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Urge to Experiment

Social Entrepreneurs are characterized by their tendencies to negate the obvious, to question the convention and find out ways to plug holes in the existing system. This tendency prompts them to think out of the box and imbibe creativity and innovation as a culture rather than a one-time practice. This chapter focuses on the creative ideas and innovative approaches of the Social Entrepreneurs and the underlying principles.

Darwinian theory suggests that the fittest survives. Same theory holds good even when it comes to corporate leaders and their products. One of the crucial factors that keeps organization surviving in today's world is innovation and the urge to experiment. Innovation today, is as good a building block for an organization as land, labor, capital and management are. Time is not far-off, when organization will have one Chief Innovation Officer, whose function would be to monitor and ensure continuous improvement and consistent innovation in the organization. One has to understand and accept the fact that *me too approach* is ephemeral and in the long-run one has to have a different or an improved version over the existing competitors.

As Bill Drayton – Founder, Ashoka Foundation – puts it “there is no entrepreneur without a powerful, new system-change idea”. Thus Social Entrepreneurs are motivated by the very intrinsic factors like variety in idea, innovation in implementation and passion to serve. Social Entrepreneurs have the knack of digging out the uncommon observations from the common phenomena. And this knack prompts them to come up with unconventional solutions to the pressing issues. Social Entrepreneurs carry the will to change an important pattern across the society. To make all this possible, Social Entrepreneurs imbibe the culture of innovation firmly and adhere to it as an inevitable feature in their ideas and approaches.

Experimenting since ages has been in the blood and veins of entrepreneurs. In fact, entrepreneurs are thinkers first and businessmen later. They have the knack of channelising their thought process in different and unexplored tracks and thus coming up with a novel idea. Creativity is an inalienable ingredient of entrepreneurs. They have a deliberate tendency to think unconventionally, out of the box. They are driven by the urge to break the convention and experiment with available resources. This is a tendency that Social Entrepreneurs also claim to possess. In fact, one of the parameters for one to qualify as a Social Entrepreneur, according to Ashoka Foundation, is to think creatively and come up with an innovative idea that contributes to the society.

Thus, Social Entrepreneurs are bunch of creative souls with an irresistible urge to experiment with the concoction of passion, knowledge and the deftness to exploit resources available.

What it takes to Innovate

Innovation has no prescribed scale or size. Anything that is different than the traditionally practiced style and can yield better results when compared to the earlier practice can be termed as innovation.

An efficient team and a flexible environment encourages innovation. Innovation is a phenomenon that drives change in the existing practices. In other words, innovation is a shift of paradigm. Hence, to make an innovation successful, a Social Entrepreneur must adopt a culture that is active and responsive to change. As Tom Peters says, "It's all about having the courage to introduce change". One more important factor that governs the success or failure of an innovation is the timing of that particular innovation. The entrepreneur must ensure that the society is in a position to accept the change. It should not end up in an anachronistic innovation. This was observed in case of invention of the xerographic process by Chester Carlson in 1938. Though scientifically it was a successful invention, it had to wait for a decade or more to prove itself as a successful commercial viability. Gerhard Gaynor in his book *Innovation by Design* said that innovation is equal to invention added to implementation and commercialization. The Social Entrepreneur must ensure that the society is going to benefit out of such innovation. The entrepreneur must ensure its success on sustainability front too.

Rohit Baluja's Urge to Experiment

I am a businessman. I started with a family business of footwear. I intended to support my family business way back in 1957 and I used to travel on short business trips. I am very fond of driving, I realized that there is something called Right of Way. With Every person or vehicle or road user has a right of way on road which I saw is respected in the developed world but is totally violated in the developing world especially India. Stealing a Right of Way is as good as an offence; criminal offense. I realized that nobody neither the police, nor the government, nor road users feel that there is something called right of way. And I realized that when we violate the Right of Way, it results in so many accidents, and there is nothing called road safety in its right term. So I thought can I not initiate something to instill the Right of Way in India? With these thoughts in mind, in December 1991, I founded this non-governmental organisation, with a registered society called IRTE and the whole exercise was around the objective of bringing about a developed way of using road, so that people will feel happy and feel confident that they would be safe on roads.

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After creating this society I gathered a few members together. Everybody discouraged me initially and said it will not result in anything substantial; its waste of time and money. However, the society started and the journey was absolutely rough. The government's philosophy was to leave it to the public. Finally we started our journey in Chennai. People still didn't believe when I said my direction seems to be all right.

Convincing actually comes from abroad. I mean what I did in India was recognized at the level of United Nations, recognized by the British Department.

A radical innovation demands a continuous application of creativity. Often creativity is wrongly, interchangeably used with innovation. How are they different? Creativity is as different from innovation.

Normally, the failure rate of the ideas among entrepreneurs is very high. Why do ideas fail? No doubt this is a billion dollar question whose answer is always a subject to research. One crucial reason could be that many ideas are just the modified version of the existing ones. This defeats the very logic behind Social Entrepreneurship.

Thus the idea fails and one ceases to be a Social Entrepreneur. The entrepreneurs must emphasize on the newness in the idea by bringing together the various resources like technology, people, etc. This demands a creative orientation of the entrepreneur. Creative orientation can be classified into four components.

- Originality component
- Orientation component
- Flexibility component
- Fluency component.

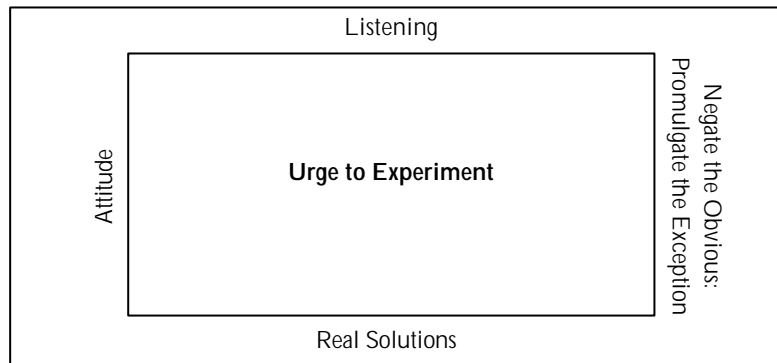
The Social Entrepreneurs must be thoroughly and constantly oriented towards the aforesaid four components in order to avoid redundancy in ideas and in order to provide an effective solution to

the society. While originality component refers to the newness in the idea, orientation component refers to the tendency to be constantly oriented towards creativity and innovation. Similarly fluency component would indicate the number of creative ideas the entrepreneur can conceive at regular intervals ensuring the sustainability of the enterprise. And flexibility component indicates the ease of the entrepreneur while examining one particular idea in various effective dimensions possible, and thus selecting the most effective. Each of these components have a crucial role to play in determining the efficacy of the entrepreneur's idea. Idea generation requires a few tenets to be followed strictly. First and foremost; total participation. It must be ensured that there is total participation in the organization during the process of idea generation. Ideas should be allowed to flow freely across the organization. While possession of creativity by one person is the efficiency stage of innovation, conversion of creativity into an idea is the evolutionary stage. The final stage of the process of innovation is revolutionizing the evolution, i.e., making the idea sustainable. This involves the implementation and replicability of the idea evolved.

While efficiency and evolution are the processes within the organization, revolution is the process, which is a function of both internal and external factors to the organization. Successful exploitation of ideas and incorporation of new technologies is a must in order to keep a business house running successfully. Continuous improvement through innovation is inevitable which decides the fate of the businesses in the times to come.

Entrepreneurial Traits for Innovation

Taking a cue from David Bornstein's *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New ideas*, the following are few traits that the author observes in Social Entrepreneurs and prescribes for the aspiring Social Entrepreneurs.



Listening

Bornstein says that strong commitment to listening is one of the most important qualities of innovative organizations. Especially Social Entrepreneurs are the breed of entrepreneurs at complete disposal of the people. Their vision, mission, and goals are in fact driven by the needs of the people and not by their desire absolutely. Thus listening plays a pivotal role for Social Entrepreneurs. And hence the propensity to listen in a Social Entrepreneur, should be much more, in order to understand the needs, necessities, grievances, aspirations, and expectations of the people and thus come up with a suitable, feasible and a path breaking idea. Unlike other entrepreneurs and managers, Social Entrepreneurs should also be conscious about the type of listening they are exercising. Social Entrepreneurs should be patient enough and their listening should empathize with that of the grievances of the affected. In other words, they must be tuned in the empathetic mode of listening. They should be experts of empathetic listening i.e., listening and understanding the issue from other person's point of view.

Leena Joshi – RKS

The activity at Rationing Kruti Samiti and the efforts taken up by Leena Joshi, illustrates how important is listening as a skill for Social Entrepreneurs to bring about a change in the society. Leena Joshi –

a professional social worker and an alumna of the prestigious Tata Institute for Social Service says “this is a collective effort”. With collective effort, many NGOs and individuals were working under the issue of PDS (Public Distribution System) in one way or the other. Leena Joshi along with her dedicated team came across the issue when they were interacting with poor people. One of the issues they came across was health and nutrition aspect of the poor, which affected their lives drastically.

Leena Joshi while sharing her experience says, “We were working on health, nutrition. When we talk about nutrition, we talk about food and access to food. We have come across this issue very frequently during the course of our work. We thought we should know more about the system as to what are the rights of the poor, what are they entitled to, and how do they go about it and how does the system function. And that is how we started with it. There is no denying the fact that the entire mechanism of the existing public distribution system leaves a lot to be desired with a lot of grievances from the target communities. Hence, it demanded acute empathetic listening skills as the service to them demands nothing more than just that. And then the team led by Ms. Joshi realized that, the public distribution system has been plagued with loopholes like bad quality of food grain, black-marketing all kinds of things. Slowly in mid 80s the problem started growing. And thus with a deep understanding of the existing system and the need for a better system and a dire necessity for a catalyst that can monitor and streamline the system, Ms. Joshi has been playing an instrumental role towards the organization called Rationing Kruti Samiti. Much of the success of the Rationing Kruti Samiti can be attributed to Ms. Joshi’s urge to understand the problem and listen to the affected and a drive to make nutrition everybody’s right with humility, and dedication.

Is Creativity Born or Made?

Is creativity born or made? And, if it's born, were you born with it? And if you weren't, does that consign you to the dustbin of 'uncreative' people, doomed to spend your life in the doldrums of repetitive work, drudging away following other people's orders? These questions are in many people's minds, and particularly in the minds of those who are The Big Boss, and who have decided that their organizations must be more 'creative'. They then instruct their HR department to 'recruit creative people', and the HR department, duly complying with The Big Boss's latest whim, decide that what they need is the appropriate psychometric test. So they appoint the leading academics in the field as consultants. These academics have been researching creativity all their working lives.

When faced with the challenge of thinking of uses for a rolling-pin, my mind tends to think of a rolling-pin in its conventional use as a mechanism of making a ball of bread dough (or maybe, these days, pizza dough) nice and flat. This primary use tends to constrain my thinking, making it very hard for me to imagine uses other than making a ball of plasticine flat, or perhaps chewing gum. Then I'm stuck. Well, the way to unstuck things is to approach the problem in a different way. Rather than trying to think, immediately, of an alternative use for a rolling-pin, what you should do is think – as perceptively as you can—of everything that you know about the rolling-pin itself. So, imagine you were writing an e-mail to one Martian, describing a rolling-pin as fully as you can. Do this as a series of bullet points, so that, when the Martian lands, he can immediately identify the rolling-pin, and distinguish it from any other household object he might come across—such as a television, an ironing board, a bread knife, whatever.

What might such a list look like? Here are some of my thoughts:

- The rolling part is made of wood.
- It's about eighteen inches long.
- There's a handle on each end.
- It's made of two parts: A cylinder which rotates about a central bit that extends to form the handles.
- It weighs around a pound or so (I guess).
- The handles might be metal.
- The handles might have rubber grips.
- The rolling part is smooth.
- The cylinder is about three inches in diameter.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can buy them in shops. • They cost a few pounds... <p>I'm sure your list is different, and probably longer: Which is interesting, in that both you and I started with the same trigger—"rolling-pin"—but maybe we see the same concept rather differently. What this list does is to 'disaggregate' the concept 'rolling-pin' into a number of constituent elements. And once this is done, it is far, far easier to think of alternative uses. As an example, just take the very first item, the fact that the rotating cylinder is made of wood.</p> <p>What else can I use wood for? A host of things, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A source of fuel, from lighting a domestic fire, to providing the motive power for a steam engine; from making into matches, to being the source of energy for a city's power station. • A material for making anything from a wooden egg-cup, to furniture, to the framework of a house. • A material that is a rather poor conductor of electricity—and so to provide electrical Insulation... • ...And also a rather poor conductor of heat—and so provide thermal insulation. • The raw material for products derived from wood, such as paper or cardboard, and all the products made from these...
<i>Courtesy: Excerpts from Dennis Sherwood's "How Creative Are You?".</i>
<i>Source: http://www.cul.co.uk/creative/how.htm</i>

Negate the Obvious: Promulgate the Exception

Social Entrepreneurs' urge to experiment keeps them inclined towards thinking out of the box. Social Entrepreneurs often come up with unconventional outcomes, owing to their tendency to stand out. Social Entrepreneurs take up where others give up. Social Entrepreneurs take charge where others submit. Social Entrepreneurs are addicted to derive a solution out of an apparently unsolvable problem. Poverty has been an apparently unsolvable problem before free India, since independence. And poverty is one of the crucial causal factors responsible for the huge digital divide between societies. While the rich are busy getting richer, while knowledgeable are busy in getting

more knowledgeable, Akhtar Badshah – a Social Entrepreneur came up with an exceptional and revolutionary principle – “Money can be made while serving the poor”. Digital Partners, under the leadership of Akhtar Badshah has launched a process that promises supporting and strengthening a new generation of successful Social Entrepreneurs that are using information and communication technology, in order to create social benefit. The effort also is channelised to accelerate transfer of capital to investment opportunities that harness the new digital economy to generate social returns while also deriving investment returns. (Source: Financing Entrepreneurial Solutions to Bridge the Digital Divide). With this exceptional strategy, Digital partners could support social organizations like SEWA (Self-Employed Women’s Association) SKS (Swayam Krishi Sangam) Foundation, CARE/UNDP etc.

Real Solutions

Social Entrepreneurs are innovative, according to David Bornstein, because they spend significant amount of time, thinking about realistic solutions for the end users. When we say real, it includes an array of factors like plausibility, appeal, replicability, revenue earning capacity, newness, innovativeness, user friendliness etc. Which is why, a Social Entrepreneur is tuned to think minutely not missing even a single viable idea, to cause social benefit satisfying the double bottomline.

Anil Shaligram of One Village One Computer came up with one such real idea, with an innovative approach. Anil Shaligram initiated the project with an objective of making information technology relevant and accessible to rural communities in India by imparting underprivileged people to utilise computers as a means of meeting basic social and economic issues. The objective also envisages creating a network of locally operating IT cooperatives. How do these realistic, practical yet innovative ideas occur to Social Entrepreneurs. When asked the same Anil says “I was writing a column in leading newspapers

of Maharashtra (a state in India) from 1997-2000. The subject was *IT for Development*. So, I wrote some 400 articles in various newspapers on this subject. And then while writing, I have been constantly thinking how to use IT for a social change. That was the thing. I had never written on any technology or programming. But the impact of IT. That was the subject from the very first article. Thus these ideas evolved and finally crystallized around 1999 and 2000. Then I started working on it."

Anil was resolute to facilitate IT literacy for village community. Thus he came up with an innovative model and syllabus that was introduced for the objective. Anil's concept and approach towards the objective was different and exceptional when compared to the normal IT training in different institutes. Anil says, "Basic idea is to impart community, particularly village community, the IT literacy and inculcate IT interface." While teaching, Anil adopted a few newer and effective techniques like teaching in a One-to-many mode instead of One-to-One, to bring in collective learning. Secondly, Anil is particular about linking learning immediately to their problem, so that technology can be exploited to address and resolve their issues. Through this, Anil and his team developed a large section of human capital, including the village youth with no conditional formal educational requirement with a bonafide intention that, even illiterates can learn and are encouraged to use technology for improving their lives. The concept of One-Village-One-Computer has been making a significant contribution towards the village community problems like employment, water etc.

That shows a bent of mind. Social Entrepreneurs as a result of their constant botheration towards the society, develop a bent of mind

that programs their thinking towards realistic, innovative and plausible solutions towards pressing social issues.

Attitude

There are two types of factors that drive the interest, motivation and passion of people: Extrinsic factors and Intrinsic factors. While extrinsic factors indicate materialistic factors like monetary benefits, positional possessiveness, etc., intrinsic factors are the ones that drive you from within. The factors like passion to face challenges, and a will to give back to develop the society are the intrinsic factors which gradually develop an indifference towards the extrinsic factors. Thus resulting in more creative and innovative ideas. Social Entrepreneurs are in principal driven by the intrinsic factors and hence their entire thought process is propelled by, and channelised towards, genuine service to the society giving no way for the extrinsic factors to disturb creativity and innovation. Hence, the Social Entrepreneurs, while employing or recruiting others in their organization would also be interested in taking such people who are driven by intrinsic factors. They are the souls with a different attitude and different bent of mind when compared with other entrepreneurs. While talking on attitude, innovation and Social Entrepreneurship, Ravi Agarwal of Toxics Link says “Any Entrepreneurship means innovation. I was a Business Entrepreneur and I became a Social Entrepreneur. But I still need to innovate. That is the key to success; one needs to be focused on one’s mission and find a way to do it. It has more to do with attitude than anything else. Its not something which you learn in the Business schools.”

We gather from the discussion that Social Entrepreneurs are those social messiahs who are characterized by an irresistible hunger to break the conventional, obsolete patterns of the system, by way of coming up with creative and innovative approaches. And their propensity to be creative in thinking is supported by their august assets like empathetic listening skills, intrinsic motivation, and hunt for realistic solutions.

At a glance...

- One of the crucial factors that keeps organization surviving in today's world is innovation and the urge to experiment and thus innovate.
- Social Entrepreneur must ensure that the society is going to benefit out of an innovation, with an equal attention on the sustainability front too.
- Social Entrepreneurs must be thoroughly and constantly oriented towards the components of creativity in order to avoid redundancy in ideas and in order to provide an effective solution to the society.
- Strong commitment to listening is one of the most important qualities of Social Entrepreneurs.
- Social Entrepreneurs' urge to experiment keeps them inclined towards thinking out-of-the box.
- Social Entrepreneurs are innovative, because they spend significant amount of time thinking about realistic solutions for the end users.
- Social Entrepreneurs are in principal driven by intrinsic motivational factors and hence their entire thought process is propelled by, and channelised towards genuine service to the society giving no way for the extrinsic factors to disturb the creativity and innovation.

