FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING: LEADERSHIP, VISION AND COMMUNITY IN THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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Principal Topic

In developing a framework for understanding the social enterprise, this paper takes as its point of departure Sykes’ egg to butterfly (EtB) theory of leadership, which identifies three categories of actors: envisioners (inventive, innovative, and characterised by creative imagination); enablers (good organisers and ideas processors, an interpreter of vision); and enactors (take tasks to implementation, focused on progress). The paper explicates these roles and suggests that effective social enterprise development requires a balance of all three.

Method

We analyse three very different social enterprises grounded in very different communities of place and practice. At the local level we examine an organisation in industrial Scotland that serves a community surviving industrial decline (as the coal and steel industries on which the region depended declined in the 1980s). At the national level we examine the development and work of an agri-business outside Kigali, Rwanda established to cross the Hutu/Tutsi divide in the wake of the genocide to provide employment and income to women left as widows (an example of ‘peace entrepreneurship’, the application of entrepreneurial activity, and social enterprise in particular, to address community divisions). At the global level we examine the role and impact of a trust established to deal with the consequences of surviving the world’s biggest medical mistake.

Results and Implications

In all three cases we identify the roles played by envisioners, enablers and enactors in the development of these enterprises in their shared commitment to move from surviving (in a deindustrialised wasteland, through a genocide, from a medical disaster) to thriving. We conclude that their success is in part a function of the clarity of the vision on which they are based, but is more specifically a reflection of their common emphasis placed on valuing and respecting their people, most particularly those who work in the enterprises, as the basis for valuing those in their communities. We conclude the paper by examining in more detail what it means to value employees in the social enterprise sector, and how this serves to provide the basis for organisational success.

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