

Exploring Stewardship as an Antecedent Behavioural Trait of Social Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

We explored stewardship behaviour as a possible antecedent to the activities of a social entrepreneur towards providing desired sustainable solutions. Extant literature posits that social entrepreneurs are predominantly guided in their sustainable solutions by *ex-ante* and *ex-post* resource positions. Resource availability guides the social entrepreneur's behaviour which per se is not different from the behaviour of a profit-seeking entrepreneur. We contend that apart from resource considerations, stewardship is also an important behavioural consideration for social entrepreneurial activities. We used a single embedded inductive case study to establish the linkage between stewardship behaviour and social entrepreneur leading to desired sustainable solutions in the context of the health care sector in institutionally weak economies like India.

Keywords

stewardship behaviour, social entrepreneur, desired sustainable solutions, health care sector

Social Entrepreneur (SE) is an emerging research construct with no universally accepted definition (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern,

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2006; Swanson & Zhang, 2010). SE is variously defined in terms of an entrepreneur with a social vision and abilities to analyse, empathise, enthuse, communicate, enable, empower, advocate and mediate (De Leeuw, 1999; Mort, Weerawardena & Carnegie, 2003; Yunus, 2011). SE is a path-breaker and a creative, real world problem solver with powerful ideas (Bornstein, 2007; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum & Shulman, 2009). The activities of a SE lead towards sustainable solutions (Santos, 2012). The objective of the SE to provide sustainable solutions is normally embedded in social systems with the health care system being a typical example. Such solutions are the legitimate expectations of the civil society and the SE works towards attaining the same (Murray & Frenk, 1999). Murray and Frenk (1999) also spoke of enhanced client-oriented responsiveness of SEs in the context of health care system. In the same context, the meritorious activities of the archetypal SE Florence Nightingale are well documented (Bornstein, 2007; Drayton, Brown & Hillhouse, 2006). Here, the predominant traits of SEs centre around (i) integrated, simple and affordable health care solutions (Haines et al., 2007; Molyneux, Ahmad, & Robertson, 2006), and (ii) care delivery models for sustainable solutions (Haase-Herrick, 2005; Santos, 2012). However, the predominant constraint in the integrated service content and the delivery process had been the availability of relevant resources. Murray et al. (1999), therefore, spoke of the need to bridge the 'know-do' gap in terms of available resources that provides sustainable solutions.

The resource–sustainable solutions linkage is then the point of departure for our article. We believe that positing resources as the primary constraint towards achieving sustainable solutions by the SE is too restricted a view. It simply does not help us to adequately distinguish an SE from an economic entrepreneur. By economic entrepreneur we mean the opportunity-seeking, profit-maximising entrepreneur. We believe that a key consideration should be embedded in the behavioural perspective of the SE which is beyond the risk-taking abilities, generation of pattern-breaking ideas (Light, 2006) and the sort. We believe that stewardship behaviour (SWB) should be a key input in the emergence and divergence of an SE from her well-researched sibling—the economic entrepreneur. For the purpose of this article, we have adopted the definition of SWB as the attitudes and behaviours that place the long-term best interests of a group ahead of the personal goals that serve an individual's self-interests within that group (Hernandez, 2008). With SWB thus defined, our research centres around investigating

the question: Other things being equal, does SWB enable an SE to provide desired sustainable solutions (DSS)?

Literature Review

The construct SE had been seen from the perspective of a change agent with a problem-solving mission (Dees, 1998; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Peredo & McLean 2006). Studies highlighted the qualities of the actor in terms of proactiveness (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006) and innovativeness (Leadbeater, 2007). These qualities help the SE to sense and recognise opportunities and find a fit between unmet social and societal needs and resources (Mort, Weerawardena & Carnegie, 2003; Thompson, 2002). SEs exhibit the propensity to take risk and the desire to address unmet or underserved societal needs (Mair & Marti, 2006). Literature also focused on two broad aspects within an SE—(i) entrepreneurial behaviour in terms of risk-taking abilities (Henton, Melville & Walesh, 1997) and (ii) activities leading to societal transformation (Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2004). The literature on the behaviour of SE closely mimics that of the economic entrepreneur. In terms of activities leading to societal transformation, the SE seeks resources that are either available *ex-ante* or created *ex-post* (Peteraf, 1993; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Rumelt, 2005). Resources for an SE must lend sustainable solutions than sustainable advantages (Ormiston & Seymour, 2011; Santos, 2012). Consequently, the types of resources sought by the SE could be categorised as:

1. Financial Resources—Grants, donations (cash and kind), venture philanthropy, loans and partnerships (Aldrich, 1999).
2. Human Capital Resources—Volunteers, interns, staff and managers (Barney, 1991; Becker, 1964).
3. Social Capital Resources—Resource embedded in relationships of individuals, communities, partnerships, networks or societies through trust (Burt, 1992; Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).
4. Physical Capital Resources—Technology, equipment, geographic location, buildings, information technologies and access to raw materials (Barney, 1991; Harris & Helfat, 1997).

The nature of resource requirement and the risk undertaken by the SE do not differentiate her from profit-seeking entrepreneur. The latter, desirous of profit maximisation, would push beyond acceptable norms, thereby reducing the residual value for the society. As a result, legal institutions emerge to enforce property rights (Demsetz, 1967; Emerson & Twersky, 1996). However, no governance mechanism has the capacity to serve and monitor at all levels. Therefore, SEs emerge to meet basic human needs and act as social change agents (Brugmann & Prahalad, 2007). The emergence of the SE is thus different from the emergence of her profit-seeking counterpart. Though both exhibit risk-taking abilities and can adopt any legal form (profit or not for profit), the SE either ploughs back her profit to enrich her service, or develops a subsistence model thus enlarging her stakeholder network towards sustainable solutions (Pearce, 2003; Yunus, 2011). We adopted the definition of ‘risk-taking ability’ as

[T]he perceived probability of receiving the rewards associated with success of a proposed situation, which is required by an individual before he will subject himself to the consequences associated with failure, the alternative situation providing less reward as well as less severe consequences than the proposed situation. (Brockhaus, 1980: 513)

The subsistence model, involving stakeholder network, can also be conceptualised by the concept of stewardship. Both SE and SWB have their linkages with societal normative expectations (Nicholls, 2010; Saltman & Ferroussier-Davis, 2000). For the purpose of our article, we have adopted the definition of SWB as ‘the attitude and behaviours that place the long-term best interests of a group ahead of [the] personal goals that serve an individual’s self-interests’ (Hernandez, 2008). Consequently, importation of stewardship behaviour within the SE construct conveys the sense of service, responsibility and partnership (Block, 1993) as opposed to self-interest, dependence and control that characterises an economic entrepreneur. Extant literature explains SWB as the commitment of organisational leaders towards the welfare of all stakeholders (Donaldson & Preston, 1995) by placing the long-term best interests of the organisation and its stakeholders ahead of their self-interest (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997). The aforesaid commitment is achieved through benevolence and loyalty (Welchman, 2008) that influences similar behaviours in others. We have adopted the definition of benevolence

as ‘the extent of doing well without egocentric profit motive’ (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Similarly, loyalty is defined as ‘the capability of honouring the trust of trustor in case there is an extrinsic motivational conflict (monetary rewards)’ (Rosanas & Velilla, 2003). Therefore, we believe that importing benevolence and loyalty (stewardship characteristics) as behavioural antecedents for the activities of an SE will lead her towards providing desired sustainable solutions. We define desired sustainable solutions as: (i) responsible management and well-being of the destitute, disabled and needy children, women and elderly persons; (ii) enabling education and employment; (iii) providing health, empowerment and human rights to the underprivileged. This is consistent with the conceptualisation of Elkington (1998) and WCED Report (1987). We proposed to advance the theory using the case research method.

Method

We adopted a single embedded case study to explore the linkages between SWB and SE. The SE in the case is Mr Anshu Gupta, the founder of the organisation GOONJ. Anshu Gupta had been recognised as the Social Entrepreneur of the Year – 2012 by Schwab Foundation. The data for the case drew from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include in-depth interviews with the entrepreneur and on-site observations. Secondary data include archives from Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs, Stanford Social Innovation Review, International Institute for Sustainable Development, GOONJ’s website and news video clippings. The case facts are described in the following.

Case Description¹

The Social Entrepreneur and the Trigger

Anshu Gupta started his career as a freelance journalist. During one of his news errands in 1997–1998 in the streets of New Delhi, he met Habib, a disposer of unclaimed abandoned dead bodies from streets. For each dead body Habib was paid ₹ 20 (about 35 cents). Habib informed

that in summer while he would pick up 3–4 bodies, in winter the average would go up to 10–12 dead bodies in a 3–4 kilometres radius. That was a trigger that changed Anshu's perspective about the society. While he was aware of the three basic necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), he realised that proper clothing could supplement shelter to some extent. This was especially true for the poor in winter who suffer the inevitable due to inadequate protection against the elements. In 1999, he left his journalism and advertising career and founded an organisation called GOONJ..a voice, an effort., with just 67 personal clothing item. With that modest beginning, Anshu started his mission named *Vastra Samman* (dignity of the cloth) of reusing and refurbishing old clothes donated by others and providing the same to the poor. *Vastra Samman* became the flagship programme and its activities were carefully designed right from the collection of clothes to the end distribution. Donors are encouraged to contribute clothes in usable condition and also to contribute one rupee per cloth to meet the expenses. This is a deliberate effort of the organisation to free the contributor from the pride of donation and make him realise the pride of participation.

In 2002, GOONJ touched the much tabooed issue of providing sanitary napkins to the underprivileged. An in-depth research conducted by Anshu and his team, across the country, revealed unsightly facts imprinted on the psychology of the poorer segment of the society about menstrual cycles. They found that during menstruation, women use the dirtiest available piece of cloth; they wash and dry it after sunset due to social inhibition. The team also found that if there are two or three women in a family and their cycles are different, then they would share the same piece of cloth. The team also found that women are using absorbents like ash, husk, jute and gunny bags, dry leaves and grass and even plastic sheets. The psychological problem was exacerbated by poor infrastructure, unavailability of water and sanitation. In some extreme cases, these unsafe practices led to removal of uterus or even death due to tetanus or cervical cancer.

The Special Initiatives

With these alarming data in hand, GOONJ expanded the scope of *Vastra Samman* to collect old cloths for making sanitary napkins at their

processing centres. Backed by numerous exhibitions and awareness campaign, GOONJ was able to convince the underprivileged women to use recycled, easily disposable and biodegradable 'sanitary napkins' on regular basis. Prices were kept at a minimum to ensure affordability by the poorest section of the society. Consequently, the inputs were collected on a regular basis at various collection/donation centres. Maximum donation normally happens during Joy of Giving Week, usually in the Gandhi Jayanti (2nd of October) week every year.

Operational Details

GOONJ's processing centres have various dedicated sub-units/sections, viz., sorting unit, washing section, drying section, stitching section and packaging unit. After magnet test the final products are packed in completely biodegradable paper bags and are stitched and packaged. GOONJ takes pains to see that its materials actually reach the intended recipients. The distribution of the processed cloths essentially happens through two main campaigns: GOONJ Rahat (GR) and Cloth for Work (CFW). While GR aims to facilitate the relief measures during calamities and natural disasters by addressing the problem of clothing, CFW encourages villagers to take up developmental activities, not imposed by outsiders and be remunerated with cloth, utensil or any other material in GOONJ's collection. CFW does not include any cash transaction. GOONJ follow strategy of partnership with the corporate, grass-root organisations, such as, Ashoka Fellows, the Indian Army and local panchayats. The partners facilitate collection as well as distribution of materials. GOONJ has collaborations with Johnson and Johnson and partnership with Easyday, More, Reliance Fresh and Star Bazaar for the collection of books, toys, clothes and other belongings and had a slogan 'Share the Language of Love'. GOONJ has also collaborated with Whirlpool through the slogan 'Ek Jodi Kapda' (a pair of cloth) to motivate people to contribute and donate their old belongings.

Resource Acquisition Process

GOONJ is charity driven. However, it does not explicitly undertake fund-raising activities from retail contributors. However, it seeks

specific partners or volunteers for financial support on a project to project basis. In general, cash comes from donations (Rahat), corporate grants (Whirlpool), innovation awards, membership fees, sale of scraps/newspapers and sale of material to corporate clients through exhibitions-cum-sale. The available cash is deployed in manufacturing and processing about 200,000 sanitary napkins per month.

Organisational Culture

GOONJ's culture is modest, frugal and factual. It is very informal and democratic with no hierarchies or rigid guidelines. The majority of staffs are women who come from nearby areas in Sarita Vihar, Delhi. The local women manage most of the work with a focus on operational efficiencies through zero wastages and zero bribery. The stakeholders, both internal as well as external, are invited to share ideas and views. These day-long interactive sessions are called 'Meet the Change', wherein brainstorming sessions are conducted without any fixed agenda. However, the sessions ultimately lead to creative ideas for enhancing collection in the 'Joy of Giving Week'. Currently, GOONJ works across 21 states with about 250 partner groups to support in on-going implementation of GOONJ regular programmes. It has 10 offices with 150 full-time employees, approximately 50–60 graduates, around 300 paid interns and thousands of volunteers.

Emerging Challenges

GOONJ, through its subsidy driven model, has been able to keep the price well below that of competition and within the reach of the poorest segment. However, the model is prone to threats from regulatory activities. For example, under health care programme, the Government of India has plans to bring sanitary napkins to 150 districts at subsidised rates. Similarly, corporate can venture into the base of the pyramid with institutional support or when they can harness scale economies. Any first mover advantage by GOONJ may well be offset by fast moving corporate. However, the acceptance by the grass-root consumers and the question of hazard-free disposal are still to be adequately addressed.

Analysis

We analysed the case by using an inductive approach. We performed a content analysis and selected relevant description and classified the same into suitable variables within our construct of interest. We then validated the same by drawing support from the literature. The analysis is presented in Table 1.

Discussion

From the description and analysis of the case, it is apparent that an SE spots an opportunity for interventions into a societal problem (lack of adequate protection against the elements). However, *ex-ante* resources (Anshu's own clothing) and *ex-post* created resources (corporate and retail donors) enabled the entrepreneur to offer a solution. Subsequently he extended his scope of interventions and ventured into providing specific health care solutions to the poorest section of the society. The cost of providing the service exceeded the price of the deliverables leading to requirement of subsidies or subsistence from the internal and external stakeholders. This, by our adopted definition, is benevolence that pervades from the SE into the stakeholders. Further, given the option of allocating *ex-post* resources (clothes and other inputs) from the donors into other more profitable avocations, the entrepreneur and his organisation continued producing cheap and affordable napkins at a cost to the organisation. The price–performance trade-off for the service is likely to remain in favour of the entrepreneur, enabling him to sustain the desired service, despite possible future competitions in the same segment. We interpret this behaviour of the entrepreneur as loyalty towards his consumers through his defined purpose. Literature posits benevolence and loyalty under stewardship behaviour. Consequently, we propose that other things being equal, stewardship behaviour enables the SE to provide desired sustainable solutions. We present our findings in Figure 1.

In our broader schema of exploring the possibility of stewardship behaviour being an antecedent factor to the activities of an SE, the present study based on a single case is a small step. It suffers from the limitations of a single embedded case. Moreover, we have used only two

Table 1. Analysis of Embedded Phenomena in the Case under Study

Case Description	Variable Identification	Construct	Literature Validation
In 1999, he left his journalism and advertising career and founded an organisation called GOONJ...a voice, an effort..., with just 67 personal clothing items	Risk-taking ability (with pattern breaking ideas)	Social Entrepreneur	Brockhaus (1980); Weerawardena and Mort (2006); Light (2006)
In 2002, GOONJ touched the much tabooed issue of providing sanitary napkins to the underprivileged			
GOONJ is charity driven—however, it does not explicitly undertake fund-raising activities from retail contributors	Benevolence	Stewardship Behaviour	Mayer et al. (1995); Welchman (2008)
Available cash is deployed in manufacturing and processing about 200,000 sanitary napkins per month			
Prices were kept minimal to ensure affordability by the poorest section of the society			
Cash comes from donations (Rahat), corporate grants (Whirlpool), innovation awards, membership fees, sale of scraps/newspapers and sale of material to corporate clients through exhibitions-cum-sale			
Deliberate effort from the organisation to free the contributor from the pride of donation and make him realise the pride of participation			
The stakeholders, both internal as well as external, are invited to share ideas and views	Loyalty (internal stakeholders)	Stewardship Behaviour	Rosanas and Velilla (2003); Welchman (2008)
The local women manage most of the work with a focus on operational efficiencies through zero wastages and zero bribery			

Cash inflows are primarily from donations (Rahat), corporate grants (Whirlpool), innovation awards, membership fees, sale of scraps/news-papers and sale of material to corporates through exhibitions-cum-sale	Financial	Resources	Aldrich (1999); Barney (1991); Becker (1964); Burt (1992); Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998); Luthans and Youssef (2004); Harris and Helfat (1997)
150 full-time people and approximately 50–60 are graduates and more than 300 paid interns and thousands of volunteers	Human		
Partnership with the corporate, grass-root organisations, such as, Ashoka Fellows, the Indian Army and local Panchayats	Social		
Various collection/donation centres, processing centre, transportation facilities	Physical		
GOONJ collected old cloths through <i>Vastra Samman</i> initiatives and started making 'sanitary napkins' at their processing centre	Innovative; Adaptive	Value Creating Activities	Santos (2012); Mort et al. (2003); Ormiston and Seymour (2011)
Day-long interactive sessions called 'Meet the Change', wherein brainstorming sessions are conducted leading to creative ideas meant for enhancing collection during 'Joy of Giving Week'			
Cloth for Work (CFW) initiatives			
Backed by numerous exhibitions and awareness campaign, GOONJ was able to convince the underprivileged women to regularly use recycled, easily disposable and biodegradable sanitary napkins	Value creating activities through available resources	Desired Sustainable Solutions	Santos (2012); Zahra et al. (2009); Austin et al. (2006); Pearce (2003); Yunus (2011); Haase-Herrick (2005); Murray & Frenk (1999)
Prices were kept minimal to ensure affordability by the poorest section of the society			
Competition from regulators or private players can be beaten through trust or price-performance means			
GOONJ better positioned for grass-root consumers in providing hazard-free products			

Source: Authors.

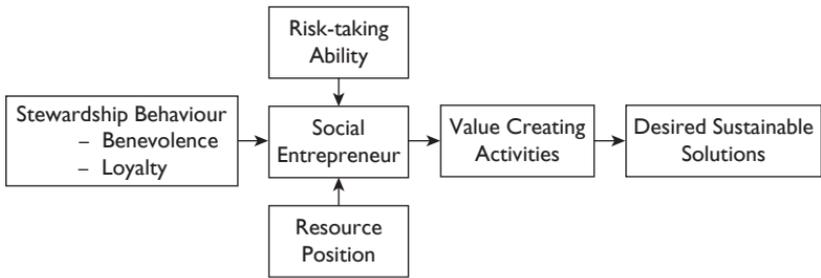


Figure 1. Model Proposing Linkages between SWB and SE Leading to DSS

Source: Authors.

variables to define stewardship construct. Therefore, for greater generalisability, more number of cases and usage of more variables within the constructs of interest will have to be considered besides measuring the strength of the linkages. Last but not least, we have not considered environmental protection and economic growth as measures for desirable sustainable solutions in the current study. We shall endeavour to accommodate the same in our future research.

Note

1. Sources: (1) www.csmonitor.com/World/Making-a-difference/2013/0222/Anshu-Gupta-brings-clothing-for-dignity-to-India and www.goonj.org (accessed on 27 February 2013). (2) Indian Retail Brands: Easyday-Bharti Retail; More-Aditya Birla Group; Reliance Fresh-Reliance Industries; and Star Bazaar-TATA Group.

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