Social Entrepreneurship and Community Connections

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Natasha Bobyreff, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Management Discipline Group at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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Abstract

While much is known about entrepreneurial business practices, there is little research about the relational conditions under which social entrepreneurship works. This is particularly so when considering the communities in which social entrepreneurship operates. Specifically, little is known about relational aspects between social entrepreneurs who complete affordable housing developments and community stakeholders. When it comes to considering the community's ability to have a voice in these projects, it is unclear where exactly, or even if, the community is heard. To explore this theme, the research adopts the conceptual framework of complexity theory, while undertaking case studies on social entrepreneurship in the context of affordable housing projects.

The affordable housing case studies took place in both Canada and Australia, with four businesses where a social entrepreneur was a key participant. The research shows that contrary to the bulk of current literature the most effective social entrepreneurship does not and cannot exist as an autonomous practice taking a top-down approach. Making an impactful contribution is found to be significantly enhanced through social entrepreneurs closely considering the needs and 'voice' of those within the community whom they seek to serve (the future residents), and carefully navigating the broader community context in which the project takes place. Moreover, the creation of positive impact through social entrepreneurship in housing is reliant on a careful combining of several different stakeholders. It was found that in cases where a deeper connectivity between the social entrepreneur and other key stakeholders occured, richer results ensued. Key among stakeholders must be the community or individuals being served. This urges the development of a collaborative, inclusive and connected work environment, where expertise is shared and valued form each different group.

The research for this thesis contributes to addressing a gap in the academic literature through identifying emergent themes which illustrate how social entrepreneurs interact with various community stakeholders. It considers the opportunities and challenges of each stakeholder to add to an understanding of how they are able to or restricted from collaboratively contributing. It highlights where and how the voices of community stakeholders are heard through shared expertise between all stakeholders and the implications of their inclusion in the activities of social entrepreneurship.

Key Terms

Social entrepreneur – While the exact definition of the term 'social entrepreneur' is a matter of debate in much academic literature, for the purpose of this thesis the term will refer to an individual working in a business with the intent of effecting social good.

Affordable housing – Affordable housing is considered, in alignment with standard accepted definitions, to be housing that costs the tenant (or owner) 30 per cent or less of their income.

Broader community members – refers to individuals within the community that may be affected by housing projects. These may be neighbours in the area of the development or relevant individuals living locally who are not a part of an organised group.

Community groups – Groups that emerge from within the community and who unite to support a shared cause. These groups may begin to formalise, even forming independent NFPs to support their cause.

Not For Profit (NFP) – refers to a business which formally runs in an NFP capacity and is (usually) the recipient of government funds to support their activities. While one case (2) involves an NFP formed by a community group, this is the only instance where the NFPs referred to are not pre-existing and long-established businesses.

Resident groups/future residents – refers to the collective group of individuals who will occupy or are intended to occupy the affordable housing building developments of the case study.

Government bodies – These may be at the level of local council, provincial/state through to federal government and will be specified as relevant throughout.