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EXAMINING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL ACCELERATORS (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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≈ INTERACTIVE PAPER ≈

**EXAMINING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS' PERSPECTIVE
ON THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL ACCELERATORS**

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Principal Topic

In this study we ask the following questions: 1) Are the most-publicized benefits of social accelerators also the ones most valued by social entrepreneurs? 2) Does the social entrepreneur human capital – such as education, professional background, and experience – shape the attractiveness of value propositions of different social accelerator benefits? Our study extends two streams of research – social entrepreneurship and social accelerators. We assume that as social entrepreneurs strive to establish their start-ups, supportive ecosystems can complement and supplement their entrepreneurial efforts. Within these ecosystems, social accelerators are an important entity. We develop study hypotheses in two steps. First, we delineate the value propositions of social accelerator firms by drawing upon population ecology theory and the theory of sponsorship. Next, we use human capital theory to hypothesize relationships between different types of human capital resources and the value propositions of social accelerators. The underlying assumption is that all aspects of the social accelerator value proposition are neither equally attractive to social entrepreneurs nor relevant to their social ventures. Instead, we argue that social entrepreneurs' competencies and deficiencies – their strengths and weaknesses – determine which social accelerator services are attractive.

Method

We test study hypotheses using a sample of aggregated and anonymized observations from 4,125 self-identified social ventures that applied to social accelerator programs between January 2013 and December 18 2015. The study dataset was obtained courtesy of the Entrepreneurship Database Program (EDP) at Emory University's Social Enterprise @ Goizueta Center.

Results and Implications

Our findings support study hypotheses that founding teams' human capital is associated with perceptions of social accelerator benefit. Our findings also challenge the design of social accelerator programs. For example, social accelerator programs are offered as cohort programs that emphasize networking with like-minded entrepreneurs. Our analyses suggest that social entrepreneurs do not see this as important. Our findings lead to several follow-up research questions. For example, we found that that founding teams with prior social accelerator experience see social accelerator benefits differently, which raises the question—why do these entrepreneurs reengage with social accelerators? What residual benefits do they expect to accrue?

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