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≈ INTERACTIVE PAPER ≈

**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' ATTITUDES TOWARD
KNOWLEDGE PROTECTION AND SHARING**

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Principal Topic and Theoretical Development

Social entrepreneurship is a source of profound conceptual disagreement. Distinguishing social entrepreneurial ventures from ordinary entrepreneurial ventures is difficult. Meyskens, Robb-Post, Stamp, Carsrud, and Reynolds (2010) apply the resource-based view of the firm en route to concluding that social entrepreneurship is more similar to ordinary entrepreneurship than not. Their study shows that if there is a meaningful difference between social entrepreneurship and ordinary entrepreneurship, that difference is not revealed by the resource-based view. In this paper, we develop and test an account of social entrepreneurship that applies the knowledge-based theory of the firm.

Since the unique knowledge possessed by the venture is the source of its competitive advantage, ordinary entrepreneurs take great pains to find out how to protect and defend it from imitation by other firms (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001). Replication of the knowledge underpinning the venture creates economic and social value in the case of successful social ventures. But, in contrast to ordinary entrepreneurs, the social entrepreneur is not expected to protect that knowledge from imitation at all times. Ordinary enterprises rely on significant impediments to replication by others (e.g., causal ambiguity, knowledge stickiness). Social enterprises work to ease replication by others. They identify key success factors and share their lessons with other organizations carrying out a similar mission.

Methods and Implications

We collect data from social entrepreneurship award programs conducted by Acumen Fund, Ashoka Fellows, Fast Company, Global Social Benefit Incubator, Manhattan Institute, Skoll Foundation, Social Venture Partners, and Venture Philanthropy Partners. We create a catalog of knowledge-protection and knowledge-sharing tools for which we look in these ventures. Examples of knowledge-sharing practices include teaching programs, allowing others to observe their operations, and visits to other ventures to facilitate knowledge-sharing. By contrast, examples of knowledge-protection tools include patents, trade secrets, contractual non-compete clauses, and non-disclosure agreements.

We expect to find that ventures known as social entrepreneurial ventures will employ fewer knowledge-protection tools and more knowledge-sharing tools. This suggests that the meaningful difference between social entrepreneurial ventures and ordinary ones is found in the attitude toward knowledge replication.

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