

Exploring the relationships between Purpose, Practices, Policy and Place in the Social Partnership ecosystem – the narratives, complexities and paradoxes.

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Social enterprises arise from noble intentions combining societal goals with an entrepreneurial spirit. They focus on achieving wider social, environmental or community objectives often bridging gaps in areas neglected by the government, deemed non-financially viable by traditional enterprises or in marginalized regions. Social enterprises may take different organizational forms or ‘hybrid’ models seeking to combine their social mission with business principles. They are neither typical non-profits nor for-profits; instead, they include aspects of both, and thus are often on the periphery or lack ‘place’ in the enterprise literature. Despite their business structure, successful social enterprises combine the passion and values of a non-profit organization with the inventiveness and efficiency of a for-profit enterprises (Audebrand, 2017). As the enterprise scales the tensions emerge about the challenges and associated skills for effectively managing the paradoxes emerging from the juxtaposition of social mission and business outcomes.

Further due to their lack of resources, social enterprises seek to actively manage their position in the social ecosystem by engaging with stakeholders and strategically determining and pursuing the kind of collaborations or ‘network of teams’, it wants to use in its operating model (Bradach, 2010). Correspondingly, it is increasingly acknowledged that a single business, government or social enterprise is not equipped to tackle social and economic challenges alone, and sustainable solutions require different collaborations with diversity of viewpoint, approach and expertise. Irrespective of the type of collaboration, co-creation is the core catalyst for achieving sustainable social impact and leveraging mutual benefits to both the large corporation and the social enterprise. Impactful co-creation is built on having shared values and applying partner social capital consisting of knowledge, expertise, social networks and goodwill. The cumulative social capital enables each other’s competitive advantages and self-interests to emerge in an atmosphere of reciprocity and trustworthiness eliminating firm size and power differentials and achieving ultimate social impacts.

Given the above, opportunities exist for social enterprise collaboration but many questions remain unanswered as to how social enterprises and indeed larger commercial organizations can be enabled to establish more mutually beneficial collaborations for social impact. This research stream engages in a conversation on the interplay of social enterprise collaborations/partnerships with large firms on issues such as (but not limited to):

- Variations in language and meaning - how do differences in the narratives of collaboration between partners (e.g. social and larger enterprises and government development organisations and financial institutions) shape interaction in social enterprise partnerships
- Practice of collaboration – How can the social enterprises embrace the principles of co-creation when allying with the business sector? how can co-creation models transcend functions and business boundaries as a means of sustainable learning and generating multiple internal and external impacts to both enterprise types?
- The power and relational dynamics of partnerships – are partnerships asymmetric power relationships or does size matter? How can the social power of social enterprises balance the business economic power? What is the role of reciprocity and trustworthiness eliminating firm size and power differentials?
- Boundary conditions - How do the specifics of place affect the nature and role of partnership development and implementation? Is place based just on regional location or perceptual in nature

- Bringing the social enterprise in from the periphery to the core of business collaborations and partnerships agenda and literature
- Shared values and shared mindsets – how can the purpose of the social and larger organization be aligned to address inherent paradoxes or contradictions?
- Commercial endeavors to achieve a social mission - What are the skills and competencies social entrepreneurs need for managing the tensions between social, personal and financial demands and engaging with larger firms?
- The role of entrepreneurial orientation – To what extent and how can the entrepreneurial ethos of social enterprises affect the establishment of social partnership? How can the collaboration between social enterprises and businesses yield social innovation?
- Quantifying the social impact - how can we measure the social impact of social partnership? what are the measures (or indicators) that can be used to assess the role (or effectiveness) of a social enterprise when involved in partnerships?

References

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