

THE DISTINCTIVE SKILLS OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

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Addressing the need to identify distinctive skills for social entrepreneurs, we conducted an exploratory, qualitative study based on interviews with social entrepreneurs. We identified seven skills, three out of which have not been previously mentioned by entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship scholars. These skills include an ability to induce behavioral change and educate target groups; co-creation with multiple stakeholders; and developing solutions that aim to address the root cause of a social problem. Based on these findings, we provide recommendations for further research, as well as how the identified skills can be taught in experiential learning format.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship; education; social enterprise; experiential learning; skill.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the increasing impact of social entrepreneurs (SE) who develop solutions for a variety of social and environmental problems (e.g., Neck *et al.*, 2009; Mair and Martí, 2006; Nicholls, 2006) and the increasing attention to the topic of social entrepreneurship in academic literature (e.g., Meyskens and Carsrud, 2011; Meyskens *et al.*, 2010a,b; Nicholls, 2010; Short *et al.*, 2009; Zahra *et al.*, 2009; Austin *et al.*, 2006), we do not yet know if social entrepreneurs possess any distinctive skills that enable them to develop these solutions. What we do know is that social entrepreneurs face distinctive challenges that commercial entrepreneurs do not (Tracey and Phillips, 2007).

These distinctive challenges of managing accountability, identity and double bottom line (Tracey and Phillips, 2007) stem from the fact that social entrepreneurs pursue *different objectives* than commercial entrepreneurs. For social entrepreneurs, value creation is the main objective of their venture while commercial entrepreneurs put value appropriation in the center of their activities (Santos, 2012). Thus, compared to commercial entrepreneurs, social ventures show a greater normative identity (Moss *et al.*, 2011). Second, social entrepreneurs pursue *different entrepreneurial opportunities*. Often, opportunities enacted by social entrepreneurs are related to the social, the so-called “third sector” markets that tend to be informal, unregulated, unpredictable, and characterized by the idiosyncrasies of personal relationships (Robinson, 2006). Third, social entrepreneurs take *different approaches to enact opportunities*. For example, social entrepreneurs tend to follow open-source approaches or establish loose forms of social franchising (Tracey and Jarvis, 2007; Volery and Hackl, 2010), instead of focusing on privatizing innovation profits by employing patenting and licensing strategies.

Tracey and Phillips (2007) noted that “social entrepreneurs need all the same skills and expertise as more traditional entrepreneurs when they build their businesses” (p. 268). But if social entrepreneurs face additional, distinctive challenges, do they need any additional, distinctive skills to overcome these challenges and successfully create and scale their ventures? If yes, could these skills be taught and how? More insights on skills, which are required to successfully build and run a social enterprise, are a prerequisite for skill-based social entrepreneurship education. Currently, the knowledge about social entrepreneurial skills is scarce. We are not aware of any empirical study that tries to identify specific social entrepreneurship skills. Addressing the need to identify distinctive skills for social

entrepreneurs, we conducted an exploratory, qualitative study based on interviews with seven social entrepreneurs in different sectors.

This paper proceeds as follows: first, we present previous research on skill sets that are required of commercial and social entrepreneurs. We then give an overview of our methodology. Next, we present our findings of distinctive skills of social entrepreneurs. In conclusion, we discuss how experiential learning pedagogies might be used for teaching the identified distinctive social entrepreneurial skills. Though our study offers only preliminary insight into social entrepreneurial skills, we hope that it will inspire further research on the subject and thereby spawn a discussion among other educators on the most essential social entrepreneurial skills that social entrepreneurship programs ought to address.

SKILLS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Following Rands (2009), we define skills as “abilities to engage in certain courses of action so as to produce intended and effective results” (p. 302) (e.g., identifying an opportunity, designing a business model, diagnosing and planning organizational change). An important distinction should be made between a skill and a competency (Boyatzis, 1982): although competencies are also defined as underlying characteristics and abilities of a person which result in effective performance, a competency is a wider concept than a skill and it includes motives, traits, skills, self-image and a body of knowledge that a person possesses (Boyatzis, 1982, pp. 20–23). This study adopts a narrow focus on skills and does not investigate distinctive social entrepreneurial traits or the body of knowledge social entrepreneurs need.

Since we are interested in identifying skills that are *distinct* for social entrepreneurs, in contrast to skills for commercial entrepreneurs, we will first summarize and comment on the current state of knowledge on skills needed by commercial entrepreneurs and then do the same for skills needed by social entrepreneurs. As research sources we employ both scholarly contributions that talk explicitly about skills for commercial and social entrepreneurs and studies that implicitly point to certain skills since they describe entrepreneurial activities that require a specific set of skills.

Skills for Commercial Entrepreneurs

The identification and specification of entrepreneurial skills is an ongoing topic in entrepreneurship research. For example, Ray (1993) presented an

overview of previous studies on entrepreneurial skills, including the skills related to the personality of an entrepreneur (e.g., skills to innovate, leadership skills), the opportunity (e.g., identify, assess, or test opportunities), resource acquisition (e.g., capacity to raise money, deal making skills), social networks (e.g., interpersonal communication, effective usage of social networks), customers (e.g., market entry skills, effective at PR), and management (e.g., problem solving, efficiency orientation). Some of these entrepreneurial skills seem to have attracted more attention from academic researchers than others.

One of such skills is the ability to identify opportunities. Numerous studies (e.g., Baron and Ensley, 2006; Corbett, 2005; De Tienne and Chandler, 2004) pinpoint the identification and creation of opportunity as an element that is crucial in entrepreneurship research (e.g., Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Alvarez and Barney, 2007) and that might even differentiate the field from management, economics, and other social science disciplines (Venkataraman, 1997). Additionally, the skill to identify and critically assess new product and service opportunities has been mentioned as an explicit skill for entrepreneurs (Ray, 1993).

Once an opportunity is identified, it must be exploited. As Kwiatkowski (2004) puts it, "Entrepreneurship is many things at once, but above all it is the ability to perceive opportunities and to tap the resources necessary for exploiting them" (p. 218). Skills such as selecting the right people, building a team (Martin and Smith, 2010), and persuasive communication (Ray, 1993) have thus been identified as key determinants of entrepreneurs' success. Additionally, transforming an opportunity into a venture requires skills that help to deal with the process of "emergence" (Gartner *et al.*, 1992) and acting under uncertainty. Various sources point towards this direction: Baumol (1993) and Kirzner (1979) mention that entrepreneurship is linked to uncertainty; Weick (1979) mentions that entrepreneurship is about actions that help to transform equivocal situations of an emerging organization into non-equivocality (Gartner *et al.*, 1992). Thus, skills that help students to operate successfully in ambiguous situations seem to be extremely important. As listed in the study of Venkataraman *et al.* (2012) such skill sets can include being able to apply the concepts of bricolage (e.g., Baker and Nelson, 2005), effectuation (e.g., Sarasvathy, 2001; Read *et al.*, 2009), improvisation (e.g., Hmieleski and Corbett, 2006), or pattern recognition (e.g., Baron, 2006; Baron and Ensley, 2006). Additionally, a whole range of activities linked to the rather practical translation of getting the venture to work have been identified such as writing a business plan, carrying out a market analysis,

time management skills (Jusoh *et al.*, 2011), and problem-solving skills (Ray, 1993).

In sum, the skill set for commercial entrepreneurs includes skills necessary to find an opportunity (opportunity identification, opportunity exploitation, using market awareness to innovate), implement the opportunity (e.g., attract people and money, employ a competitive strategy, create a new product or service) and deal with the uncertainty related to the fact that entrepreneurship is linked to the processes of emergence and situations of uncertainty (e.g., effectuation, bricolage).

Skills for Social Entrepreneurs

Current academic literature on social entrepreneurs has been devoid of empirical work that explicitly focuses on skill sets of social entrepreneurs. Yet a number of scholarly contributions, while focusing on other aspects of social entrepreneurship, allow deducing which skills might be required for social entrepreneurs.

As in commercial entrepreneurship, opportunity identification has been in the focus of a number of social entrepreneurship research publications (Patzelt and Shepherd, 2011; Pacheco *et al.*, 2010; York and Venkataraman, 2010; Corner and Ho, 2010; Zahra *et al.*, 2008; Cohen and Winn, 2007; Dean and McMullen, 2007; Austin *et al.*, 2006). Although they did not explicitly refer to this as a social entrepreneurial skill, they nevertheless emphasized a distinctive nature of social entrepreneurial opportunities. Opportunities in social entrepreneurship are focused on social problems and involve attempts to create social value by finding solutions to these problems. “For a commercial entrepreneur, an opportunity must have a large, or growing total market size and the industry must be structurally attractive. For a social entrepreneur, a recognized social need, demand, or market failure usually guarantees a more than sufficient market size.” (Austin *et al.*, 2006, pp. 6–7). Thus, while commercial entrepreneurs are seeking entrepreneurial opportunities that will potentially allow the entrepreneur to generate and maximize profits, social entrepreneurs seek opportunities that allow them to generate social value. Of course, commercial entrepreneurs can also generate social value and social entrepreneurs will need to generate economic value in order to operate in a sustainable manner, however the primary focus differs. Based on these differences, one can infer that the distinctiveness in the type of opportunities recognized by social entrepreneurs requires a set of specific skills.

Also, researchers repeatedly referred to the following skills of social entrepreneurs: managing multiple accountabilities and connecting to multiple stakeholders (Tracey and Phillips, 2007; Zahra *et al.*, 2008, 2009) in order to continuously inform them of the social venture's progress towards social goals (Austin *et al.*, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Bloom and Chatterji, 2009; Miller and Wesley, 2010). For instance, Austin *et al.*, (2006, p. 13) mention that "a social entrepreneur must be skilled at managing a wider diversity of relationships with funders, managers, and staff from a range of backgrounds, volunteers, board members, and other partners". All these stakeholders need to be "clearly informed, frequently reminded, and convincingly persuaded that what the organization is doing has value to them" (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009, p. 118) Thus, potential beneficiaries should be persuaded of the benefits of a social innovation that is offered to them; paid personnel and unpaid volunteers should be persuaded to work for a social venture; potential financiers should be persuaded to invest in a social venture; finally, potential partners should be convinced of the benefits of entering into partnerships, joint ventures and alliances with a social venture. Austin *et al.* (2006) emphasize that while building relationships with various stakeholders is also an important skill of commercial entrepreneurs, "political and relationship management skills are of utmost importance to social entrepreneurs because such a large portion of the resources they rely upon for success are outside their direct control" (p. 13, also see Zahra *et al.*, 2009, p. 526). This notion is supported by other studies that showed that partnerships are one of the primary strategies used by social ventures to gain resources (Meyskens *et al.*, 2010a,b; Seelos and Mair, 2007), especially if social ventures are established as nonprofit or hybrid organizations (compared to for-profit social ventures) (Meyskens and Carsrud, 2011). Granted, commercial entrepreneurs also need to manage relationships and partnerships with suppliers, customers, and other stakeholders. However, literature suggests that resource restrictions require social entrepreneurs to cooperate with a larger variety of partners (including nonprofits, governmental organizations, local communities, grant-giving foundations and commercially-oriented venture capitalists).

An ability to create social value (Austin *et al.*, 2006; Zahra *et al.*, 2009; Short *et al.*, 2009; Di Domenico *et al.*, 2010; Ruebottom, 2011), quantitatively measure it (Miller and Wesley, 2010) and report it to all key stakeholders, and in particular to financiers, is another critical skill for social entrepreneurs as "[i]t appears that the ability to demonstrate results in a robust and detailed format increases the [social venture capitalists'] evaluation of venture effectiveness" (Miller and Wesley, 2010, p. 724). Related

to this is a social entrepreneurial skill of replicating created social value (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009), which is not always an obvious thing to do since “[t]his wealth of experience-based knowledge, developed over time, is not easily transferable to another individual or entity” (Meyskens *et al.*, 2010b: p. 665, also see Tracey and Jarvis (2007) for an account of a replicating effort via a franchising scheme). This ability of social entrepreneurs to transfer the knowledge and replicate social value was also found to be critical in determining the competitive advantage for social ventures (Meyskens *et al.*, 2010b).

However, it is not only the ability to create social value that is important for social entrepreneurs but also an ability to create a business model that is financially stable and, if possible, self-sustaining. Thus an ability to incorporate social and financial objectives in one organization (Kistruck and Beamish, 2010; Short *et al.*, 2009; Townsend and Hart, 2008; Tracey and Phillips, 2007), or in other words to manage the double bottom line, is another crucial skill that may influence a social venture’s success in acquiring resources from key resource providers. As demonstrated by Miller and Wesley (2010), what many venture capital firms, including those with a focus on social impact, are looking for is an ability of social entrepreneurs to demonstrate “business skills” and “management skills”. Some scholars even characterize social entrepreneurship as “the phenomenon of applying business expertise and market-based skills in the nonprofit sector” (Austin *et al.*, 2006, p. 2; also see Kistruck and Beamish, 2010, p. 737).

In sum, although none of the previously published studies has explicitly aimed to empirically investigate which skills social entrepreneurs should have to successfully create and scale their ventures, a number of important skills were nevertheless briefly mentioned, including identifying social entrepreneurial opportunities; connecting and communicating with multiple stakeholders; creating, measuring and replicating social value; integrating social and financial objectives in one venture; creating a financially stable and even, if possible, self-sustaining organization; as well as using traditional business and management skills as expected from any successful entrepreneur.

Comparing what we know about skill sets needed by commercial and social entrepreneurs, it seems that a lot of skills are similar at first glance. For example, both types of entrepreneurs rely on certain skills to identify and exploit opportunities and communicate with employees and other stakeholders. Upon more scrutiny the distinct nature of the social entrepreneurial skills becomes obvious. For example, opportunity identification in social entrepreneurship relies on different abilities since the nature of

opportunities in social entrepreneurship is very different from commercial entrepreneurship. And therefore only limited amount of existing knowledge on skills for commercial entrepreneurs can be directly applied to the field of social entrepreneurship. In the absence of prior empirical research on social entrepreneurial skills, we have thus embarked on an exploratory study of distinctive social entrepreneurial skills by interviewing seven social entrepreneurs in different sectors.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling

A possible reason for the lack of research on social entrepreneurship skills could be the multiplicity of different definitions in the field. Agreement on what defines and delineates social entrepreneurship is currently missing (Peredo and McLean, 2006; Perrini, 2006), a fact that results in conceptual confusion (Dacin *et al.*, 2010). Yet, if we are not sure what social entrepreneurship actually is, how could we define the skills needed to carry out social entrepreneurship? For this reason, we decided to base our study on the empirical analysis of self-proclaimed social entrepreneurs and thus circumvent the debate on definitions.

Our sample included seven social entrepreneurs who are based in the U.S. Though this is a small sample size, it is justifiable for a study that is intended more to explore than to confirm (e.g. Clarysse *et al.*, 2009). We compiled a list of social entrepreneurs that address a variety of social and environmental problems and that are located in the relative proximity to the university with which one of the authors was affiliated. We also used personal contacts of this author to identify social entrepreneurial ventures in the area. We used a judgment sample, a type of purposive sample where “a researcher handpicks sample members to conform to some criterion” (Emory and Cooper, 1991, p. 275). Table 1 presents an overview of the profiles of the studied social entrepreneurial ventures. We changed the names of these ventures to maintain confidentiality.

Interview Process

Face-to-face interviews with the lead entrepreneur in selected social ventures were conducted during summer 2009. Our approach was not to ask specific questions about our interviewees’ skills, but to prompt social entrepreneurs to talk about challenges that they faced when starting or

Table 1. Profile of Social Ventures.

Length of Interview		Social Problem Addressed and Short Description of a Social Mission
SE 1	50 min	Community support and corporate citizenship To create community spirit and the sense of belonging among office employees through participation in activities which benefit local communities: “The idea was let’s start bringing — bringing community in and building community from within the building” “Breaking down barriers that are causing chronic disengagement and introducing opportunities for corporate citizenship.”
SE 2	33 min	Resolution of Israeli-Palestinian conflict To use online networking technology to enable communication between conflicting sides and thus facilitate conflict resolution: “...Internet and social networking as a model for connecting people across boundaries and geographic regions and engaging in some kind of constructive dialogue so people could learn about each other...”
SE 3	54 min	Access to drinking water in rural communities in developing countries To improve access to drinking water for rural communities in developing countries through installation of gravity flow pipe water systems: “...the objective [to provide] every home in that village with access to safe drinking water” “Give people access to enough safe drinking water, their health improves immediately.”
SE 4	55 min	Human-induced carbon emissions To encourage companies to enroll to the program of voluntary reduction of electricity demand when there is an overall high demand in the grid and limited supply; To create a clean-tech incubator in order to identify high quality technologies and entrepreneurs who can turn successful products out of these technologies; To use recycled CO ₂ as a refrigerant in containers used for shipping.

Table 1. (Continued)

Length of Interview	Social Problem Addressed and Short Description of a Social Mission
SE 5 35 min	Health illiteracy in the U.S. To improve public health in the U.S. through songs with educational messages: “This way I could reach thousands or tens of thousands or millions people [...] with health information.” “So it’s much better to stay well than to get well — so that’s a motto of the company.”
SE 6 47 min	Dehumanization of business (sole focus on profits at the expense of people and the environment) To create a network for MBA students who want to make a difference: “Every MBA has a lucky lottery ticket in life. Not one of us needs to really focus on making a living. We are all going to make a living of some sort. We need to make a life. How are we going to give back? How are we going to serve? And to truly be happy, happiness comes from service.” “So, the whole point was that every MBA would be able to go out and make a difference and not starve to death.”
SE 7 32 min	Overconsumption of natural resources To produce high quality toothbrushes made of recycled plastic: “I wanted to found a company that demonstrated that we could make high quality products and also treat our natural resources with respect by reusing them as much as possible.” “...making products that were better performing but also lighter on the earth and also deliver a return to those people who were backing us.”

developing their venture. Through the discussion of challenges, we wanted to understand which skills our interviewees possessed (or had to develop on the job) in order to cope with these challenges.

Thus, each interview consisted of two parts. In the first part we took a narrative approach asking interviewees to tell us the story of their respective social venture, starting with the genesis of the idea behind it. This invited the interviewees to talk about the aspects that were most important during their ventures' beginnings. The second part of the interview was semi-structured and covered topics such as interviewees' motives for starting their venture, the opportunity recognition process, or the nature of the societal problem in focus. These topics aimed to uncover potential challenges faced by social entrepreneurs and the skills that they possessed to face these challenges. All interviews, except two, took place in the premises where the social entrepreneurs were based. We obtained permission to audiotape the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and coded using the inductive iterative multiple-rater technique described by [Miles and Huberman \(2005\)](#). The initial coding was done by all three authors coding one of the interviews independently. Guided by the question "which skills do social entrepreneurs refer to when talking about their social ventures?" we coded sentences and paragraphs referring to social entrepreneurs' abilities. After comparing and discussing the emerging coding scheme, we established coding categories and developed detailed descriptions of them. Two of the authors then applied the coding scheme to the remaining six interviews. To facilitate the process, we used data analysis software (ATLAS.ti) during all procedures. As new codes emerged in the process of coding, we re-coded earlier interviews using the new codes ([Miles and Huberman, 2005](#)). Since we did not predefine sentences that need to be coded, we were occasionally faced with a situation in which one of the authors identified a certain sentence or a paragraph as referring to a particular skill, while another did not. Such situations were discussed and an agreement was always reached. Initial inter-rater reliability for passages of text that both authors identified as referring to a specific skill was 66%. In the case of disagreement, the two authors analyzed the causes and discussed the appropriate attribution until they were able to agree.

Our second step was to develop “pattern codes” (Miles and Huberman, 2005). Pattern codes usually appear around themes, causes and explanations, or relationships among people, or may also describe constructs of a more theoretical nature. Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes that capture recurrences and assemble the material “into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Miles and Huberman, 2005: p. 69). We looked for pattern codes both within individual interviews and across the interviews as a whole. Following Miles and Huberman’s (2005) approach, we also adopted a practice of memos that were assigned to sentences or paragraphs (in addition to codes) and that were subsequently used to derive the pattern codes. This procedure helped to reduce a long list of skills that we had identified in the first step of data analysis to the seven pattern codes presented and further explained in the results section.

Verification of Results

To verify the identified skills, we reported the results back to the interviewees. For each of the seven skills, we asked them to respond to the following questions in writing: Is the described skill relevant to your work? If yes, did we correctly describe what the skill entails? Did we overlook other aspects of the skill? We also asked for other skills that might be relevant and that we had not been able to identify. All seven interviewees responded to the questions and confirmed the importance of the identified skills. Based on this feedback, we were able to sharpen and complement the description of each distinctive social entrepreneurial skill. In the following section, we therefore included both the quotes from the original interviews and the written feedback to detail our findings.

RESULTS

Based on a rigorous, qualitative analysis, we identified the following seven distinctive skills that the social entrepreneurs we interviewed had exhibited: (1) establishing and managing complex relationships with multiple stakeholders, (2) educating the target customer group and inducing behavioral change, (3) measuring and articulating social impact, (4) co-creating the product or service with multiple stakeholders, (5) developing solutions that aim to address the root cause of a social problem, (6) developing a financial model that supports the venture’s social mission, and (7) prioritizing social

and financial returns. Table 2 provides an overview of the skills as well as a brief description of them. Table 3 presents examples of text passages corresponding to each pattern code.

In the following sections, we aim to explain the nature of each skill, why it is a crucial skill for social entrepreneurs, and why we believe this skill is distinctive for social entrepreneurs as opposed to commercial entrepreneurs.

Table 2. Pattern Codes: Social Entrepreneurial Skills.

SE Skills	Short Description
Establishing and managing complex relationships with multiple stakeholders	Social entrepreneurs engage a variety of stakeholders in various roles for the purpose of creating social value. The variety of stakeholders includes commercial and not-for-profit organizations, suppliers, and beneficiaries.
Educating the target customer group and inducing behavioral change	Social entrepreneurs educate beneficiaries to induce behavioral change. The behavioral change is necessary in order to fully create the intended value for the beneficiaries.
Measuring and articulating social impact	Social entrepreneurs need to be able to articulate the mission, the business model and the social impact of their venture so that people can relate to it.
Co-creating the product or service with multiple stakeholders	Social entrepreneurs apply the principle of co-creation with partners or beneficiaries to (re)design and deliver products and services and for ensuring a lasting impact. They apply co-creation to capture the needs of their customers, to gain commitment of the beneficiaries, or to leverage scarce resources.
Developing solutions that address the root cause of a social problem	Social entrepreneurs are not satisfied with treating the symptoms of the problem; they want to eliminate the root cause of the problem in order to create systemic and lasting change.
Developing a financial model that supports the venture's social mission	Social entrepreneurs shape their revenue models according to the mission of their enterprises. To generate trust between the social entrepreneur on the one side and partners, customers, and beneficiaries on the other side, it is important that the way money is generated is in line with the enterprise mission.
Prioritizing social and financial returns	Social entrepreneurs aim to build a revenue model that ensures financial viability and allows them fulfilling their mission. Even though this sounds like the objective is to equally balance social and financial returns, we observed that the social entrepreneurs are very clear as to where their priorities are.

Table 3. Distinctive Social Entrepreneurial Skills and Examples of Corresponding Text Passages.

Social entrepreneur	Illustrative statements
Skill 1 Establishing and managing complex relationships with multiple stakeholders	
SE1	“Having such a strong earned income model is because we manage relationships really well.”
SE2	“If you run a business according to those principles, it’s very pragmatic because in the long term your customers will be happy, you know you are doing good so there is a reciprocal relationship people feel excited and good about.”
SE3	“But as far as [SE3] goes it’s an investment and I’m going to tell you with regularity what the state of your investment is.”
SE5	“I create the music and the lyrics and then I work with musicians and engineers to produce that music. And then we work with other people to license the music and [with] a variety of other people.”
SE6	“A lot of people, a lot of students helped, brought in funds when we needed, did whatever we needed to do, but I haven’t been on the board or [. . .] had any formal relationship for over ten years, but it is my life.”
SE7	“But one of the most important things is the relationships that we have developed and we want to see other companies making more eco-friendly products.”
Skill 2 Educating the target customer group and inducing behavioral change	
SE1	“Let’s bring it to the people. I like to make it sound very revolutionary.”
SE3	“And while we’re there we also teach them about health and hygiene.”
SE4	“So you are basically getting people to adjust their behavior based on an incentive to do that.”
SE5	“If information isn’t fun kids just change the channel. . . That’s OK but if it isn’t entertaining, they won’t stay with it, they won’t listen and it’s finished.”
Skill 3 Measuring and articulating social impact	
SE1	“ . . . being able to articulate the hybrid of [. . .] the financial model with the vision, [. . .] that was clearly a difficult one. [. . .] If you can’t deliver or keep people engaged in your vision, you can’t raise the money to move forward.”
SE3	“Because you know our hit rate from doing a decent amount of broadcasting — it’s pretty good [. . .] and that’s not especially

Table 3. (Continued)

Social entrepreneur	Illustrative statements
SE4	different from a commercial venture where you have a product [. . .] that people say, oh wow I didn't know about that." "We actually just rolled out this whole sustainability campaign, where we are measuring everybody [. . .] on their sort of sustainability level."
Skill 4 Co-creating the product or service with multiple stakeholders	
SE1	"I started tapping on the doors. . . I'm here to ask you how we can make your building a better place."
SE2	"We are listening very closely to what people are, the feedback that we are getting, and trying to understand exactly what it means."
SE3	"The villagers themselves — our model requires them to do all of the labor. For no monetary compensation. This is their sweat equity."
Skill 5 Developing solutions that address the root cause of a social problem	
SE1	"It's really about changing those root causes and moving people down this continuum, away from kind of disengagement and towards some kind of commitment in their community."
SE2	"If you had hundreds of thousands of people actually talking to each other, my feeling is that they could influence political discourse."
SE3	"Give people access to enough safe drinking water, their health improves immediately."
SE4	"So the overall objective, I would say, from the incubator would be to identify really high quality technologies and entrepreneurs that can then turn successful products out."
SE5	"So if you could overcome embarrassment and overcome the lack of knowledge. . . hopefully we would see more preventative measures taking place, and then people would have a higher level of health."
SE6	"But the bigger mission, which I was really into, was changing the way we do business."
Skill 6 Developing a financial model that supports the venture's social mission	
SE1	"We rolled out as a nonprofit. . . So, it has to be an independent organization [from the parent organization]."
SE2	"We're also trying to work with nonprofits; that's more challenging because their budgets are so limited. . . but that's part of

Table 3. (Continued)

Social entrepreneur	Illustrative statements
	our goal too, I think not everything that we do is going to have a profit margin of x%.”
SE4	“We are not looking to make money on the incubator itself.”
SE5	“The only reason I will do anything there for a smaller amount is if that affiliation leverages me in a positive way... On the other hand there are a number of small organizations which I’m happy to do things for and which I do.”
SE6	“Go as long as you can without outside investors, and when you decide [...] you need outside investors, make sure you agree on values.”
Skill 7 Prioritizing social and financial returns	
SE2	“So if you want to have a social nonprofit, you want to be self sustaining and provide a good living for everyone involved.”
SE4	“It is not going to be viable if we can’t turn out financially rewarding companies that have a sustainable business model that can succeed.”
SE6	“There are different times that you make decisions, that you are not accomplishing the social, [...] that you are still an economic — you still have the payroll on Friday.”
SE7	“I think you can have a social venture mission that is seeking to improve our world [...] and still be a company that is measured by a lot of today’s financial metrics.”

We also provide examples of how the social entrepreneurs we interviewed translated these skills into action.

Skill #1: Establishing and Managing Complex Relationships with Multiple Stakeholders

The social entrepreneurs (SE) we interviewed engage a variety of stakeholders in various roles in order to create social value, as the following remark illustrates (further comments supporting this conclusion are detailed in Table 3).

“And, we partner with about thirty different nonprofits across the state. All of them fit under that umbrella. So each of our thirty partners works around one of those issues [...]

and works in a geographic location where some of our buildings are located.” (SE1).

The variety of stakeholders includes employees, partner organizations, suppliers, and beneficiaries. Some of these stakeholders provide money or advice, while others play an active role within their respective social venture’s value chain. The social entrepreneur’s task is to orchestrate these frequently complex networks of relationships in such a way that each partner contributes to the social value in a manner that benefits both sides. As one of our interviewees put it, the social entrepreneur needs to create a “reciprocal relationship people feel excited and good about” (SE2). Or, as another interviewee expressed, “The ‘Do It Together’ approach vs. ‘Do It Yourself’ feels like a common driver for many SEs” (SE1, verification of results).

The variety of stakeholders can be seen in the example of SE3. The social venture aims to improve access to drinking water for rural communities in developing countries; it has donors in the United States, partners with a nonprofit organization in a developing country that carries out the project on site, and engages the beneficiaries as co-creators to build drinking water systems in their villages. Each partner plays a crucial role within the value creation network, and each requires a different type of involvement. The donors, for example, need to be kept informed on the progress towards achieving the venture’s goal. The relationship with the partner nonprofit organization in a developing country is of a completely different nature. While the social entrepreneur in the U.S. ensures the funding, the partner organization retains the sole leadership for all operational activities. This requires the two organizations to synchronize incoming funds with new and ongoing projects and align fundraising and the fulfillment of the venture’s mission.

The identified skill is in line with previous social entrepreneurship literature that highlights the importance of complex relationships and partnerships for social entrepreneurs (Austin *et al.*, 2006; Tracey and Phillips, 2007; Zahra *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Bloom and Chatterji, 2009). Commercial entrepreneurs also build complex relationships, albeit of a different nature. Partners of commercial entrepreneurs are likely to have clearly defined roles that in many cases are regulated by legal contracts, e.g. joint venture or strategic alliance partners (Gomes-Casseres, 1997; Kirby and Kaiser, 2003; Chen and Huang, 2004). Social entrepreneurs build their relationships on a rather different foundation: they try to create an environment in which various stakeholders feel strongly committed to their initiative’s

social goals and understand how they can contribute. As one of the social entrepreneurs expressed it, “My job is not to be the captain of the ship. It is to design a ship that everybody helps to be captain of.” (SE6, verification of results).

Skill #2: Educating the Target Customer Group and Inducing Behavioral Change

For all social entrepreneurs in our sample inducing behavioral change is a precondition to fully creating the intended value for the beneficiaries. For example, the value of safe drinking water, provided by SE3, can only be fully utilized if people practice good hygiene. The venture thus engages in educational measures, as the following statement illustrates:

“And while we’re there we also teach them about health and hygiene. We have a couple of women who come in and work with the women of the village and talk about issues of health and hygiene.” (SE3).

Likewise, health literacy is only beneficial if it translates into a higher number of preventive medical checkups or people having a healthier diet (SE5). SE2 aims to foster a dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians using online networking technology in order to improve communication between opposing sides and thus help resolve conflict. Education and inducing behavioral change requires social entrepreneurs to “get close” to their target groups both in a spatial and personal sense. For example, the mission of SE1 is to foster community spirit and a sense of belonging among office employees through participation in activities that benefit local communities. This mission is achieved through close cooperation with more than 30 organizations, each of which is located in the direct proximity to the office buildings served by SE1. These partner organizations know best what the people living in their area need; office employees are thus able to improve the situation in their community and at the same time develop a sense of belonging and purpose. SE5 exemplifies how beneficiaries can be reached on a personal level. The company aims to improve public health in the U.S. through producing educational songs. Anorexia, for example, is predominant among young women; the song “Anorexia” is thus sung by a young woman. This allegedly makes the song more believable among the target audience and hence boosts its effectiveness.

We believe that the need to educate beneficiaries and induce behaviors that in some cases are completely new to the beneficiaries and may even clash with existing cultural norms sets social entrepreneurs apart from most commercial entrepreneurs. Following diffusion theory, commercial entrepreneurs would rather introduce products that are highly compatible with existing values, beliefs, ideas, and previous experiences in order to increase the likelihood that customers will adopt the product (Rogers, 2003, pp. 240–249). Social entrepreneurs, in contrast, might not be able to link their products or services with existing behavior — for example, social entrepreneurs who engage in initiatives that are designed to empower women in male-dominated cultures.

Skill #3: Measuring and Articulating Social Impact

Social entrepreneurs need to be able to articulate their mission, their business model, and the social impact of their venture so that people can relate to it, as the following quotation indicates:

“If I had known that if I could articulate the social return on investment, the SROI, earlier, that’s the first thing I would have learned, because [...] it’s a way of talking about your work in a way that people really can understand it.” (SE1).

Commercial entrepreneurs are also expected to be able to articulate the objective and the business model of a venture. But it is a different matter to measure and articulate the *social impact* of venture activities. Accounting and reporting formats of commercial companies mainly focus on financial performance indicators as opposed to social impact. It has, indeed, become more common for commercial businesses to report to the public on their sustainability-related impact (Daub, 2007; KPMG Global Sustainability Services, 2002; Roca and Searcy, 2011); however, this is still more of a secondary objective, while the opposite is true of social entrepreneurs (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009). Therefore, measuring and articulating the social impact of a venture requires new ways of measuring and new forms of communication.

SE1, for example, quantifies the social return on investment in the following way: For every dollar invested, “you’re going to generate five to seven dollars for the community.” SE3 informs investors regularly about the state of their investment and keeps them “up to date from conception to conclusion” on all water-related projects. For those who invest in social entrepreneurs, the generated social value is their return on investment.

Measuring and articulating the value that has been generated is thus of crucial importance.

Skill #4: Co-Creating the Product or Service with Multiple Stakeholders

For the social entrepreneurs we interviewed, the principle of co-creation with partners or beneficiaries often played an essential role in the (re)design and delivery of their products and services as well as ensuring that they have a lasting impact. The following remark underlines this conclusion:

“The villagers themselves — our model requires them to do all of the labor, for no monetary compensation. This is their sweat equity.” (SE3).

The social entrepreneurs applied co-creation to capture the needs of customers, gain the commitment of beneficiaries, and/or leverage scarce resources. SE1, for example, listens carefully to beneficiaries in order to determine what they actually need: “And so, I started talking to the place where we had donated the suits. And, I said so what else do you need?... Well, we really need people to come in and volunteer with our job trainees and help them get ready for interviews...” (SE1). Later on SE1 offered this service and asked office employees in the served buildings whether they would be willing to become volunteers in order to do mock-up interviews with the beneficiaries.

For SE3 co-creation serves multiple purposes. The venture’s business model requires the villagers to build their own water systems without any compensation. In the absence of written permission of the villagers, SE3 would not start the project even though it can take up to four years for a village to achieve the required consensus. In this case, co-creation not only helps boost limited resources; by building their own water systems, the beneficiaries assume ownership and acquire the knowledge necessary to actually maintain and repair the system. Building the water system with the help of each household also increase acceptance of the intervention in general. This is an important issue, since the intervention is not limited to a technical change, but includes a behavioral change as well. If the water is not used to improve hygiene, the intervention’s impact might be limited. Also, the successful completion of a project that immediately increases the quality of life within a village helps villagers gain trust in their own

abilities. The element of co-creation enables the intervention to have a lasting impact.

Granted, co-creation is also used by commercial entrepreneurs. However, due to the frequent scarcity of resources and the sense of ownership that needs to be developed in beneficiaries — all of which can be attained through co-creation — the use of this principle seems to be a prerequisite for social ventures to achieve their desired social impact. Social sector markets are often informal, not regulated or predictable and “prone to the idiosyncrasies of personal relationships” (Robinson, 2006, p. 99). Thus, applying a concept that allows social entrepreneurs to closely cooperate with their beneficiaries seems ideally suited to social entrepreneurs.

Skill #5: Developing Solutions that Aim to Address the Root Cause of a Social Problem

Successful social entrepreneurs are not satisfied with merely treating the symptoms of the problem; they strive to eliminate the problem’s root cause (e.g. Zahra *et al.*, 2009; Elkington and Hartigan, 2008; Bornstein, 2004; Dees, 2001):

“Health literacy is basically the amount of knowledge and understanding that people need [...] in order to make good health choices to stay well. So in the United States over half of the population lacks this information.” (SE5).

SE5 believes that by increasing health literacy, we could overcome embarrassment and ignorance; he thus aims at preventing illness rather than providing cures as well as boosting overall health. He believes that if you can sing about something, you can also talk about it, thus overcoming embarrassment. SE3 addresses the problem of rural villages having no access to safe drinking water. A problem he refers to is the “single largest public health problem in the world” and it is the one that causes serious diseases and compromises lives and further development of a huge number of people. By providing villagers with access to enough safe drinking water, “their health improves immediately.” Finally, SE1 wants to break “down barriers that are causing chronic disengagement” in office employees by involving them in community service, while SE6 is trying to change the way business is done by changing the mindset of MBA students who are likely to become new business leaders after graduating.

However, this does not mean that the social entrepreneur needs to know everything in order to address the problem; the social entrepreneur needs to

“understand enough to inspire others and help the entire team understand and build the solutions. The organization must find a way to the core; not just the social entrepreneur” (SE6, verification of results). As discussed previously, behavioral change is often necessary to have the desired effect. Thus, an effective solution can only be offered if the social entrepreneur and his/her collaborators understand beneficiaries’ motives: “It’s not understanding the problem, but understanding what motivates those with the problem” (SE5, verification of results).

Skill #6: Developing a Financial Model That Supports the Venture’s Social Mission

We found that the social entrepreneurs in our sample shape their revenue models according to the mission of their ventures. The following quote illustrates the conclusion:

“Go as long as you can without outside investors, and when you decide [...] you need outside investors, make sure you agree on values.” (SE6).

Social entrepreneurs often use various sources of capital to fund their ventures, including money from investors, donors, and sales profits. In order to promote a relationship of trust between social entrepreneurs and their partners, customers, and beneficiaries, revenue must be generated in a manner that accords with the venture’s mission. If, for example, a social entrepreneur takes donations, he or she must be forthcoming regarding the flow of the money. SE1 guarantees donors that one hundred percent of their donations will go towards benefitting the community, while administrative purposes are funded separately. Transparency, setting clear standards, and communicating those standards helps SE1 build trust among donors. Similarly, social entrepreneurs must let potential investors know whether they will receive dividends or merely the return of their initial investment. “If you are planning on taking money, it has got to be money that [...] completely supports what you are doing. Do not back down in those presentations to investors in terms of what your social cause [is], and how it is supported.” (SE6).

Whether the financial model is in line with the venture’s social mission is subject to debate. One interviewee mentioned the difficulty of deciding whether to accept money “from an organization that may operate in ways that the social enterprise opposes, yet certain individuals within the organization may strongly support the mission of the social entrepreneur” (SE4,

verification of results). The complex nature of revenue generation and distribution can make it detrimental to the social entrepreneur's credibility and hence his or her ability to establish trust and gain resources from other partners.

Skill #7: Prioritizing Social and Financial Returns

The social entrepreneurs in our study see a self-sustaining business as a must-have, i.e. as a prerequisite to fulfilling their mission:

“It is not going to be viable if we can't turn out financially rewarding companies that have a sustainable business model that can succeed.” (SE4).

That means that on the whole, the business must cover its costs. Social entrepreneurs thus try to “marry social returns with financial” (SE7, verification of results). However, they would not be willing to compromise social values for financial returns: “[...] and never said that financial returns should come at the cost of social” (SE7, verification of results). One interviewee clearly stated that he is willing to lose money if the company's societal or environmental impact is affected and that he would rather go out of business than compromise on the relevant characteristics of his products (SE6). “If social entrepreneurs put money first, they are not social entrepreneurs” as suggested by SE3. This confirms Neck *et al.*'s (2009) argumentation that only those ventures that have a clear social mission can be called social entrepreneurial ventures, whereas economic outcomes of their operations are crucial for their ability to realize their mission but do not come first in the hierarchy of objectives.

DISCUSSION

We identified seven distinctive skills that social entrepreneurs need in order to successfully accomplish their social mission. Interestingly, only some of these skills were previously referred to by social entrepreneurship scholars, which points to new avenues for future social entrepreneurship research. For instance, skill #1 (establishing and managing complex relationships with multiple stakeholders) was briefly mentioned by a number of other researchers (e.g., Austin *et al.*, 2006; Tracey and Phillips, 2007; Zahra *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Bloom and Chatterji, 2009). Tracey and Phillips (2007) even explicitly recommend that social entrepreneurs “need to be skilled at

building mechanisms to act as a bridge connecting the social enterprise to key stakeholders” (p. 267). Likewise, skill #6 (developing a financial model that supports the venture’s social mission), skill #7 (prioritizing social and financial returns) and skill #3 (measuring and articulating social impact) were repeatedly mentioned in previous social entrepreneurship publications (e.g., Miller and Wesley, 2010; Kistruck and Beamish, 2010; Short *et al.*, 2009; Bloom and Chatterji, 2009; Townsend and Hart, 2008; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Tracey and Phillips, 2007; Austin *et al.*, 2006).

In contrast, previous researchers have overlooked the fact that social entrepreneurs must be able to induce behavioral change and educate target groups (skill #2). As discussed earlier, it is exactly this ability that sets social entrepreneurs apart from commercial entrepreneurs, who tend instead to introduce products and services that conform to existing values and previous experiences. The social entrepreneurs whom we studied engage in such activities as educating beneficiaries on issues related to health and hygiene (by way of educational songs) and the installation of clean water equipment, improving relations among Israelis and Palestinians (by way of online interaction) as well as among white-collar workers (by way of community service projects and the cultivation of a sense of belonging and purpose) and companies (through the creation of incentives to voluntarily reduce electricity consumption during peak times, which reduces carbon emission).

Another interesting finding from our data is the importance of co-creation (skill #4). In some cases co-creation was the central principle guiding the choice of actions of the interviewed social entrepreneurs; in others, social entrepreneurs learned the importance of co-creation on the job. Our interviewees were, for instance, skilled at engaging the local community in co-creating clean water systems or developing new volunteer programs. Through collaborative action and the joint development of solutions, social entrepreneurs aimed to have a lasting social impact. Finally, skill #5 (developing solutions that aim to address the root cause of a social problem) also yields some very interesting insights. Although a large number of social entrepreneurship researchers, in line with commercial entrepreneurship scholars, focused on the process of opportunity identification (Patzelt and Shepherd, 2011; Pacheco *et al.*, 2010; York and Venkataraman, 2010; Corner and Ho, 2010; Neck *et al.*, 2009; Zahra *et al.*, 2008; Cohen and Winn, 2007; Dean and McMullen, 2007; Austin *et al.*, 2006), to our knowledge, little to no research has been done on types of social entrepreneurial opportunities and specifically on the types of solutions in which social entrepreneurs specialize. The social entrepreneurs interviewed in our study offered goods and services that aim to address the very root

cause of a social problem (i.e. health education to improve health instead of, or in addition to, expensive equipment and drugs; mechanisms that enable voluntary reduction of energy consumption instead of, or in addition to, developing technologies for clean fuel, etc.).

We believe that this ability of social entrepreneurs to induce behavioral change through education (skill #2) and the co-creation of products and services together with beneficiaries (skill #4) in order to generate solutions that try to address the root cause of a social problem (skill #5) is one of the aspects that differentiates social entrepreneurs from commercial entrepreneurs the most and therefore ranks among the most important skills that social entrepreneurs should have. For that reason, more research should be done on these specific aspects of social entrepreneurship in order to establish exactly how social entrepreneurs achieve behavioral change, how then the process of co-creation in social entrepreneurship works, and how they effectively come up with solutions that aim towards the root cause of a social problem. In the remainder of this article, we will discuss the ways in which our findings might be of use to social entrepreneurship educators in developing new educational programs.

Implications for Social Entrepreneurship Education

According to Brock and Steiner (2008, p. 1135), “the vast majority of universities that include social entrepreneurship as part of their curriculum offer only one or two courses. As a result, social entrepreneurship courses are typically designed to provide an overview of the field instead of focusing on one or two elements.” This indicates the rather superficial nature of current social entrepreneurship curriculum — one that precludes the cultivation of concrete skills. Likewise, Krueger (2010) reports that skill development is specified as an educational objective in only around 17% of the analyzed 298 social entrepreneurship syllabi. Rands (2009) recognizes a similar situation with regard to sustainability education: “Despite its acknowledged importance, skills-based education is challenging and time consuming. As a result, only a minority of environmental sustainability education efforts may actually devote significant time to developing environmental sustainability skills” (p. 303).

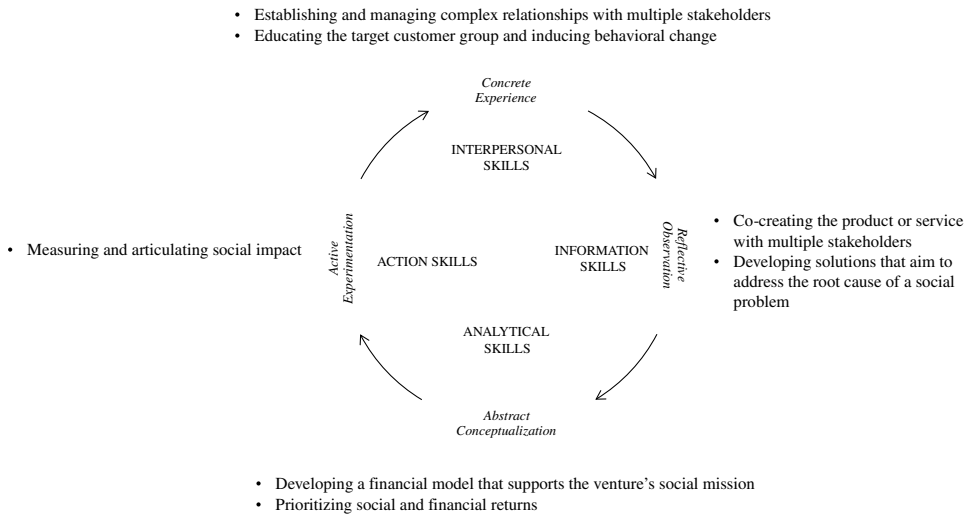
In contrast to general knowledge, skills cannot be developed in a traditional “talk-and-chalk” lecture format. Evidence shows that “institutionalized academic routines too often result in graduates knowledgeable of theory yet unable to meaningfully contribute in practice” (Papamarcos, 2005, p. 325), especially in management education (Bailey and Ford, 1996; Mintzberg and

Gosling, 2002; Hoover *et al.*, 2010). Experiential learning, as pedagogy, is growing in popularity to address this gap and provide tools that enable students to learn concrete skills. There is increasing evidence that experiential learning is used for teaching entrepreneurship courses (e.g., Solomon *et al.*, 2002; Mustar, 2009), as well as social entrepreneurship (Litzky *et al.*, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Papamarcos, 2005). As noted by Barbosa *et al.* (2008, p. 418), “through a combination of coursework and experiential education, entrepreneurship educators can assist students in developing their entrepreneurial thinking and risk-taking skills while also allowing them to further build their entrepreneurial knowledge base.”

One of the basic principles of experiential learning is the “idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education” (Dewey, 1938, pp. 19–20). Kolb (1984) describes experiential learning as a cyclical process of feeling, reflecting, thinking, and acting. In other words *concrete experiences* (feeling) are combined with *reflective observations* (reflecting), which further allows learners to translate concrete experiences in *abstract conceptualization* (thinking) and then form them into *active experimentation* (acting). The role of the educator in this process is changing dramatically: experiential learning requires the educator to take over the role of a coach or a mentor and much less the one of a teacher; simply because students are not supposed to learn from their teachers, but from their experiences.

Drawing on Kolb’s (1984) conceptualization of experiential learning, we propose a model how the seven distinctive social entrepreneurial skills identified in this study can be integrated in an educational program. According to Kolb, the four learning dimensions (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) correspond to four learning skills: interpersonal, information, analytical, and action skills. Kolb’s learning skills can be matched to the identified seven distinctive social entrepreneurial skills in the following way (Figure 1): interpersonal skills involve the use of feelings, intuitive understanding, and sensitivity towards other people’s emotions and values and correspond to skill #1 (establishing and managing complex relationships with multiple stakeholders) and skill #2 (educating the target customer group and inducing behavioral change). Information skills revolve around carefully watching and listening; they correspond to the two identified social entrepreneurial skills: skill #4 (co-creating the product or service with multiple stakeholders) and skill #5 (developing solutions that aim to address the root cause of a social problem). Analytical skills require thinking, analyzing, and building general theories and therefore describe skill #6

The Distinctive Skills of Social Entrepreneurs



Based on: Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004

Figure 1. Kolb's Experiential Learning Dimensions, Learning Skills and Distinctive Social Entrepreneurial Skills.

(developing a financial model that supports the venture's social mission) and skill #7 (prioritizing social and financial returns). Finally, action skills involve actively influencing people and changing situations and thus relate to skill #3 (measuring and articulating social impact).

Consequently, educators can either split the experiential learning cycle into four separate experiential learning projects or they can attempt at integrating all four stages of learning into one project. The first possibility may work for shorter courses in which four types of experiential learning projects might run in parallel. Thus, for instance, one project might aim at training interpersonal skills using concrete experiences through getting students involved in a start-up social venture that needs to define key stakeholders (including beneficiaries), establish relationships with them, and even attempt at implementing first initiatives to influence their behavioral patterns. The second project might aim at training information skills using reflective observation learning mode through students' involvement in another start-up social venture that faces the challenge of developing the right offering for beneficiaries. The third project might aim at training action skills through students' involvement in a social venture that needs some assistance with, or on the contrary, excels at impact measurement and communication with stakeholders. Finally, analytical skills (i.e. developing financial models and prioritizing social and financial

returns) can be trained either in a lecture-seminar format or in the fourth type of experiential learning project that targets early-to-later stage entrepreneurial ventures with funding challenges. For instance, Papamarcos (2005) reports on the experience with a project where students helped secure \$400,000 in financing for a taxi company that employed disabled taxi drivers; student teams were also involved in the training of prospective drivers to help them obtain licenses for driving a cab. In a different project outlined by Papamarcos, students helped a Harlem-based brewing company (the United States' only African-American owned and operated brewing company) to identify and analyze the market as well as to conduct an in-depth financial analysis.

Dividing the course into four separate projects will of course mean exposing student groups only to one type of learning skills out of four; however, as mentioned by SE6 in our research, social entrepreneurs should "understand enough to inspire others and help the entire team understand and build the solutions" rather than be equally experienced in all four categories of skills. Nevertheless, if the curriculum allows for the development of a longer course – i.e. two semesters or even longer — it may be possible to engage students in a full experiential learning cycle in one social venture. With the explosion of popularity of social entrepreneurship and multiplicity of social entrepreneurship networks, it should not be too difficult to identify a social entrepreneurial start-up that students can work with throughout the year and thus gain experience in all four learning modes and receive training in all seven social entrepreneurial skills. An alternative approach might be the creation of a completely new social venture by students; Smith *et al.* (2008) report on their experience of the initiation of a student-run venture *Edun LIVE on Campus*, which is an excellent example that students are capable of setting up and running their own social ventures in the framework of a social entrepreneurship class.

CONCLUSION

In our view, we have made three main contributions to social entrepreneurship research and practice through our study: first, we have conducted an exploratory study of distinctive social entrepreneurial skills and empirically grounded some of the skills that were previously referred to by other researchers, such as establishing and managing relationships with multiple stakeholders, measuring and articulating social impact, prioritizing social and financial returns, and developing a financial model that supports the venture's

social mission. We have explored these skills in far greater detail than any of the previous social entrepreneurship scholars, who only briefly mentioned them while focusing on other aspects of social entrepreneurship. Second, this exploratory study revealed several new distinctive social entrepreneurial skills that had not been previously investigated. These skills include the ability of social entrepreneurs to induce behavioral change through education, co-create products and services together with beneficiaries, and find solutions to the root cause of a social problem. The identification of these new social entrepreneurial skills points to new avenues for social entrepreneurship research. Third, we have provided recommendations to social entrepreneurship educators as to how the seven identified distinctive skills can be taught in an experiential learning format, which is gaining popularity — particularly in entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship education.

Though this study relies on a limited sample size of only seven social entrepreneurs, each of the identified social entrepreneurial skills recurred in numerous of the seven cases, which indicates that our findings are robust. Small sample sizes are common in qualitative, exploratory studies (e.g., *Clarysse et al.*, 2009). However, the identified social entrepreneurial skills need to be validated in a larger survey, which offers opportunities for future empirical research. We hope that our study will foster further discussion on the subject of social entrepreneurial skills as well as the most appropriate content and pedagogy for social entrepreneurship education, thus contributing to the development of a new generation of socially-conscious leaders who are motivated and capable of finding solutions to the most pressing societal and environmental problems.

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