MEASURING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: LESSONS FROM THREE YEARS OF EXPERIMENTATION BY THE UK GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP MONITOR TEAM (INTERACTIVE PAPER)

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INTERACTIVE PAPER SESSION

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Principal Topic

This paper measures social entrepreneurial activity (SEA) in the UK in a way that is comparable to the measure of business entrepreneurial activity (TEA) employed by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Research Consortium.

Method

We compare definitions and measures of social and business entrepreneurship used in the literature and then describe the evolution of our definition of a social enterprise, currently: “any kind of social, voluntary or community activity, venture or initiative. This might include providing subsidised or free training, advice or support to individuals or organisations; profit making activity, but where profits are used for socially orientated purpose; or self-help groups for community action”. Mirroring the GEM business entrepreneurship measure (TEA) protocol, respondents in the annual UK GEM surveys are asked a series of filter questions designed to isolate individuals who are actively attempting to start a social enterprise and who are currently running a social enterprise.

Results and Implications

We demonstrate face validity and convergent validity of SEA by listing the textual descriptions of the social enterprises captured by this measure in the UK GEM surveys in 2004 and 2005, and comparing these both with our definition of a social enterprise and with definitions of social enterprises in the literature. Discriminant validity is also estimated. We find that SEA is approximately half the level of TEA, and that SEA is higher among students and highly educated individuals. There is a higher attrition rate between interest and action than in business entrepreneurship activity.

Other academics could use SEA to measure social entrepreneurial activity in their own nation or engage in comparative studies. The results have relevance for policymakers as they reveal quantitative differences between social entrepreneurs and business entrepreneurs. This has implications for programmes of support, and the relative economic contributions of social and business entrepreneurs. They have relevance for social entrepreneurs, revealing the extent of the social enterprise sector and their collective contribution as social entrepreneurs to their country.

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