

LEARNING SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH DESIGN THINKING

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Abstract

This paper on “Learning Social Entrepreneurship Through Design Thinking” attempts to explore the application of design thinking in social entrepreneurship through Yule’ 24, a student- led fundraising initiative at a higher educational institution in Madurai. Social entrepreneurship combines innovation with social change, equipping individuals with the tools to address societal challenges while ensuring financial sustainability. Design thinking, a human- centered approach to problem solving, plays a critical role in developing impactful social enterprises. The initiative engaged the students in experiential learning, encompassing financial planning, stakeholder management and ethical commerce, while collaborating with marginalized communities including prisoners, autistics children, persons with disabilities, and orphanages. This initiative followed a trust-based model in which NGOs provided products without upfront investment allowing students to engage in ethical business practices without financial risk. A self-sustaining revenue system was established, where operational cost was covered by student’s contribution and profits were reinvested. The study highlights the sustainability and scalability of the model, emphasizing reinvestment strategies and financial viability. The findings underscore the necessity of entrepreneurial exposure into academic curriculum to cultivate innovative and socially responsible professionals.

Key Words: *Social Entrepreneurship, Design Thinking, Experiential learning, Sustainable Business Practice, Social Responsibility, Student- led initiative.*

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship integrates business principles with social impact, empowering individuals to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to societal challenges. The concept of social entrepreneurship gained recognition in the late 20th century, with organizations such as Ashoka (1980) and The Skoll Foundation (1999) promoting the idea of business-driven social change. Yule’24, a student- led fundraising event in a higher educational institution in Madurai. The social work students set up and managed stalls in the event in which the products made by the marginalized communities such as prisoners, autistic children, person with disabilities and orphanages were sold, which served as the platform for promoting their products and supporting the sales. This initiative employs a trust based entrepreneurial model whereby NGOs partner with students to offer products

on a consignment basis with no upfront investment. Through setting up stalls, engaging with consumers, managing finances, and strategizing sales, students developed essential business skills while supporting communities in need.

Evolution of the Idea

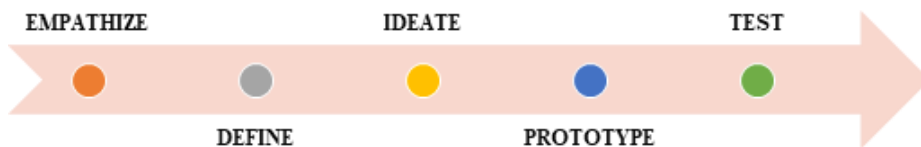
The concept developed because of the necessity to give students experience in the real field of entrepreneurship. The students had brainstormed on ways of building a stall that would bring in a lot of money with minimum investment. The emphasis slowly moved to a greater cause where NGOs and the marginalized communities would join forces to build a business model that is socially responsible. Students did not just sell products, but they advertised a platform that the economic transactions would also have a social role. Planning and discussions allowed the identification of the most important stakeholders, beneficiaries of the success. The students have contacted NGOs by describing their idea and requesting their cooperation. The key role in such cooperation was the trust as NGOs were willing to give out products without initial investment, trusting that the student will be able to advertise and sell them well.

Key Stakeholders

- It was a team work which included various stakeholders and they had a major contribution to the running and influence of the event. The stakeholders included:
- Prisoners - Hand crafted textiles, and hand made food products.
- Autistic children - Hair accessories made by craftspeople.
- Orphanage - Sells homemade foodstuffs, environmentally friendly sanitary pads.
- NGOs - Collaborated with students to demonstrate the social entrepreneurship.
- Faculty employees - Mentoring and logistical assistance.
- Students - headed the initiative, operated stalls, met buyers.

Design Thinking

Design thinking as conceptualized by Brown (2009) is a human centered approach that combines empathy, creativity, and rationality to address complex problems. It consists of five key stages:



1. Empathise: The former stage aims at understanding how people are, feel and struggle. This will entail observation, sharing and empathy with the users to know their actual experiences.

2. Define: Once knowledge is gained, the next step would be to define the problem statement in a clear and concise manner. The phase entails information synthesis in order to identify the specific issue that should be tackled.
3. Ideate: The brainstorming part of the ideation motivated our thinking of various solutions to the issue. This stage is concerned with being creative in thinking and how to go about the challenges in different ways.
4. Prototype: Prototyping is the development of a small scale replica of the solution as a test to determine its viability. The phase assists in the refining of ideas prior to full implementation.
5. Test: This is the last step where the prototype is tested, feedback and required improvements are collected. This is aimed at polishing the students to the greatest effect.

Application of Design Thinking

Empathize

They engaged the marginalized groups, including prisoners, autistic children, persons with disabilities and non-governmental organizations to find out the main challenges, including low access to the market, financial restrictions, and brand knowledge.

Define

On these lessons, students created a problem statement that defined the necessity to have a marketplace where marginalized people could access ethical and sustainable business opportunities.

Ideate

Different options were discussed and the students embraced the trust based entrepreneurial model in which NGOs provided commodities without the initial investment. This enabled the students to have the opportunity of marketing and sales without any financial strain.

Prototype

The event was a small scale trial where students could experiment on sales strategies, consumer engagement strategy, and financial management practice.

Test

The post event analysis assisted in fine tuning the model to be used in future. Student, NGO and consumer feedback were used to offer information on areas of improvement to make them sustainable and scalable.

Student's Reflections

The carnival introduced the opportunity of first hand experience on marketing and selling and gave me a chance to help a social cause.

The management of stall enhanced my self-esteem, leadership qualities. It was gratifying to fund NGOs directly.

The program helped me to realize that empathy is crucial in determining who buys what and problem-solving capabilities also worked with fellow group members emphasized on the need to be a team player and support NGOs.

Sustainability and Scope of This Model

- The model has a sustainability because of its capabilities to achieve a balance between social impact and financial sustainability and affordability as well as offer a practical learning experience to students. The program is a combination of experiential education and ethical entrepreneurship, which promotes the long-term relationships between the educational organizations and the marginalized groups. The project was able to show that it can become a scalable and self-sustaining model, which can be replicated in other institutions of higher learning. Through the institutionalization of this program, universities will be able to create student-led entrepreneurial units that focus on social impact. Future improvement can involve:
- Establishing a structured supply chain by formalizing partnership with NGOs.
- By incorporating social entrepreneurship as a curriculum, the students will be able to gain academic credits by participating in the entrepreneurship activity.
- The product and service offerings should be extended to attribute digital platforms to marketing and e-commerce.
- Establishing mentorship systems in which old students are mentoring new students on how to run social businesses.
- Finding institutional or exterior funding through corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects and giving grants.

Reinvestment Strategies

One of its key strengths lies in the fact that this model is based on trust and zero-investment entrepreneurship where the NGOs offer products on consignment, thus, removing the initial financial risk among the students. The following are recommendations to the company in terms of reinvestment to achieve long-term financial sustainability:

Revenue Diversification: The diversification of products and the integration of strong and natural products.

Profit Redistribution: A portion of the profits in form of a percentage of profit in form of an investment back into the future student-led fund raising initiative to generate a cyclical and ongoing funding process.

Micro- investment Pool: It involves investing a part of the income to create a seed fund to fund student-led initiatives that market products of marginalized community.

Cooperation with the impact investors: The interaction with organizations which fund social entrepreneurship projects.

Financial Scoping and Profitability

It is possible to measure the financial success of the student- led social entrepreneurship initiative by:

Profit Margins: The project produced on estimated percentage profit on sales that shows the economic viability of the ethical business.

Cost Recovery Mechanism: Logistic costs (setting up of stalls) and operating costs incurred were recovered via contribution of student and reinvested profits to guarantee self-sustaining revenue system.

Similar Supporting Models

The social entrepreneurship movement led by students corresponds with the models of social entrepreneurship that have been established to integrate education, impact, and sustainability across the globe and they include:

Entrepreneurial Action for Us (Enactus).

Enactus India initiated many projects in the rural sphere, which were headed by students and centered around women empowerment, sustainable farming, and inclusion.

Aravind Eye Care Model

A social business that paves its way to affordable healthcare by subsidizing its profits through providing premium healthcare services to cover the free treatments of underprivileged patients.

Conclusion

The project is a revolutionary study of social entrepreneurship, which fits the gap between theory and practice. Through the application of design thinking, students had experience in emphatic problem-solving, strategic planning and appropriate business conduct, which strengthens their position as social entrepreneurs in the future. This model and the plans of its institutional integration, its financial sustainability, and strategic reinvestment are the keys to its successful work and the expansion of this initiative. The student-led initiative can offer an example of a replicable and versatile framework to be broadened to other institutions and industries by creating another generation of socially

responsible entrepreneurs. Its trust-based, sustainable approach can be used as an example of future student-led programs, which will make a long-term impact on students and the communities in which they act as agents of change and support.

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