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Social Enterprises with Exceedingly Tight Resources

Glasbeek, L.

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SUMMARY (ENGLISH)

THIS DISSERTATION EXAMINES HOW SOCIAL enterprises and their leaders function when they have extremely limited resources and contextual circumstances are changing rapidly and radically. We discuss various aspects of this subject in four chapters. Firstly, in Chapter 2 of this thesis, we investigate the foundations of social entrepreneurship. We base our conceptual analysis on a “theory of definition” by Suppes (1957, p. 151). We argue that Suppes’ work helps shed new light on existing definitions of social entrepreneurship, and is a tool for recognizing and addressing their possible shortcomings. Accordingly, we argue for definitions of social entrepreneurship that seek to (1) convey the essence of the concept, (2) clearly separate the *definiendum*—that is the concept to be defined—and the *definiens*—that is the description thereof—(3) formulate things positively, and (4) avoid figurative and obscure language. We state that Santos (2012) gives an example of a definition of social entrepreneurship that meets these four essential criteria: “Social entrepreneurship is the pursuit of sustainable solutions for neglected problems with positive external effects” (p. 335). We also advocate using a cluster of complementary definitions of social entrepreneurship instead of striving for a universal definition of social entrepreneurship.

We then observe that social entrepreneurship researchers mainly use existing management and organizational theories in their empirical studies. Our findings, however, show that scientists often provide limited information about which theories they use and which criteria they choose. They also often provide little or no information about the underlying assumptions of their theoretical perspectives and the expected benefits of their chosen perspectives. Finally, we note that researchers vary their methodological orientations considerably, even though there is often a lack of insight into the underlying motives.

In Chapter 3, we look at how social enterprises, i.e. organizations, function when their resources are extremely scarce. We selected Greece as our source of empirical data because

this country was in a protracted economic recession during this research and therefore offered meaningful opportunities for studying social entrepreneurship under resource constraints. We subsequently position “bricolage” as a valuable concept to understand how social companies deal with deprivation. The concept includes, for example, the formation of new combinations with existing resources.

Although scientists recognize different forms of bricolage, they implicitly view them as unchanging. Our findings, however, have led to the idea of considering bricolage as a dynamic concept rather than as a static one. Our findings also suggest that working with limited resources can shape a social enterprise’s development strategy, thereby suggesting a relationship between bricolage and strategy. We call this phenomenon “formational bricolage.” In contrast, we recognize “strategic bricolage,” which means that an overall vision of the company’s objectives may actively limit daily operations under scarcity. In this way, strategic bricolage stimulates goal convergence and efficiency in a social enterprise. We subsequently connect formational bricolage and strategic bricolage to different phases in the development of a company. We relate formational bricolage to social enterprises that are just beyond the start-up phase and recognize strategic bricolage in mature social enterprises.

In Chapter 4, we examine how social entrepreneurs, i.e. individuals, manage their businesses. In this study, we found that the various social entrepreneurs that we worked with did not match the usual scholarly depiction of social entrepreneurs as heroic frontrunners. Instead, we make a case for what we call “generative leadership.” Here, the social entrepreneur adopts an outward-looking role and, to a much lesser extent, is a self-referential individual. He or she is primarily focused on creating conditions for organizational action, rather than on downward interventionism within a hierarchical structure. Given the nature of our empirical context, we have based our interpretation of empirical data primarily on complexity theory. Complexity theory strives for a better understanding of dynamic, non-linear, and open systems.

The theory provides us with a language that enables us to better describe the leadership function of social entrepreneurship under scarcity and dynamic change. The connection that we make in this chapter between the leadership of social entrepreneurs and complexity theory is new.

Finally, in Chapter 5, we investigate the theme of uncertainty. We focus our attention on a certain kind of uncertainty, namely “unknown unknowns.” Although this topic was not explicitly considered at the start of the Ph.D. research, we have realized its importance for companies dealing with resource scarcity under rapidly changing circumstances. Moreover, this area also appeared to have been neglected in research. We use an image metaphor to cast unknown unknowns as “organizational dark matter,” arguing that although unknown unknowns lie outside of human consciousness, they can have significant negative consequences for organizations and their stakeholders. With this, we question the axiom that states that ignorance is bliss.

This Ph.D. research also has three broader implications and corresponding general limitations, which may lead to new avenues for future research into social entrepreneurship. The first implication concerns the philosophical foundations of this thesis. In our research, we used qualitative, interpretative methods to better understand social entrepreneurship under scarcity. However, as our research progressed, the inherent limitations of this method became clearer, such as its inherently subjective foundations. Therefore, we call on colleagues to help provide further guidelines in the field of interpretation. If qualitative research emphasizes *verstehen* and *erklären*—as opposed to predicting how A leads to B—we would consider it valuable if researchers of social entrepreneurship actively drew on areas such as hermeneutics, phenomenology, cognitive sciences, and neurosciences in order to further improve the qualitative methods of their studies. Moreover, studies on social entrepreneurship can benefit from combining qualitative and quantitative research forms (Small, 2011). Thus far, such studies are uncommon (for an exception, see Phillips, Alexander & Lee, 2017). Nonetheless,

mixed methods can remove some of the limitations of purely qualitative research designs, as briefly mentioned above, because they provide more structured data sets.

The second implication concerns possible topics for future studies. Chapters 2 to 5 in this thesis mention various options for further research. Table 25, which is identical to Table 24 in the dissertation's main text, summarizes these points. In addition to the table, we mention a fundamental limitation in the theory that we use in Chapter 4, namely, its lack of an ethical dimension. However, when studying complex human systems, such as organizations and their socio-cultural-economic context, we cannot avoid ethical and moral considerations. Therefore, we argue that it is valuable to investigate how ethics can be integrated into complexity theory. We recommend drawing on sociology, philosophy, and psychology. For example, the sociologists Hitlin and Vaisey (2013) provide an overview of moral typologies. In addition, Woermann (2013) investigates the "ethics of complexity" from a philosophical position that goes beyond morality as a set of normative rules. As a final example, we propose to draw on psychological classics such as van Fromm (1950) in order to consider a humanistic view of morality in complexity theory. We argue that such a multidisciplinary approach benefits the further development of complexity theory in organizational studies.

The third implication concerns stylistic forms in social entrepreneurship research, that is, how scientific knowledge is presented through language. Golden-Biddle and Locke (2007) argued that the language in academic articles is often clinical and flattened. In our opinion, the literature on social entrepreneurship showed a similar pattern. This is also a limitation in this dissertation, in which academic writing conventions impose "logocentrism" (Van Maanen, 1995, p. 134). The question is whether this is always necessary and whether we should consider other more aesthetic forms. We argue for the latter and have somewhat tried in this dissertation to abandon the conventional norms for academic texts.

Table 25: Limitations and Topical Suggestions for Future Research

Chapter and Short Title	Limitations	Topical Suggestions for Future Research
(2) A Review of the Literature on Social Enterprises	Our quest to finding the <i>genus</i> of social entrepreneurship could lead to dogmatism.	The richness of social entrepreneurship could be served by taking a postmodern turn, whereby a hegemonic stance, which comes from conceptual “settlement,” makes room for a cluster of definitions and ongoing linguistic remodeling.
(3) A Framework for Bricolage	Although the framework for bricolage and strategy in social enterprises breaks new ground in terms of linking two disparate concepts, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the micro-processes in the co-evolution of bricolage and strategy. For instance, this means that the current model does not describe how insights from bricolage activities are incorporated into strategies or, conversely, how pre-existing strategies curb bricolage.	Now that bricolage and strategy have been associated with one another at a basic level, further studies could examine their evolving relationship in greater detail. In this area, there are opportunities for theoretical pluriformity to aid a more in-depth inquiry. For instance, scholars could use concepts from the strategy or sensemaking literature to enhance the concept of formational bricolage.
(4) An Inquiry into Generative Leadership	This study does not examine duality, i.e., how generative leaders may act, at least to a degree, as “heropreneurs,” and vice versa.	Future studies may explore how “heropreneurship” and generative leadership interweave.
(5) Reflections on Unknown Unknowns	The essay highlights problems surrounding unknown unknowns and explores ideas that convey what this phenomenon entails. However, being an essay, it is intrinsically limited in that its theoretical depth is not the same as with conventional scholarly papers. Nonetheless, it marks a useful developmental starting point for a contemporary debate on agnotology.	Future research could be aimed at developing a conceptual framework for organizational dark matter, addressing how, where, and when aspects of this perspective can be studied.

Other scientists have expressed similar interests. For example, Zinsser (1991) argued for the vision of “nonfiction as literature” (p. 95), and Pollock and Bono (2013) encouraged the

use of storytelling techniques by, for instance, emphasizing human aspects. However, in this dissertation, we could have pushed the limits further and we call on social entrepreneurship researchers to consider this in future. Such an approach not only can improve readability, but it can also increase the value of research concepts.

We trust that giving substance to these fundamental perspectives (namely philosophical foundations, research topics, and stylistic forms) will boost research into social entrepreneurship.

The concepts in this dissertation can also be of value to practicing social entrepreneurs. The first study in this thesis, in Chapter 2, examines the scope and significance of the academic literature on social entrepreneurship. Apart from the scientific contributions of this literature review, various implications can be derived that are important for social entrepreneurs. Firstly, the study indicates the importance of methods that measure the effects (“impact”) of social enterprises (“Social Return On Investment—SROI”). Entrepreneurs who make use of this knowledge can make more informed decisions about which SROI methods are most suitable for their companies, and can better understand the strengths and limitations of these practices. Secondly, our study points to the importance of collaboration between social entrepreneurs and conventional companies. Thirdly, our analysis of the academic debate on definitions of social entrepreneurship contributes to a better understanding of key concepts in this domain. Social entrepreneurship practitioners can use this to develop meaningful identities.

The second study in this thesis, in Chapter 3, describes bricolage as a natural *modus operandi* for social entrepreneurs with limited resources. However, this does not necessarily mean that the individuals concerned are aware of what they are doing, or that they can clearly explain their approach to others. Therefore, a practical implication of our study is that it helps social entrepreneurs put their practices into words. Our study points to the importance of a balance between bricolage and strategy, instead of considering them as separate phenomena

with separate developmental trajectories. Our explanations prompt young, developing social enterprises to consider the fruits of bricolage when drawing up strategies. The opposite applies in the case of more mature social enterprises; here, we would like to point out the importance of taking into account an overall strategy when engaging in bricolage.

The theoretical considerations of the third study in this thesis, in Chapter 4, represent a form of leadership that is not exercised by single, intrepid individuals who are at the top of a hierarchical structure. Instead, we portray leadership as an organizational function that several people can (and must) fulfill at the same time, especially if the environment in which they operate is complex and dynamic. This characterization of what we call “generative leadership” offers social entrepreneurs a positive and practical message, namely that the pursuit of becoming a heroic individual needs to be neither a necessary means or an indispensable end. This view can have a liberating effect.

The practical value of the fourth and final study in this dissertation, in Chapter 5, is that this places tacit ignorance on the organizational agenda. In recent decades, companies have recognized the strategic importance of concepts such as innovation management, learning organizations, and human development. Ontologically, these concepts are based on knowledge. In contrast, the fourth study in this dissertation draws attention to its logical counterpart. The fourth research of this thesis could thus lead to the development of practical methods for reflections on unknown unknowns. Instead of, for example, developing “knowledge maps” or “learning trajectories,” organizations could take advantage of “ignorance maps” which can form the basis for taking fundamentally new directions in organizations.