

***A Redefinition of Social Entrepreneurship:  
Deliberate Disruptive Design***

Craig P. Dunn (corresponding author)  
College of Business and Economics  
Western Washington University  
516 High Street  
Bellingham, Washington 98225-9075 USA  
[craig.dunn@wwu.edu](mailto:craig.dunn@wwu.edu)

Nabil Daoudi (presenting author)  
University of Victoria  
3800 Finnerty Rd.  
Victoria, British Columbia V8P 5C2 Canada

International Association for Business and Society, Portland, Oregon, USA, June 2013  
Conference Theme: *Social Innovations that Create a Better World*

**Proposal for Discussion Idea:** a short, informal presentation of a research idea or teaching challenge, intended to solicit constructive feedback.

**Grounding:** The current proposal emerged from a book chapter in a forthcoming volume entitled *Creating Good Work: The World's Leading Social Entrepreneurships Show How to Build a Healthy Economy*. While scheduled for publication, the ideas outlined in this chapter have neither been presented at a professional academic conference nor vetted with academic colleagues.

**Key Words:** Social Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation, Disruption

## ***A Redefinition of Social Entrepreneurship: Deliberate Disruptive Design***

This discussion idea is based on a deconstruction, and ultimate reconstruction, of the term *social entrepreneurship*. The first step in this exploration has to do with drawing a distinction between inductive and deductive reasoning as these apply to the literature of social entrepreneurship. The inductive approach seeks to identify—largely using powers of intuition—solid examples of social entrepreneurship, and then categorize those characteristics that such exemplars hold in common. Little time will be spent with the inductive approach (though its value is both recognized and appreciated), in favor of examining the literature of social entrepreneurship through the lens of deductive reasoning. Here attention turns to the variety of ways in which the range of explorations into social entrepreneurship might best be ‘organized’...including but not limited to the following:

- identifying (dis)similarities between *social* entrepreneurship and *traditional* entrepreneurship
- categorizing social entrepreneurship along a continuum of *for-profit* to *not-for-profit* enterprise
- differentiating individual behavior from institutional behavior, and outlining the *characteristics* of *successful* social entrepreneurs
- exploring entrepreneurship from a *hierarchical* perspective, examining whether social entrepreneurship is (merely) one specific ‘*type*’ of entrepreneurship
- examining whether the emergence of social entrepreneurship can be fully explained as a *response to market failure*
- assessing the multiplicity of ways in which one might evaluate the effectiveness of social ventures

The question at this point in the discussion is: do any of these structural schemes, either individually or taken collectively, allow for a full explication of the term *social entrepreneurship*?

Next comes an inquiry (in light of Kant’s categorical imperative that we not treat individuals as mere means to some other end) into the term *social entrepreneurship* itself. Several ‘jarring juxtapositions’ are explored: these are conjoined terms that share in common the supposed uniting of a sacred term with an economic term. These include but are not limited to:

- human resource management
- human assets
- human capital
- exchanging gifts

The invitation at this point is to engage session attendees in offering their own ‘jarring juxtaposition.’ More central to the discussion idea theme, it is hoped some consensus can be achieved around the question of whether or not the term *social entrepreneurship* itself falls into this category of ‘jarring juxtaposition’—and thereby is a term that diminishes the human experience, violating the dignity that a universalist ethical perspective demands.

It is not enough to provide criticism without offering an alternative conceptualization. If it is agreed that the term *social entrepreneurship* is replete with ethical challenges, as is expected

## ***A Redefinition of Social Entrepreneurship: Deliberate Disruptive Design***

(hmm...if it is not a flawed construction...this might be a shorter discussion session than I have anticipated!), what might a better 'frame' for the construct be labelled? Put another way, what are the *essential attributes* that make for social entrepreneurship? The following three will be offered for consideration:

- *deliberate*
- *disruptive*
- *design*

This is to say that social entrepreneurship is *deliberate*, not accidental. The achievement of social good is not a mere *unintended* byproduct of traditional entrepreneurship activity that intends only an economic end; rather, it is the result of purposeful human activity that *intends* as its end the enhancement of positive social ends—and profit, perhaps. Intentionality is essential to what has come to be known as social entrepreneurship.

This is also to say that social entrepreneurship is *disruptive*, not incremental. Minor shifts in traditional entrepreneurship—say, utilizing the free market as a means to accumulate wealth that is then donated to social causes—does not constitute social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is a tectonic shift, not a mere tremor. Social entrepreneurship is the next (logical) evolutionary step of free market capitalism, motivated as it is by a spreading moral enlightenment regarding not only the *limitations*, but the *destructive force*, of unconstrained economic activity within a laissez-faire system of scarce resource allocation. Disruption is essential to what has come to be known as social entrepreneurship.

This is also to say that social entrepreneurship is *design*, not disorder. Design engages innovative systems thinking serving to unite *inspiration, ideation and implementation*. Inspiration comes from the practice of being embedded in the lives of the people one is designing for, and certainly has no relation to paternalism. It often involves positive deviance, or at a minimum divergent thinking. Design is essential to what has come to be known as social entrepreneurship.

What is being explored here is a notion that is fundamentally subversive. *Deliberate disruptive design* is meant to address persistent problems—problems that have often been viewed as necessary concomitants to the 'human condition.' Such problems often have to do with social inequities, which are amplified within market systems. This system needs to be overturned (not abandoned), to change completely—in short, to be subverted. *Deliberate disruptive design* bears the potential to harness that which is effective within market systems—thereby engaging the head—as a legitimate means to attaining greater social justice—thereby attending to the heart.

Do you *agree*? Do you *disagree*? In *either* case, do you perceive there to be *value* in an intellectual, heartfelt conversation that will take you—and your IABS colleagues—in an unusual direction...one that is clearly grounded in the conference theme?

*Relevant References* follow on next page:

## ***A Redefinition of Social Entrepreneurship: Deliberate Disruptive Design***

Alter, K. (2007) *Social enterprise typology*. Virtue Ventures LLC  
(<http://rinovations.edublogs.org/files/2008/07/setypology.pdf>)

Brown, T. & Wyatt, J. (2010) "Design thinking for social innovation." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, pp. 31-35

Brown, T. (2008) "Design thinking." *Harvard Business Review*, June 2008.

Dees, J. G. (1998) "the meaning of 'social entrepreneurship'." Stanford University: Draft Report for the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, 6 pp.

Dunn, C. P. & Schaeffer, L. (2008) "Ethics of entrepreneurship." In: Robert W. Kolb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Business Ethics and Society*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, Vol. 2: pp. 724-728.

Khanin, Dmitry. (2011) "Market failures and the strategies of social entrepreneurship." *Academy of Management Paper Proceedings*.

Latour, B. (1987) *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. Harvard University Press: Harvard, MA.

Markides, C. (2006) "Disruptive innovation: In need of better theory." *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 23: pp. 19-25.

Nicholls, A. & Cho, A.H. "Social entrepreneurship: the structuration of a field." In A. Nicholls (ed.), *Social Entrepreneurship: New Models of Sustainable Social Change*, pp. 99-118.

Schaeffer, L. & Dunn, C. P. (2008) "Social entrepreneurship." In: Robert W. Kolb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Business Ethics and Society*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, Vol. 4: pp. 1963-1968.

"Social enterprise." *Community-Wealth.org: A Project of the Democracy Collaborative at the University of Maryland*. (<http://www.community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/social/index.html>)

Shaw, Elianor and Carter, Sara. (2006) "Social entrepreneurship: Theoretical antecedents and empirical analysis of entrepreneurial processes and outcomes." Babson College, Babson Kauffman Entrepreneurship Research Conference (BKERC), 2002-2006. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1768126>

Seanson, L.A. & Zhang, D.D. (2011) "Complexity theory and the social entrepreneurship zone." *E:CO* Vol. 13 No. 3.

Trexler, J. (2009) "Social entrepreneurship as an algorithm: Is social enterprise sustainable? In J.K. Hazy & J. Silberstang (eds.), *Complexity Science and Social Entrepreneurship: Adding Social Value through Systems Thinking*, pp. 43-69.