6-7-2014

THE WICKEDNESS OF DOING GOOD: THE ROLE OF PROBLEM TYPE ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURAL FOUNDING AND PERFORMANCE (SUMMARY)

Anthony R. Briggs
Alberta School of Business, Canada, tony.briggs@ualberta.ca

Jo-Louise Huq
Alberta School of Business, Canada

Jennifer E. Jennings
Alberta School of Business, Canada

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol34/iss18/2

This Summary is brought to you for free and open access by the Entrepreneurship at Babson at Digital Knowledge at Babson. It has been accepted for inclusion in Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research by an authorized editor of Digital Knowledge at Babson. For more information, please contact digitalknowledge@babson.edu.
THE WICKEDNESS OF DOING GOOD: THE ROLE OF PROBLEM TYPE ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURIAL FOUNDING AND PERFORMANCE

Anthony R. Briggs, Alberta School of Business, Canada
Jo-Louise Huq, Alberta School of Business, Canada
Jennifer E. Jennings, Alberta School of Business, Canada

Principal Topic

Social entrepreneurship refers to a broad range of economic, political and social phenomena, from the founding of new organizations with social missions to new individual and organizational efforts aimed at creating social value. Principally, social entrepreneurs seek to “do good” by solving efficiency-related problems, such as the “inadequate provision, or unequal distribution, of social and environmental goods” (Nicholls, 2009), and addressing opportunities arising from market failures and institutional voids (Mair and Martí, 2009; Zahra et al., 2009; Dacin, Dacin and Tracey, 2011).

However, opportunities for “doing good” are not always straightforward. Social entrepreneurs may seek to address “wicked problems” that are ill-defined, have complex or conflicting goals and engender conflicting stakeholder interests (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Conklin, 2006; Dorado and Ventresca, 2013). Wicked problems, like poverty, climate change and end-of-life care, may place new demands on social entrepreneurs as they seek to do good.

We examine how the wickedness of the social problem influences the social entrepreneur’s choice of organizational form (profit or non-profit). We then test if problem wickedness, controlling for form, influences the choice of organizational performance measures and the entrepreneur’s perceptions of organizational success.

Method

We have collected organizational data from 489 founders of social entrepreneurial organizations, identified as having a cultural, environmental, and social (CES) mission. The data was collected through an alumni survey conducted at a major Canadian research-intensive university. It includes information on the mission of each CES organization, the performance measures used and the founders’ evaluation of organizational performance relative to its mission.

Results and Implications

We find that problem wickedness significantly increases the likelihood that the social entrepreneur will found a for-profit organizational form. Second, organizational form significantly predicts whether a social enterprise will use economic performance measures. Last, controlling for age, firms with economic missions will be perceived as having a lower degree of success. These findings advance our understanding of how important social goals are addressed and are of value to policy makers and social entrepreneurs intending to promote new organizations to overcome wicked social-economic problems.