

# Social Entrepreneurship

The following is an exploration of social entrepreneurship. The content is a codification and synthesis of ideas put forth in articles selected by the faculty of Austin Center for Design's (AC4D) Theory of Social Entrepreneur-

ship course. In addition to providing a broad definition of who could be considered a social entrepreneur and what could be considered a social business, I have also included several provocations based on personal reflections

on the topic as well as discussions with faculty and fellow students. These will be denoted by the citation (Lewis). A full list of readings can be found at [www.ac4d.com/home/curriculum/idse302-theory-of-interaction-design/](http://www.ac4d.com/home/curriculum/idse302-theory-of-interaction-design/)

Implicit in the term "entrepreneur" is the idea of using and reallocating resources to create a product, service, or experience that did not previously exist (Martin, Baptiste, Schumpeter, Dees). Entrepreneurs use available resources to create something, while simultaneously extending those resources beyond what most would think possible (Stevenson via Dees, Baptiste).

## Making



Without the creation of something that did not exist, one stays in the realm of policy discussions, philosophy, and activism (Martin, Yunnis).

Entrepreneurs identify imbalances in systems and introduce a product, service, or experience, that will create more of an equilibrium. The technical term used to describe this imbalance, is "sub-optimal equilibrium." In social entrepreneurship this imbalance is based on some form of injustice an "unjust equilibrium" and a social business is introduced into a system to bring some form of justice or order (Martin, Dees, Wyatt, Rittel).

## Equalizing



Most would argue that businesses that create chaos or imbalance cannot be construed as a social business. While in many instances this would be true, there is the possibility of a social entrepreneur starting a business to intentionally disrupt, or break a system for the purposes of a more accelerated transformation process once the system is broken and in need of repair (Lewis). Micro-examples of this can be seen when social networking platforms are introduced into societies with limited free speech or in 'hypothetical' businesses that provide services to illegal immigrants.

The pursuit of a more ideal future is what most social entrepreneurs refer to as a vision or mission. In social entrepreneurship this oftentimes involves a mission to bring about a future that is different than what would naturally occur sans the impact of a social business (Dees, Martin, Yunnis).

## Vision



Entrepreneurs without a vision for the future cannot effectively communicate the value of their product or service. They are simply "doing good," with no idea of how it will fit into the broader story and trajectory of the human experience (Dees, Yunnis, Martin).

Productive = Good. Social entrepreneurship is productive when the things entrepreneurs create result in flourishing individuals and societies (Baumol, LeDantec, Dees).

## Productive



Non-productive, means that an entrepreneur's endeavor accomplishes nothing or makes a system worse off than when he or she introduced their thing to the world.

Social entrepreneurs make things that are impactful in breadth (Martin), or depth (Kolko). While most researchers would argue that some degree of breadth in scale is important when identifying the impact of social entrepreneurs, breadth of scale should only be relevant in discussions as to whether or not a thing can support and sustain itself (Lewis). To put it succinctly, breadth AND depth of scale should be taken into consideration when discussing impact.

## Impactful



The word 'social' connotes that some humanitarian or environmental component of the world in which we live is being impacted. If it is not then one cannot call him or herself a social entrepreneur.

Because a significant portion of the return on investment in social entrepreneurship is in karmic value rather than economic value, it is vital that social entrepreneurs and social businesses build in levels of accountability into their business (Dees). This will ensure that they are staying true to their ideal world vision/mission.

## Accountability



Without accountability one runs the risk of no longer be impactful or relevant. This is especially the case when there is oftentimes no universally accepted quantifiable metric (dollar signs) to evaluate success (Martin, Dees).

Social entrepreneurs should think in terms of self sustainability and continuity (Yunnis, Martin). This enables for long term investment into systems, and for an impact that does not rely on grants or donations which are unreliable.

## Continuity



Without an element of continuity most social good ventures fall into the categories of philanthropy or volunteering.