

Factors Motivating Social Entrepreneurs to Learn About Change-making, Social Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

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Background

Social enterprise is widely recognized as an innovative and impactful approach to tackling challenging social issues and enhancing community well-being. As highlighted by Samuelsson & Witell (2022), one of the key attributes of social entrepreneurship is its creation of new social values. Understanding social entrepreneurs’ motivations can help inspire more people to create positive contributions to our community. However, there is a lack of research on this topic within Ontario, Canada.

Our study interviewed 10 social entrepreneurs in Ontario to understand the “Factors Motivating Social Entrepreneurs to Learn About Change-making, Social Innovation, and Entrepreneurship.” The objective is encouraging more individuals to generate a positive societal impact through social entrepreneurship.

Methods

The study involved semi-structured online interviews with ten social entrepreneur who were founders of various social enterprises in Ontario.

All participants in the research met the following four criteria: (i) being founders of at least one social enterprise, (ii) aged 18 or above, (iii) based in Ontario, Canada, and (iv) Canadian citizens or permanent residents.

Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. The researchers prepared a Letter of Invitation, Consent Form, and Interview Guide with probes. The ten one-on-one virtual interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams and recorded on Otter.Ai for transcription.

The research qualified as minimal risk, as every precaution was taken to minimize any potential harm or risk to the research participants and ensure the confidentiality of their information.

Informed consent forms were emailed to the participants, outlining the parameters of anonymity and confidentiality and the steps the researchers took to ensure and safeguard participant confidentiality. All transcripts were anonymized, and all identifying information was removed. The researchers employed pseudonyms from (R01-R10) to identify the participants in the final report. All information was stored at a secure designated Sheridan College’s One Drive folder that only the student researchers and their professor Dr. Ferzana Chaze have exclusive access to for up to two years. The researchers will lose access once the whole project is completed. The collected data was then coded and categorized according to various themes for analysis.

All research practices adhered to and upheld the highest ethical standards throughout the study.

Key Findings

The research has identified the three most common motivating factors for social entrepreneurs to initiate their social ventures:

- A desire to make positive changes in society or support specific groups within their community.**  
*“I’m here for my audience, for my customers, and it’s a very particular group of people. I’m here for them to serve their needs” (R04, 2023).*
- Personal experiences that inspire them to pursue a specific mission.**  
*“So from that day forward, I always have had, you know, an ear listening to what’s happening with long-term care beds and what’s happening, you know, just looking for innovative ways for the retirement home industry and everything to evolve. And so that’s also been part of my research. So my focus is the evolution of retirement living, the importance of multigenerational interactions, and keeping people connected and together” (R05, 2023).*
- The opportunity to earn income while engaging in work that aligns with their interests.**  
*“I wanted to find that happy medium where you can do the work that you’re able to do and still be able to make an income that allows you to continue to do the work you’re doing” (R01, 2023).*

Furthermore, the research has identified three key factors that help sustain the motivation of social entrepreneurs:

- Being recognized by clients or other stakeholders**  
*“When you get responses from the clients that you work with that tell you that you know what you said or what you did helped made a difference” (R01, 2023).*
- Seeing their positive impact on the community**  
*“I’ve seen firsthand the impact that these devices can have, and when they get to people similarly, we’ve seen like with the people who are coming to work or volunteer in the organization, you see like the growth in the capacity they built by being engaged or part of our organization” (R10, 2023).*
- Their social enterprise helped their employees grow and have stable jobs**  
*“The people who joined our staff, they were all newcomers, mostly. This was their first work experience in Canada. They were very smart, but they didn’t have Canadian experience so nobody would hire them. So, we hired them, we grew them” (R03, 2023).*

Discussion

Participants in this study mentioned various motivating factors for them to set up social ventures. These include community development, reduced limited access to technology, alleviated health disparities, addressed unemployment and underemployment issues, and enhanced well-being of many marginalized communities. These factors were similar to the crucial motivating factors that foster the development of pro-social entrepreneurship action identified by Duncan-Horner et al. (2022),

In particular, this research unearthed an underexplored area of social entrepreneurs – the emerging group of Black social entrepreneurs who endeavor to systematically leverage their social ventures to solve social problems such as unemployment or underemployment, health disparities, inequality, and social justice issues.

Implications for policy and/or practice

It is recommended to research specific groups that social entrepreneurs perceive as not receiving sufficient attention. This would provide valuable insights into the unmet needs within society and shed light on areas that require assistance. The findings could inform government agencies and concerned organizations in improving the allocation of resources to marginalized groups in a more targeted and effective manner. By identifying and addressing these overlooked needs, we can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society.

Furthermore, it is recommended to research to understand why most social entrepreneurs seek support from their personal connections instead of going to the government or non-profit organizations. This research would help these organizations develop better ways to advertise their services and give more support to social entrepreneurs who are making positive changes in society.

References

Duncan-Horner, E. M., Farrelly, M. A., & Rogers, B. C. (2022). Understanding the social entrepreneur: a new intentions model for advancing equity, social justice and sustainability. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies*, 14(3), 361–391. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-10-2020-0359>

Samuelsson, P. and Witell, L. (2022), "Social entrepreneurs in service: motivations and types", *Journal of Services Marketing*, 36 ( 9), 27-40. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-08-2017-0274>