

Technology Utilization in Social Entrepreneurship

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Introduction:

New technologies are introduced in high frequency in the fast-evolving world today. There are a lot of opportunities to make a social impact by resolving the issues plaguing our world using the latest technologies. To do so we need social entrepreneurs who can develop a solution with the right balance of economic, environmental, and social impact.

Let's understand entrepreneurship before dwelling on social entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship:

A business person is called an *entrepreneur* if they introduce a major improvement or change in the way a product or a process functions compared to the existing status of it. That means the product or process is not “as is” other competition in the market. There is an element of “new” in the product or service which will elevate the end user experience.

In known history, the first person to use the word *entrepreneur* was French economist Jean-Baptiste. In the early 19th century in his main economic work *Treatise* described the entrepreneur as an intermediary who “shifts economic resources out of an area of lower and into an area of higher productivity and greater yield,” thereby expanding the literal translation from French, “*one who undertakes*,” to encompass the concept of value creation. (Dees, 1998)

A century later, Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter added upon this basic concept of value creation, which is the most influential idea about entrepreneurship. Schumpeter identified the entrepreneur as the force required to drive economic progress, absent of which economies would become static, structurally immobilized, and subject to decay. Enter the *Unternehmer*, Schumpeter's entrepreneurial spirit, who identifies a commercial opportunity – whether a material, product, service, or business – and organizes a venture to implement it. Successful entrepreneurship, he argues, sets off a chain reaction, encouraging other entrepreneurs to iterate upon and ultimately propagate the innovation to the point of “creative destruction,” a state at which the new venture and all its related ventures effectively render existing products, services, and business models obsolete. (Schumpeter, 1976, #)

Austrian American management consultant Peter Drucker, on the other hand, does not see entrepreneurs as necessarily agents of change themselves, but rather as clever and utilizers of change. According to Drucker, “the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity,” (Drucker, 1985, #) a basis picked up by British-American economist Israel Kirzner, who identifies “alertness” as the entrepreneur's most critical ability. (Baumol, 2022)

As per Roger Martin, former Dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and Sally Osberg, former president and CEO of the Skoll Foundation - we don't call someone who show all of the personal characteristics of an entrepreneur – opportunity sensing, out-of-the-box thinking, and determination – yet who failed badly in their venture as an entrepreneur; we call them a business failure. Even someone like Bob Young, of Red Hat Software fame, is called a “*serial entrepreneur*” only after his first success; i.e., all of his prior failures are dubbed the work of a serial entrepreneur only after the occurrence of his first success. The problem with done afterwards definitions is that they tend to be ill defined. It's simply harder to get your arms around what's unproven. An entrepreneur can certainly profess to be one, but without at least one success on the belt, the self-declared will have a tough time convincing investors to invest in their ventures. Those investors, in turn, must be willing to assume greater risk as they verify the credibility of would-be entrepreneurs and the potential impact of growing ventures.(Martin & Osberg, 2007)

Social Entrepreneurship:

As per Teresa Chahine, who is Social Entrepreneurship Program Leader at Harvard, *social entrepreneurship* is a process by which effective, innovative, and sustainable solutions are pioneered to meet social and environmental challenges. (Chahine, 2016, #)

A social entrepreneur endeavor is to remediate the social or environmental disadvantage a particular group or section of society faces in their daily life. They try to bring a difference in the lifestyle of people by setting up an enterprise which addresses the social or environmental challenges.

Social entrepreneurship is a new field of study as today's generation is questioning the assumptions, work and governance pattern set forth by the previous generation. Many students and professionals today are applying a “can do” attitude of ending the social and environmental problems that have persisted for generations. With increase in technology and access to information, it is not unthinkable that this may be possible.(Chahine, 2016, #)

As a field of practice, social pioneers have been implementing effective and innovative social interventions since the beginning of human society. Attention toward social entrepreneurship began to increase at the turn of millennium as the successful entrepreneurs of silicon valley began to turn their talents and energies to tackling social challenges. (Chahine, 2016, #)

Why is social entrepreneurship different from commercial entrepreneurship?: Social entrepreneurship refers to ventures and interventions targeting underserved populations, decreasing the gap between those who have access to social services and those who do not. While commercial entrepreneurship often responds to a market opportunity, social entrepreneurship often tackles a market failure. While the bottom line of commercial enterprise is financial profit, the bottom line of social enterprise is the social impact it creates. (Chahine, 2016, #)

While financial viability is a key to success, in social entrepreneurship, it is considered a means to an end and not an end in itself. The end goal and the only bottom line of social venture is its social impact. The number 1 rule of social entrepreneurship is: Do not let your desire to be a

social entrepreneur become a delusion of grandeur, superiority, or supernatural powers! (Chahine, 2016, #)

Examples of technology utilization in social entrepreneurship:

A simple browse through philanthropic crowdsourcing platforms like **OpenIdeo** will provide a lot of “problem solving” social entrepreneurship which utilize the latest technology to solve the social or environmental challenges.

Following are few examples from there:

OGOW EMR has created a desktop and mobile app for medical records, medical inventory, and caregiver immunization that not only provides a digital copy of child immunization records, but also includes a calendar schedule for adherence, educational materials, and Q+A functionality. They are also expanding to include community champions to support local education and increase initial uptake. Focusing on piloting in four cities. To start: Mogadishu, Kismayo, Somaliland and Puntland. For all caregivers & clinicians. (*Immunization Innovation Lab*, n.d.)

STAMP created a platform that trains community health workers, provides a rewards program that better aligns caregiver incentives and needs and connects them to their health system, and helps monitor and track childhood immunization. Currently it's focused on Kiambu, a peri-urban community, outside of Nairobi and Nairobi slums. (*Immunization Innovation Lab*, n.d.)

Sparkler provides a mobile infrastructure to promote early brain and childhood development for children from birth to age 8, with a goal of closing learning gaps for all children. Sparkler assesses a child's development in key areas, empowers parents and caregivers with research-based practices to support their child's growth and partners with pediatricians and teachers to ensure everyone involved in a child's care has the information they need to serve families better.

Sparkler's core offerings consist of:

- **Content** – Personalized playbook with off-screen, research-based experiences that inspire joy and build key skills, customized for each child based on observation and developmental measurement.
- **Measurement** – The first mobile versions of the Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ), the leading developmental screens, which provide valid, reliable and timely data to inform a child's education and healthcare.
- **Coaching** – Virtual coaching for parents from an early childhood expert with insights into their child's development who can help them understand and support their child's growth and progress.
- **Connection** – Social features that drive engagement (messaging, user-generated content) and networks that center around the child (parents, caregivers, extended family, pediatricians and teachers).

Sparkler's goal is to reach disadvantaged populations to improve educational outcomes and opportunity during the critical stages of early brain development. It is designed to reach these target populations by selling annual subscriptions to school districts, healthcare providers and

other service providers that work with disadvantaged populations to keep the service free for families. Families are the primary users and are provided with an extensive library of research-based content to help foster strong development.

Early efficacy research conducted in Newark and New York City with families below the federal poverty level showed extremely positive likeability and usability results from families. Approximately 60 percent of users who indicated they would like to continue using Sparkler continued to engage with the app 6 weeks after the trial period ended. Sparkler was also named one of the Early Innovator winners of the Early Childhood Innovation Prize from Gary Community Investments and Open IDEO. (Voqal, 2018)

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