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## Editorial: Do social entrepreneurs really need a theory of change?

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Considerable debate has occurred over the definition of social entrepreneurship. Dees (1998, p.4) has offered the most widely accepted definition.

Social entrepreneurs play the role of *change* agents in the social sector by:

- adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value)
- recognising 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
- exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.

Social entrepreneurship involves pursuing highly innovative approaches to addressing social problems from poverty to environmental issues. These innovative approaches are typically pursued by nonprofits or NGOs, but they can also be launched by for-profits or government agencies. For a social entrepreneur, a recognised social need, demand, or market failure usually guarantees a more than sufficient market size. Social entrepreneurs believe that their *theory of change* and accompanying organisational model can effectively meet these needs. The problem is not the existence of the need, but rather whether the necessary resources can be marshalled for the social entrepreneur's innovation to serve that need and launch social change.

Any social entrepreneurial organisation interested in scaling social impact needs to identify a *theory of change* that works effectively on at least a small scale. Bloom and Chatterji (2009) cited that for an organisation to get its theory to work on a larger scale, social entrepreneurs need to consider various factors, including their own organisational capabilities. Paul Bloom, Professor of Social Entrepreneurship at Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship, Fuqua School of Business at Duke University and noted entrepreneurship scholar, has devised an acronym for both researcher and practitioners to focus their work on these capabilities when aiming to extend their own theory of change to their daily work: SCALERS. By definition, SCALERS stands for:

- *Staffing*: the effectiveness with which the organisation is able to fill all its labour needs with people who have the requisite skills for the needed positions-volunteers and paid staff alike.
- *Communicating*: Communicating refers to the effectiveness with which the organisation is able to persuade people that its theory of change is worth adopting and/or supporting.
- *Alliance building*: Alliance building refers to the effectiveness with which the organisation has forged partnerships, coalitions, joint ventures, and other linkages to bring about desired social changes.
- *Lobbying*: Lobbying refers to the effectiveness with which the organisation is able to advocate for government actions that may work in its favour.
- *Earnings generation*: Earnings generation refers to the effectiveness with which the organisation generates a stream of revenue that exceeds its expenses.
- *Replicating*: Replicating refers to the effectiveness with which the organisation can reproduce the programs and initiatives it has originated.
- *Stimulating market forces*: Stimulating market forces refers to the effectiveness with which the organisation can create incentives that encourage people or institutions to pursue private interests while serving the public good.

What is the draw back in one having a solid business and marketing plan before launching a social enterprise? Do social entrepreneurs really need a theory of change once they have their funding, building and staff secured? Many times we have witnessed

social enterprise failures because even before growth can be considered or a strategy of growth laid out, social entrepreneurs and their organisations are often pulled into rapid growth by pressure from funders, demand for their products or services, and pushed by their social missions to meet those needs. Furthermore, some social entrepreneurs' belief that their theory of change and organisational approach is superior to any scholarly theory often drives the organisation to pursue growth and expansion before sufficient thought or planning has been put into it.

This issue of the *IJSEI* presents scholarly work of researchers from India, Nigeria, South Africa, the UK and the USA, each focusing on an application of social entrepreneurship and innovation aimed at bringing change within their given communities. Primarily though, these papers analyse and evaluate various combination of SCALERS in order to contribute and further extend their theory of change to work on a larger scale. More conferences and publications are focusing on social entrepreneurship, and more are sure to come, since the media and politics have jumped on the social entrepreneurship bandwagon. Beyond all the hype, scholars such as this issue's contributors must continue to work towards theoretical contributions to social change – with which social entrepreneurship can build itself on solid theoretical ground. Social entrepreneurs can also choose to thoughtfully listen to the scholar, because as it is been wonderfully told to us over and over by our grandparents in non-scholarly terms: let us not get the cart before the horse.

## References

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