are willing to make an effort to measure the impact of the idea, they will be unable to use these long lists of variables to discover any patterns that might actually improve the odds of success for future efforts. It is only by looking at successes *and* failures that the researcher can learn what matters and what does not. It may be, for example, that participatory leadership is nice to have, but utterly irrelevant to success. It may also be that fellowships, mentoring, and venture funding are hard to get, but absolutely essential to impact. The only way to know is to test the variables against an ultimate measure of success.

CONCLUSION

This paper is the hope, if not reality that there are more social entrepreneurs that the field has yet to discover. Some of these entrepreneurs may need help to become fully engaged, full-time. Others may simply need a boost in visibility and financial support to move through scale-up and sustained impact. And still others may be doing well as they are.

The challenge is not to define social entrepreneurship so broadly that it becomes just another word that gets bandied about in funding proposals and niche building. Other

terms such as innovation have gone that route, and may never be rescued from over-use. At the same time, social entrepreneurship should not be defined so narrowly that it becomes the province of the special few that crowd out potential support and assistance for individuals and entities that are just as special, but less well known.

In the end, the research goal should be to uncover the factors that make social entrepreneurship a reality. If these factors suggest that social entrepreneurship is truly the work of a rare breed that must struggle mightily to succeed, so be it. At least the conclusion would yield insights on how to make the struggle easier. If, however, the research suggests that social entrepreneurship can be a more natural act by a much larger number of individuals and entities, all the better. Then the field can move forward to create the conditions under which social entrepreneurship can flourish and work its will on solving the great intractable problems of our times.

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[2] They are also enrolled at NYU's Stern School of Business, as well as at the University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, Columbia University's RISE Initiative on Social Entrepreneurship, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government in collaboration with Harvard University's Business School, Oxford University's Said School of Business, and the England-based School for Social Entrepreneurs.

[3] The seven organizations were the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, the Grameen Bank, the Green Belt Movement, the Highlander Research and Education Center, Plan Pueblo, the Self-Employed Women's Association, and Se Server de la Saison en Savanna et au Shale (Six S).

[4] I am grateful to Carmen Marie Rogers, a doctoral student at my home institution, for assembling these many definitions, and providing an initial coding.

[5] See Patricia H. Thorton, "The Sociology of Entrepreneurship," *American Review of Sociology*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 19-46.

[6] The larger study from which the article was drawn is described in Lynn Barendsen, *The Business of Caring: A Study of Young Social Entrepreneurs*, Cambridge, MA: GoodWork Project, February, 2004.

[7] See William B. Gartner, Kelly G. Shaver, Nancy M. Carter, and Paul D. Reynolds, eds., *Handbook of Entrepreneurial Dynamics: The Process of Business Creation*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2004.

[8] See Steven. Kerr, "On the Folly of Rewarding A, while Hoping for B," *Academy of Management Executive,* vol. 9, no. 1, 2005, 7-16.

[9] This term was invented to describe some forms of government innovation, and is discussed in Mary Bryna Sanger, and Martin Levin, "Using Old Stuff in New Ways: Innovation as a Case of Evolutionary Tinkering," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol. 10, no. 4, Fall, 1991.