Chapter 6

Social Entrepreneurship and Its Competences: Implications for Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship needs a vision and leadership skills to accomplish it and a motivation to build something new, which will develop and sustain it. And society needs social entrepreneurs, contributing to a new organization of the welfare system, while making a difference and helping each other. The central theme in the existing social entrepreneurship literature is the pursuit of a social mission or objective. Thus, social entrepreneurs play a role as reformers and revolutionaries, who are intending to solve social problems, and not being answered by governmental policies. Entrepreneurial thinking and acting as well as innovation driving managers is a need for society. However, it is not the organization but the people, united by a proactive and market-driven culture, that are innovative and which combine to populate and to equip the organization with the required competencies. The chapter proposes a methodology to analyze the competencies that should be fostered by higher education programs to provide graduates with the desired competencies for entrepreneurship and driving innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship has gained popularity and support. Its popularity is reflected in the number of management and scholarly literature devoted to the topic (e.g., Chell, 2007; Chell et al., 2010; Dees and Anderson, 2006; Nicholls, 2010; Shaw and de Bruin, 2013, Sullivan Mort et al. 2003). In spite of the popularity of the field, there still remain questions with respect to the role of higher education in developing a solid set of skills among students as future social entrepreneurs and innovators. (Short et al., 2009)

Organizations such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have expressed concerns on the need for bridging the skills gap between what higher education systems nurture and what the society needs (Spear et al., 2013).

Social abilities such as coordinating with others and persuasion, as well as complex problem-solving skills, agility, and resiliency are essential in our society and the knowledge-based economy of the near future.

The question becomes whether a continued implementation of traditional approaches to learning is going to be helpful for students to be prepared for the economy and society in which they will have to operate. For today’s entrepreneurs, the greater challenge is to reverse key negative trends that preceded current challenges, such as rising inequalities, lack of social responsibility among market actors, and reliance on public budgets to deal with the consequences (Waring, 2018). In this respect, the role of universities is perceived as going beyond preparing students to meet the demands of the labor market (Pavlin et al., 2014). Following Teichler (2013, p. 422) graduates additionally need to be trained to deal with the uncertainties created by the threat (and sometimes the actuality) of changing environmental conditions, such as economic, social and/or political crises. This fact situates universities as mediating structures for the creative process of social entrepreneurship in linking the means for entrepreneurship (e.g., entrepreneurial competences) with its end-goals (e.g., wealth creation, value creation) (Bowen, 2018).

A core contribution of the present article hereby lies on relating the competences for entrepreneurship at the individual level, with the environmental level, particularly with the environmental change in the light of social entrepreneurship. The underlying drive for social entrepreneurship is the creation of social value as opposed to personal or shareholder wealth (Noruzi, et al., 2010; Thake and Zadek, 1997) and the activity of such social value creation is characterized by pattern-breaking change or innovation (Munshi, 2010; Noruzi et al., 2010, p. 4), through the creation of new combinations (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010).

Hence, it is argued in the present chapter that social entrepreneurs need to possess a certain set of competences that have been proved to help organizations to thrive in times of uncertainty and rapid change, particularly in an era of constant innovation. These competences relate to agility, resilience, and leadership for collaboration that need to be developed through entrepreneurship education. The development of these competences forms the basis of a new paradigm in Higher Education concerning entrepreneurship education. (Bowen, 2018, Le Deist, 2009).

In the chapter, this set of competences is presented. Agility refers to the ability to respond and adapt to change quickly, is an increasingly crucial factor when facing innovation. Sambamurthy et al. (2003, p. 238) defined agility as “the ability to detect and seize market opportunities with speed and surprise.” Resiliency is understood, in the context of this article as “the capacity for resisting, absorbing and responding, even reinventing if required, in response to fast change that cannot be avoided” (McCann et al., 2009, p. 45). Finally, leaders’ pursuit of innovation in an environment of change is not done in isolation. This endeavor requires motivating and engaging highly qualified people that will thrive in times of uncertainty. Therefore, leadership for collaboration is the capacity of a leader to set a context