

Collective Social Entrepreneurship: Collaboratively Shaping Social Good

A. Wren Montgomery · Peter A. Dacin ·
M. Tina Dacin

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Abstract In this paper, we move beyond the typical focus on the role of individuals in leading social change to examine “collective social entrepreneurship”, the role multiple actors collaboratively play to address social problems, create new institutions, and dismantle outdated institutional arrangements. Specifically, we examine collective social entrepreneurship across a diverse range of collaborative activities including movements, alliances and markets for social good. We identify resource utilization approaches and three associated sets of activities that illustrate the work of collective social entrepreneurs—framing, convening, and multivocality. Using illustrative case studies to examine the phenomenon, we highlight the capacity of collective action across sectors to create markets, institutions and organizations and, to derive success by resonating through embeddedness in broader social movements.

Keywords Collective social entrepreneurship · Collective action · Cross-sectoral collaboration

Introduction

As a result of the success and substantial public interest in the idea of social entrepreneurial ventures, an increasing number of narratives focusing on individual entrepreneurs and often characterizing them as “heroes” appear in a variety of broad-

based public outlets. The U.S. based broadcaster, PBS, for example, in their series *The New Heroes*, captures and publicizes “dramatic stories” of social entrepreneurs who found success “against all odds” (PBS 2005). The Skoll Foundation, founded to drive large-scale change by investing in, connecting and celebrating social entrepreneurs, produced and distributed *Uncommon Heroes*, a film series capturing the work of 18 social entrepreneurs who exemplify how “one person can change the world” (Skoll Foundation 2012a). In his popular book, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurship and the Power of New Ideas*, journalist David Bornstein attributes much social change to “one obsessive individual” (p. 3) even while calling for an enhanced social framework and resources to support the work of social entrepreneurs. Further, Ashoka, a leading support network for identifying and supporting innovative social entrepreneurial activities through social venture capital defines social entrepreneurs explicitly as “individuals,” “visionaries,” and “role models” (Ashoka 2012).

It is not just in broad-based public outlets that the individual entrepreneur dominates the narratives of social entrepreneurship. The growing academic literature on social entrepreneurship largely mirrors this focus on the lone entrepreneurial actor and the appeal of the “great man” or “heroic individual” rhetoric, rather than considering a more collective view (Spear 2006, p. 405). Although definitional debates continue to plague social entrepreneurship research, many of the current definitions center around the characteristics, resources, and mission of the individual entrepreneur (Dacin et al. 2010; Light 2009; Hemingway 2005; Nga and Shamuganathan 2010).

While the focus on the individual social entrepreneur continues to dominate, recent reviews of this literature express concern about this bias (Dacin et al. 2011). Social entrepreneurs face numerous resource voids (both material

A. W. Montgomery · P. A. Dacin · M. T. Dacin (✉)
Queen’s University, Kingston, ON, Canada
e-mail: tdacin@business.queensu.ca

A. W. Montgomery
e-mail: wmontgomery@queensu.ca

P. A. Dacin
e-mail: tdacin@business.queensu.ca

and non-material) but also operate in contexts where they face cultural barriers and institutional voids (Mair and Marti 2009). The focus on social entrepreneurs as lone agentic actors runs the risk of overlooking the vital role played by outside actors, stakeholders, networks, organizations, and institutions in overcoming such barriers to success (Spear 2006) and in influencing broader public discourse (Pies et al. 2009). From this perspective, much of social entrepreneurship appears, in fact, to be collaborative and collective, drawing on a broad array of support, cooperation and alliances to build awareness, gain resources and, ultimately, make change (Sud et al. 2009; VanSandt et al. 2009).

In this paper, we contribute beyond the current understanding of the individual social entrepreneur by examining social entrepreneurship through a collective lens and acknowledge that much effort to solve social problems also involves collaborative action. Collaboration with other actors and organizations provides social entrepreneurs with a means to accomplish their objectives across numerous levels in order to achieve social change where a lone actor may not otherwise be successful. The notion of the need for collaborative action in social change is not novel. Prior literature on collective action across social movements (e.g., Davis and Anderson 2008; Rao et al. 2000), institutional change (e.g., Greenwood et al. 2002; Hardy and Maguire 2008), cooperatives (e.g., Alinsky 1941; Spear 2006), and cross-sectoral partnerships (e.g., Austin 2000a; Selsky and Parker 2005; Vurro et al. 2010) illustrates the necessity of collaborating with outside actors and drawing on external resources to effect change.

The focus of our thesis, therefore, is the concept of *collective social entrepreneurship*. We define collective social entrepreneurship as collaboration amongst similar as well as diverse actors for the purpose of applying business principles to solving social problems. We contend that a better understanding of much social entrepreneurship behavior and theory emerges from examining the social relationships, social capital and necessarily collaborative actions on which effective social change relies. Collective social entrepreneurship serves to leverage existing resources, build new resources, and impact the emergence and reshaping of institutional arrangements to support scalable efforts for change. By examining several examples of collective action in the pursuit of social entrepreneurial objectives, we are able to begin addressing important questions such as what kind of work collective social entrepreneurship entails and, more specifically, what are important resources, strategies, skills, and opportunities that lead to outcomes of effective social change in the context of collective social entrepreneurship?

This paper begins with a brief overview of the literature on collective action, ranging from social movements to cross-sectoral collaboration. Next, by examining several brief illustrative case studies we begin a discussion of the resource

work undertaken by collective social entrepreneurs at multiple levels, including the need to both pool and trade resources and work within and between sectors. We then build on our discussion of the management of resource flows, by identifying three interconnected activities that facilitate and enhance the work of collective social entrepreneurs—framing, convening, and multivocality. We conclude with a discussion of directions for future research and highlight the intersection between collective social entrepreneurship and other forms of entrepreneurship as well as the role that collective social entrepreneurship plays in changing and constructing movements, markets, and institutions.

Collective Action and Social Change

The role of collectives in driving social change pervades the organizations literature. Collectives can assume many forms. Of the many manifestations of collective action, three major forms are social movements, community cooperatives, and cross-sectoral collaboration. The following brief overview of these three types of collectives serves as a background for studying and understanding the unique contribution of collective social entrepreneurship.

Social movements play an integral role in the formation of markets and in field level change. For example, a very visible impact of a social movement is in the development of new markets for environmentally friendly products such as wind-energy (Sine and Lee 2009) and grass-fed meats (Weber et al. 2008). Broad field level movements and social pressures have also brought about change among field members on issues ranging from labor practices to access to pharmaceuticals in underdeveloped nations (Davis and Anderson 2008). The social movements literature recognizes the importance of collective action and captures a deep reliance on interlinked networks of activists, professions, media and other movements to spread information and increase engagement and buy-in (Davis and Anderson 2008). Connections and support between and across organizations provide channels for ideas and practices to spread, gain support and legitimacy, and ultimately become institutionalized and effect change.

A second type of collective identified in the literature, the community cooperative, is a collective form that allows varied groups of consumers, organizations, and movements to collaborate toward enhancing the social and economic welfare of local citizens (Alinsky 1941). Spears (2006) recognizes community cooperatives as a type of social entrepreneurial venture. Although cooperative organizational forms exist in numerous sectors of business and society, the banking sector is one of the most widely studied contexts for these cooperatives. For example, for over a century Italian Rural Cooperative Banks offered accessible

agricultural and rural credit and provided a collective forum for residents, government, business, and even the church, to jointly address community social and economic challenges (Freeman and Lomi 1994). Credit unions continue this tradition with a shared social “bond” or “cooperative spirit” seen as a central mechanism in bringing groups together, founding new unions, and diffusing the organizational form (Amburgey et al. 1994, p. 244).

The third collective form we overview, cross-sector partnerships, also illustrates the role of collective action and collaboration between disparate organizations to address social issues. Vurro et al. (2010) define these cross-sector social partnerships (CCSPs) as “collaborative efforts across two or more sectors that search for more effective organizational approaches to solve complex social problems” (p. 39). CCSPs cross numerous organizational boundaries to collaborate on addressing social issues and to share resources, including government, business, and not-for-profit sectors (Austin 2000a; Selsky and Parker 2005). Although explanations for collaboration traditionally include motivations ranging from acquiring resources and knowledge, to market access and stakeholder legitimacy, more recent literature suggests more altruistic motivations for CCSPs including the need to tackle broad social problems more effectively (Selsky and Parker 2005; Vurro et al. 2010). Recent work has begun to examine social alliances between business and social enterprises (Sakarya et al. 2012), linkages between various forms of innovation and collective entrepreneurship (Spear 2011) as well as the creation of community social ventures (Haugh 2007).

Although brief, this review of social movements, community cooperatives, and cross-sectoral collaboration reveals a common insight that will prove important in our examination of collective social entrepreneurship. All of these forms of collective action highlight the importance of acquiring and deploying resources from multiple actors through a variety of activities and strategies to share ideas, mobilize supporters, bring together diverse viewpoints, and collaborate to drive change. Although related, none of these forms captures the unique mix of social and economic incentives that characterize collective social entrepreneurial ventures. Successful collective social entrepreneurs often simultaneously leverage many of these existing forms including relying on cooperative models, developing cross-sectoral collaborations, and drawing power from embeddedness in existing social movements. Consequently, collective social entrepreneurship provides an opportunity to more deeply examine the importance of resources, as well as the benefits and consequences of partnering within and across sectors. By giving explicit consideration to resource flows and strategies for managing collective entrepreneurial work we build on prior research that considers various forms of cross-sectoral collaboration (e.g., Austin 2000a, b; Selsky and Parker 2005; Vurro et al. 2010).

In the next section, we further explore the need to harness and deploy resources, especially in the context of collective social entrepreneurial work. We provide a number of examples and illustrations which highlight how resources are mobilized as well as where they arise and are deployed.

Harnessing Resources

Social entrepreneurs require a broad array of material and non-material resources, including support networks, mobilization, financial assistance, and knowledge, as well as important cultural and institutional resources. Filling these resource needs requires collective and collaborative action and results in what we define as collective social entrepreneurial work.

The organizations literature recognizes the importance of harnessing resources in collective action. Resource collaboration between diverse actors is essential in challenging and changing institutional norms and values. For example, DiMaggio’s concept of institutional entrepreneurs—the agents who drive institutional change—suggests the need for “sufficient resources” to effect such transformation (DiMaggio 1988, p. 14). Building from DiMaggio, other authors suggest these resources include an array of assets such as the ability to harness other key actors including the state and professional bodies (Greenwood et al. 2002) and external social movements (Rao et al. 2000). Successful change also relies heavily on collaboration, partnerships, coalitions, alliances, and other forms of collective action (Hardy and Maguire 2008), bringing together similar and diverse groups of actors, organizations, and stakeholders (Maguire et al. 2004).

Our thinking emerges from a consideration of both the nature of resource flows as well as the sector in which collective social entrepreneurial work occurs. In examining resource flows in the context of collective social entrepreneurship we build on the distinction between *pooling alliances* and *trading alliances* made by Doz and Hamel (1998) in the strategic alliances literature. Pooling alliances allow organizations to share similar resources and enjoy increased purchasing power, enhance leverage over other actors in the supply chain (suppliers or buyers), or jointly build new skills as is the case with shared R&D ventures in technology and energy industries (p. 65). By comparison, trading alliances allow for the sharing and exchange of complementary resources, whereby each party offers something unique or different to the other. Social entrepreneurship literature has also acknowledged the need for lone actors to pursue strategic partners that fill both such resource voids and either “compensate for weaknesses” or “act as complementors” (VanSandt et al. 2009, p. 423).

Table 1 Collective social entrepreneurship: forms of collaboration

	Same sector	Cross-sector
Pooling resources	Same sector pooling: Ontario Natural Food Co-op Marine Stewardship Council ISEAL Alliance	Cross-sector pooling: Kiva Me to We Matching Programs
Trading resources	Same sector trading: Peaceworks DNDi TDR	Cross-sector trading: Habitat for Humanity ReStores Latino Community Credit Union Triodos Bank

We suggest that in addition to resource flows the sectoral situatedness of resource contributions figures prominently in the crafting of collective action. By sector we refer to the three primary societal sectors of government, for profit, and not-for profit identified in prior theoretical work on interorganizational relationships and cross-sectoral partnerships (e.g., Austin 2000b). We observe that collective social entrepreneurial work can and does occur both within these sectors and across sectors.

Putting together resource flows and sector we now provide a number of illustrative examples that highlight specific combinations of collective action. While providing a conceptual framework of the forms that collective social entrepreneurial work may take we caution that this classification is not all encompassing. Also, please note that although we use a particular organization as an example of mobilizing a given type of resource flow and sectoral alliance, we do so primarily for illustrative purposes and do not wish to imply that this is the only form of collaboration that this collective encounters. In fact, we expect that more typically collectives will need to engage in numerous forms of resource flows and collaborations between and across multiple sectors and we discuss this situation following our initial examples.

To help frame the discussion, Table 1 illustrates our thinking about the various forms of collaboration for harnessing resources that exist in collective social entrepreneurship. The Table also includes a listing of the various examples we use to illustrate each form of collaboration.

Same Sector Pooling of Resources

Same sector pooling of resources allow actors engaged within collective social entrepreneurship within a similar sector to join together to share resources and knowledge, increase efficiency and reduce costs. For example, the 35-year-old not-for-profit Ontario Natural Food Co-op (ONFC) provides a central hub for numerous natural and organic food producers to pool their resources and products, offering retailing and distribution services throughout Eastern Canada. ONFC combines products from a

multitude of producers across various disparate food and grocery product lines from local farm-grown organic fruits and vegetables, to meats, prepackaged foods, and natural household goods. With the co-op's stated goals being to "proactively bring to market natural, organic and local foods and products within a co-operative network", the ONFC is a member run collaborative organization governed on a 'one member one vote system' (ONFC 2012). The organization claims that it strives to work "in a collaborative and sustainable manner" with both suppliers and the retailers it serves—including local and national grocery chains, daycares, hotels, restaurants, and not-for-profits. Although ONFC's offering suggests that it represents numerous competing product lines and vendors, it is evident that the benefits of combining diverse products and product choice with ease of ordering and delivery for retailers, make the co-op's services highly beneficial for suppliers. While benefiting members and customers is key to the ONFC's success it also undertakes public education initiatives on behalf of members about healthy food and environmental choices and seeds a "Community Development Fund" to support projects focused on education and sustainable food systems (ONFC 2012).

Pooling resources can also provide collective social entrepreneurial ventures with the "strength in numbers" required to mobilize action, enhance exposure and credibility, and achieve objectives. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is an international non-profit founded in 1997 with the objective of "ecolabelling sustainable fish products and thereby supporting and providing incentives for sustainable fishing practices and driving a market in sustainable seafood" (Marine Stewardship Council 2012). The MSC actively collaborates with actors up and down the supply chain and across the fisheries industry to make this happen, stating that these collaborations include "fishers, retailers, processors, consumers, and others." While maintaining independence the MSC also actively encourages various actors to "get involved", working with an array of global businesses, government bodies, stakeholders, and funders involved in fisheries and fishing

practices. These relationships provide opportunities for numerous actors to contribute expertise and resources to the MSC and to balance a variety of perspectives, while simultaneously “preventing the dominance of single interests” in the MSC’s activities.

Taking the benefits of resource pooling further still, the ISEAL Alliance provides a forum for sharing ecolabel practices and awareness across industries and sectors. Founded in 2002 by a number of global leading standards and accreditation bodies ISEAL members include such diverse industries as forestry (Forest Certification Council), fisheries (Marine Stewardship Council), social and labor standards (Social Accountability Accreditation Services), agriculture (Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade International, Sustainable Agriculture Network), and energy (Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels), among others. By forming an alliance of certification bodies ISEAL offers a means for pooling resources such as knowledge, best practices, and collaborative learning from others’ experiences across certification bodies. This sectoral collaboration forms the foundation from which to advocate for, define and promote credible sustainability standards globally through shared “Codes of Good Practice”. As well, ISEAL undertakes shared awareness and advocacy campaigns with policy-makers, business and consumers with the goal of using a collaborative “Scaling Up Strategy” to increase uptake of sustainable certification standards (ISEAL Alliance and AccountAbility 2011).

By pooling resources within the same sector in collective social entrepreneurship ventures these organizations support one another’s social and economic objectives in a variety of ways. First, working collectively provides the opportunity for sharing knowledge and costs between actors and limiting duplication of efforts. Second, gathering the support of collective actors means the ability to incorporate disparate viewpoints to present an organized yet unified public voice around an issue. A unified and representative voice assists the collective in communicating concerns more credibly to stakeholders including the public and policymakers. Third, collective action allows these groups to more effectively represent and leverage the social movements in which they find their ventures embedded.

Cross-Sector Pooling of Resources

Although pooling resources within a similar sector or field is common, pooling similar resources across sectors can likewise bring distinct advantages in collective social entrepreneurship. For example, the non-profit international microfinance lender Kiva—meaning “unity” or “agreement” in Swahili—serves as a platform for thousands of small donors across sectors to come together to pool resources to make significant change around the world

(Flannery 2007). The internet-based platform allows international donors ranging from individuals to foundations and corporations to contribute as little as \$25 to the organization and to select their individual loan recipients through online profiles in a person-to-person lending structure. Kiva then leverages a multinational network or microfinance lenders to make small business loans to local entrepreneurs around the world with the goal of alleviating poverty. Although Kiva primarily pools resources flows of financial donations at the donor level across various types and sectors of donors, the organization also benefits from pooling over 154 local microfinance lenders in a broad network that provides access to thousands of local loan recipients (Kiva 2012; Skoll Foundation 2012b).

Similarly aggregating resources across sectors, Me to We Artisans pools the products and crafts of numerous small-scale commercial artisans in developing nations and communities in which sister charity Free the Children operates. Items such as beaded jewelry, clothing, and handbags, are retailed around the world along with books and apparel produced in developed nations specifically as fundraising efforts for the not-for-profit. A full 50 % of profits from these combined for-profit and not-for-profit pooled retailed products fund sister organization and charity partner Free the Children to support its global development work. This collaboration allows Me to We to bring small producers in developing nations access to fair-trade markets, financial independence, and financial literacy while simultaneously reinforcing and supporting Free the Children’s charitable education, and development projects (Me to We 2012).

Other organizations similarly harness the power of pooled resources across sectors to fund collective social entrepreneurship activities. For instance, organizations such as Oxfam encourage corporate employers to make matching financial donations of employee contributions, including matching cash and stock donations and volunteer time (Oxfam 2012). This matching program even extends to government bodies, with Oxfam and other not-for-profits encouraging governments to undertake commitments to match public donations during times of crisis, such as the Haiti Earthquake (CIDA 2010). The City of London also utilizes a variation on matching programs to facilitate social entrepreneurship. The City run website City Action pools an array of qualified corporate volunteers whose time is donated by local partner corporations and government bodies. The service and website offers a valuable and ready source of expertise and knowledge resources to local social entrepreneurs, facilitating the pooling of essential resources across the corporate sector while aiding and building collective social entrepreneurial ventures (Wagstaff 2012).

Pooling resources across sectors brings many of the same efficiency, scale and mobilization advantages of

pooling resources within similar sectors. However, drawing from across sectors also brings the benefit of a multitude of voices and lenses, drawing from disparate viewpoints and leveraging a variety of resource to make change. These broad collaborative relationships are essential for mobilizing an even broader array of actors and resources and enhancing the collective's credibility and social power.

Same Sector Trading of Resources

Within a given sector, collective social entrepreneurial organizations also frequently share and exchange complementary resources, whereby each party offers something unique or different to the other. These resource flows may be material or non-material, also filling cultural and institutional voids as needed. For example, selling healthy and all-natural specialty food products, PeaceWorks facilitates joint venture businesses run collaboratively by actors on both sides of armed conflicts. The company strives to develop "cooperative business ventures that capitalize on the strength of each partner ... to achieve long-lasting cultural understanding" (PeaceWorks 2012). Founded in 1994 to address the Arab–Israeli conflict and bring stability to the Middle East through business relationships, PeaceWorks now also conducts business in Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, and Sri Lanka selling to over 15,000 retailers. On its "not-only-for profit" ventures PeaceWorks demonstrates the ability for same sector farming and retail actors to come together to trade cultural resources and knowledge across boundaries and to work collaboratively. At the same time, PeaceWorks also illustrates the power of such collectives to address cultural and institutional voids as well as the ability to both leverage and support social movements.

Although the organization sells its food products for profit, 5 % of all profits go directly to fund movements advocating for a two-state solution in the Middle East through the PeaceWorks Foundation, which supports creative solutions to ending conflict and fostering peace around the world. The Foundation also supports the organization's OneVoice Movement bringing together members from around the world to advocate for a two-state solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict. This not-for-profit arm also demonstrates the power of same sector collaboration and resource trading. Bringing financial resources and business acumen to the table, OneVoice partners with colleges and educational groups in its "International Education Program" to train youth leaders as advocates of its message. Finally, PeaceWorks suggests that these advocacy activities are bringing about substantive policy change by mobilizing the public and political leaders in Israel and Palestine (Skoll Foundation 2012b).

Same sector collaborations are successful in coordinating global health initiatives in developing countries and in

addressing resource constraints, incentive issues and market failures (WHO 2009). For example, the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi) encourages collaboration between developed and developing nations, building local R&D capacity with outside expertise, knowledge and research. Using virtual networks the DNDi is able to coordinate a variety of R&D resources and expertise from actors around the world in the for-profit health and pharmaceutical sectors to address research on new drugs and local diseases. This online platform obtains support from a network of "regional liaison" officers who actively advocate for collaboration and sharing of resources through DNDi, as well as serving as local information hubs on available research, community needs, and expertise (WHO 2009). Similarly, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) provides a platform for global scientific and policy collaboration of governments on a number of major global diseases. Founded in 1975 and supported by major international bodies including the WHO, UNICEF, and UNDP, the TDR's governing board consists of scientific and government representatives who collaboratively set policy priorities and share knowledge across members states (WHO 2009).

Trading resources are also important for bringing together diverse actors from within a sector, be it within the not-for-profit sector or within the for-profit sector, to collaborate on a given project. Such collaboration or vertical alliance arrangements allow for collective social entrepreneurial actors to combine strengths and expertise and to leverage one another's unique resources while being better able to reach, communicate with, and appeal to a broader array of stakeholders than each actor on their own would likely be capable of.

Cross-Sector Trading of Resources

Trading of resources can also occur across different sectors, with numerous otherwise disparate actors coming together to provide unique input, skills, and resources to solve pressing social issues. For example, the nonprofit Habitat for Humanity International strives to tackle the global housing crisis through building and rehabilitating housing for families in need around the world. One of the organizations primary fundraising sources is the Habitat for Humanity ReStores. With 825 stores across the United States and Canada Habitat accepts donations of new and used home appliances and construction materials from consumers and corporations, selling the goods at discounted prices and applying the proceeds to its charitable construction projects (Habitat for Humanity 2012). In order to support its social enterprise function non-profit ReStores partner with for-profit home improvement giants in the building industry including Home Depot, Lowe's, and

Rona. While Habitat is able to fund its primary activity of building homes through such alliances the corporations likewise receive numerous benefits. These include environmentally responsible ‘disposal’ services for unneeded product which would otherwise go to landfill, tax exemptions for in-kind charitable donations, and reputational benefits and publicity for participating in Habitat’s housing mission (Habitat for Humanity 2012).

The Latino Community Credit Union (LCCU) also provides an illustration of the means by which cross-sectoral collective social entrepreneurship ventures, through financial services, address community issues such as violence and poverty. The LCCU arose in response to a combination of rising levels of violent crimes (thefts of cash) and Latino exclusion from local banking services due to illiteracy, lack of documentation, and language barriers (Fuqua School of Business 2004; LCCU 2012). Initial challenges in starting a Latino community focused credit union in the late 1990s were finally surmounted when a broad and unique group of actors were assembled to trade resources across sectors. These included local and national immigrant and Latino support groups, the large North Carolina State Employees’ Credit Union, a community development lender experienced in real estate financing, marketing partners, local foundations and churches, a volunteer board of directors, and national financial institutions such as Bank of America. The estimated 65 partner organizations led the LCCU’s board chair to comment, “the extraordinary breadth of partners has enabled us to accomplish together what none of us could have done alone” (Fuqua School of Business 2004, p. 4). Trading cultural knowledge and acumen as well as banking and community organizing skills and resources across sectors was fundamental to establishing the collective venture.

In addition to building on traditional credit union and banking cooperative models that included both financial returns for their members as well as community support objectives, numerous financial services firms take this mission one step further to bring collectives of actors together in supporting new social entrepreneurial endeavors. For instance, Bristol U.K. based Triodos Bank provides advising and fundraising services linking private foundations and investors with local charities. Bristol Together, the newly formed social enterprise, partners with local charities to employ ex-offenders to renovate and restore unused local properties, reinvesting funds from property sales back into the social enterprise (Mair 2011).

Trading resources across sectors allows a wide array of disparate actors to join together collaboratively to make change happen. These alliances aggregate unique resources, disparate voices and lenses, and a variety of actor and stakeholder support in powerful collective social entrepreneurship ventures. In addition, this breadth allows issues

to be presented credibly, in that they represent a number of voices and perspectives on an issue, and to reach and mobilize a much wider audience.

Managing Multiple Forms of Collaboration and Resource Flows

Our conceptual framework examines noteworthy examples within each quadrant of Table 1 representing a particular combination of resource flows and within-sector or cross-sector collaborations. However, in reality what we believe to be a defining characteristic of collective social entrepreneurial ventures is that they most often require managing multiple cross-quadrant flows and collaborations.

For example, EcoPeace is an organization that brings together collectives of groups from around the Middle East to address water and environmental issues. As many successful collective social entrepreneurial ventures do, EcoPeace leverages multiple sectors and resource flows, highlighting the importance of interdependence. Projects and collaborations include bringing together thousands of citizens for water education across three nations—Palestine, Israel, and Jordan. Such collaborations involve overcoming both cultural and institutional voids as well as historical challenges to cooperation. Other EcoPeace projects include drawing on corporate and government actors for large water infrastructure investments and involving international bodies such as USAID and the United Nations Environment Program in local water agreements (EcoPeace 2012; Skoll Foundation 2012b). Many of these projects involve simultaneously pooling and trading resources and working with same and cross-sector partnerships.

Now spanning 35 countries, the global United Way organization also demonstrates the need to harness multiple resource flows and collaborations. Founded in the United States in the late 1800s the United Way historically supported numerous small, locally based community organizations and charities by providing umbrella services and resources. The United Way pools common resources across members including volunteer training, fundraising, fund allocation, knowledge and best practices, publicity, and advocacy work. Since its inception, broader collaborations and collective action also characterize the heart of the United Way’s objectives. The United Way Worldwide states that their mission is to “connect all sectors of society” to create significant social change in a “worldwide social movement” which will “mobilize millions to action” (United Way 2012). National organizations also echo this ethos of “mobilizing collective action” (United Way Centraide Canada 2012) to achieve desired change and results. More recently, led by this mission, the United Way finds itself working in partnership with community non-profits and several levels of government to develop local collective

social entrepreneurship ventures, such as the Toronto Enterprise Fund, to reduce poverty and homelessness.

In addition, delving deeper into the examples used to illustrate the conceptual quadrants above, many of these organizations also manage multiple collaborations in addition to the highlighted relationships. For instance, as well as trading resources across sectors to supply its ReStores, Habitat for Humanity also pools resources within the non-profit sector. Numerous non-profits, community groups and church groups supply critical volunteer labor for Habitat's building projects and for staffing the ReStore itself, illustrating the dual importance of pooling same sector and trading cross-sector resources for the venture's success.

Further, while our examples highlighted how collective social entrepreneurship organizations such as Kiva and Me to We rely on pooling similar resources across sectors, both of these organizations also rely heavily on powerful networks they developed within given sectors in the communities they service. Kiva relies on an extensive network of 154 local microfinance lenders, which it terms "field partners", that are responsible for selecting local loan recipients and managing those loans (Kiva 2012). Choosing and supporting these multiple same sector partners, managing their relationships, and pooling their connections and knowledge is key to Kiva's access to local communities and individuals and to its credibility with both donors and recipients. This is very similar to Me to We's reliance on a number of local women's community groups, and their unique culture and financing structures, to pool their own resources to provide the venture's key artisanal products (Me to We 2012). It is clear that these collectives are able to leverage these strong collaborations to gain credibility and mobilize support among local communities within the same sector, as well as working as intermediaries to trade these vital resources with other collaborators across sectors.

To summarize our discussion of harnessing resources, the examples presented in each of the quadrants illustrate instances of collective social entrepreneurship working collaboratively with multiple actors joining forces to apply business principles to address social issues. We identify four primary contexts for such collaborations and the important resource flows that take place. The combining of resources occurs through either sharing of similar resources (pooling) or the exchange of different resources (trading). These collaborations may occur within the same sector or across multiple sectors and levels in cross-sector collaborations that combine for-profit businesses, not-for-profits, and government actors. We also point out that our placement of organizations in Table 1 is primarily illustrative and that indeed many collective social entrepreneurship ventures frequently span multiple quadrants drawing on multiple and layered resource flows and sectoral relationships.

While each of these collaborations draws on somewhat varying strategies, throughout the discussion we highlight common, key entrepreneurial activities that appear essential for both forming a collective and succeeding collaboratively in achieving objectives. These include building credibility, sharing knowledge, and saving costs through joining forces; bringing together diverse actors in ways that benefit each while also servicing combined objectives; and drawing on a multitude of voices and lenses to enhance the venture and expand mobilization and buy-in. We see these actions as key for understanding the characteristic work that collective social entrepreneurs undertake in building collaborative ventures. In the next section, we provide a more in depth discussion of these key activities and strategies.

Key Activities and Strategies

Our classification and summary of the various forms of collaboration involved in the harnessing and managing of resources highlights not only a general discussion of what each form entails but also suggests a number of activities and strategies associated with successful collective social entrepreneurs. From the summaries associated with each quadrant of Table 1 and the general summary, three interconnected activities appear to emerge as critical for the effectiveness of collective social entrepreneurship. First, actors use *framing* techniques to both collectively interpret ideas and to mobilize followers to the cause. Second, collective social entrepreneurship requires active *convening* of disparate participants. Third, within a collective social entrepreneurship, managing and leveraging *multivocality* is essential to accommodate a broad diversity of views and cultural and social lenses. In this section we draw on the illustrative cases outlined above as well as from the existing literature on collective action and social change to flesh out each of these activities and strategies in a collective social entrepreneurship context.

Framing

Social movement theory refers to "framing processes" to explain how ideas are interpreted and socially constructed by the collective in order to mobilize collective action, and ultimately effect change (Benford and Snow 2000; Scott 1999). Benford and Snow (2000) define collective action frames specifically as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (p. 614). Framing provide a means for individuals to better identify and label ideas through "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman 1974).

Movements use framing to achieve strategic objectives, convey a movement's image to the public, mobilize and recruit adherents, and acquire necessary resources (Benford and Snow 2000; Walder 2009). Another important use of framing is to achieve "transformation" of old cultural meanings and to acquire new ones, as well as to address "counterframing/framing" contests. The recognition of framing processes distinguishes the active and agentic role that movements play in both creating and maintaining meanings and the translation of these ideas to stakeholders, rather than simply as carriers of existing ideas (Benford and Snow 2000).

While much of the framing literature focuses on social movement activities, it is important to note for the study of collective social entrepreneurship that framing is by no means a tool used solely by movements. A wide array of organizations effectively use framing practices to build legitimacy with stakeholders both internally and externally (Suchman 1995), and to impact public and media perceptions (Kimberly 2006). The need to frame ideas into more accessible and more legitimate schemata, and to construct and translate meaning for stakeholders, is evident in a number of the pooling strategies outlined above. The idea of "frame resonance" is at the core of framing appeals to the public and to collaborators (Walder 2009). In order to be successful, ideas must be both credible and salient to audiences and success will depend on the social experiences of the intended audience and alignment with those experiences (Snow et al. 1986; Walder 2009).

For instance, by forming collectives of fisheries, suppliers, and retailers offering sustainable products, the Marine Stewardship Council enhances awareness and influences public perceptions of, and demand for, seafood sustainability standards far more effectively than these actors are able to do acting alone. Further, by grouping sustainable standards bodies across industries ISEAL is better able to establish recognition and acknowledgment of sustainable standards more broadly, as well as to work to ensure low quality standards bodies do not delegitimize these programs (ISEAL Alliance and AccountAbility 2011). Pooling of resources and knowledge therefore provides a ready platform for framing standards as credible and legitimate, mobilizing public opinion, and applying pressure on both government and the private sector for support and long-term changes to these industries.

Collective social entrepreneurship also requires collaborators to attend to the important internal task of what Klandermans (1984) terms "consensus mobilization" as they "negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change" (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 615). It is through this framing process and the reciprocal theorization and translation of concepts and issues between partners, that the negotiation of

understanding and consensus occur to form collective social entrepreneurial ventures. We find numerous instances of framing occurring in pooling and trading alliances for collective social entrepreneurship in the active creation of ideas and meanings and the translation of these ideas and meanings between actors across levels and sectors. The efforts to start a Latino focused credit union, later the LCCU, illustrate the need for corporate partners to find community members who can assist with framing and designing social entrepreneurial ventures so that they are credible with the communities they are designed to serve. Framing appeals between potential alliance partners also occurs between actors in the same industry as they "sell" their prospective benefits to one another. The Habitat for Humanity ReStore's website frames appeals to potential corporate partners for donations in terms of the direct benefits to the donor including environmentally friendly disposal and tax write-offs, thereby encouraging them to work collectively with the not-for-profit (Habitat for Humanity 2012).

Convening

Dorado and Vaz (2003) describe convenors as champions of projects who navigate complex obstacles and boundaries in inter- and intra-organizational domains. Convening social networks and groups of individuals or organizations in order to allow for collaboration to occur and to tap resources, knowledge, and expertise of the participants can facilitate unique solutions and whole-system innovations which draw on collective intelligence (Svendsen and Laberge 2005). In examining the importance of convening in disparate groups of organizational stakeholders for problem solving purposes, there are three key phases of convening. First, is a phase of *outreach* in order to establish core issues, goals, and communication among participants; second, is a process of *collective learning* which allows for establishing trust and shared understanding of the issues as well as the sharing of knowledge; third, is the emergence of *innovation* and co-creation, as well as joint action where required (Svendsen and Laberge 2005).

Convening is a strategic practice most likely used when strategic actors or institutional entrepreneurs identify a complex social problem, or other need for change, yet do not possess the knowledge, know-how or skill set to address the problem without support of others (Dorado 2005). Unable to succeed unilaterally, these actors, or convenors (Svendsen and Laberge 2005), focus their efforts instead on convincing others to collaborate and to jointly address problems and initiate change (Dorado 2005). Legitimacy, social capital and interpersonal trust are, therefore, important resources for convenors (Dorado 2005; Svendsen and Laberge 2005).

The act of convening, or bringing parties together for a shared purpose and to solve complex issues, is vital in that

it also facilitates and stimulates collaboration. Defined as a process which allows multiple parties who view a problem from varying perspectives, or view differing aspects of the problem, to constructively explore solutions beyond their own vision and knowledge (Gray 1985; Gray and Wood 1991), convening has been effectively used in multiple organizational fields. For example, ‘collaborative practice’ is at the heart of the healthcare field and provides a forum for healthcare workers to share knowledge and expertise (Henneman et al. 1995). Similarly, convenors facilitate organizations to work effectively with others in *collaborative alliances* and allow multiparty problem solving on complex issues that unilateral approaches can not address (Gray and Wood 1991). As such, they are critical enablers providing access to key resources and templates for action and forging shared identity.

The Marine Stewardship Council actively drives collaboration between otherwise competing actors such as fisheries and retailers through its convening activities. With over 170 fisheries currently certified by the MSC program the Council actively encourages participation through marketing and branding sustainable seafood products and driving market demand, activities that would be virtually impossible for individual fisheries to achieve on their own. In addition, convening efforts can be identified in activities such as the MSC’s “meet the fishers” feature, regular email and RSS progress updates on individual fisheries, and, the compilation of successful and highly personalized “fisher’s stories” in public reports (Marine Stewardship Council 2009). Similarly, convening and collaborative alliances emerge between competing seafood retailers through active outreach activities including consumer education, MSC-label branding campaigns, online and web “product finder” applications, and weekly tracking of MSC products sold around the world (Marine Stewardship Council 2012).

Cross-sectoral convening across different industries also provides a forum for knowledge sharing and joint action between groups of otherwise disparate actors. By providing a central repository for best practices ISEAL allows numerous disparate industry groups (from forestry to fisheries) to meet, share knowledge and templates for action, and work jointly when required. Vancouver-based Vancity financial cooperative states this role more explicitly announcing on its website that “We are proud of our convening power”, bringing together its own financial acumen with non-for-profits and other “like-minded organizations” (Vancity 2012). CivicAction of Toronto similarly recognizes this important convening function. The group hosts a Greater Toronto Summit every 4 years “convening hundreds of city builders and leaders from across the region and all sectors to chart an action plan to address the issues facing our region” (CivicAction 2012).

Multivocality

The illustrative examples above indicate the importance of considering and understanding the role that both multiple *voices* and multiple *lenses* play in the success of social entrepreneurship ventures. First, literature on collective action, social movements, and institutional change refers to the importance of harnessing numerous stakeholders’ voices in a broad array of support, from government and professions (Greenwood et al. 2002), to social movements (Rao et al. 2000), and various collaborations and alliances with other organizations with diverse skill sets (Maguire et al. 2004). Sud et al. (2009) acknowledge the need for social entrepreneurs specifically to involve a variety of actors from business, government, education and elsewhere in order to overcome institutional barriers to large-scale social impact.

The concept of multivocality, the ability to combine these numerous voices as well as to speak to stakeholders in an accessible manner and straddle audiences, appears in multivocality studies ranging from professional social networks in academia (Carolan 2008) to the role of “social embeddedness” in Medici political power (Padgett and Ansell 1993). Combining multiple voices to speak to a variety of audiences allows collectives to connect with diverse communities in a manner that “appeals to numerous audiences simultaneously” (Carolan 2008, p. 69).

Multivocality is both evident in a number of the cases above and vital for the success of social entrepreneurship in many instances. The Marine Stewardship Council found success by providing an outlet and forum for actors across the field—fishers, processors, retailers, and consumers—to share input on sustainable seafood practices (Marine Stewardship Council 2012). In addition, the MSC incorporates and actively addresses ideas and issues from the broader sustainability, environmental and wildlife protection movements. These multiple voices, which the MSC represents through its ecolabelling program, are essential to its success and broad-based appeal to global fisheries, retailers and consumers. The need for multivocality is likewise evident in the case of ISEAL whose strategic document “Scaling Up Strategy” details the need to actively pursue the vocal and visible support of external actors. By targeting support from “public procurement” offices and “major financial institutions” through a series of detailed tactics, ISEAL plans to leverage the voices of these key supporters to enhance credibility for sustainability standards and build more broad-based government and business buy-in (ISEAL Alliance and AccountAbility 2011, pp. 10–12).

Second, in addition to the role of multiple collective voices in framing issues and attracting resources we also see an important role for considering multivocality of

lenses, in more traditional archeological and anthropological terms. In this theoretical vein multivocality refers to the variety of lenses through which communities interpret and make sense of their past and surroundings, leading to unique narratives, interpretations, and discourses (Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2006; Hodder 2008). Hodder (2008) argues that understanding these local interpretations and lenses is essential for a full comprehension of the numerous interactions and alliances between local and global communities. Multivocality involves the “complex blending of the global and the particular in ways that do not replicate Western perspectives and which do not construct the local as a product of the global” (Hodder 2008, p. 198).

The necessity in a collective social entrepreneurship to adapt to and accommodate a multitude of lenses and acquire cultural resources and acumen is a key driver of the need to draw on other actors and organizations. For instance, in developing the Latino Community Credit Union large and successful actors in the financial and credit union sector felt that they were unable to adequately understand and service the unique needs of the Latino community (Fuqua School of Business 2004). During its formation, the LCCU recruited a broad array of Latino, community, church and minority support groups to address these knowledge and resource gaps, eventually leading to a successful and expanding community banking service (LCCU 2012). Successful collective social entrepreneurship ventures such as the Me to We Artisans, PeaceWorks and EcoPeace that cross national and cultural boundaries also rely heavily on community partners who have much deeper knowledge and understanding of the communities and cultures they serve. By considering and forming alliances with groups who bring a different lens these collectives have generally managed to avoid the criticisms of cultural insensitivity that plague numerous other well meaning ventures.

Discussion

Collective social entrepreneurship serves to leverage existing resources, build new resources and impact the emergence and reshaping of institutional arrangements to support scalable efforts for change. In contrast to the “heroic” view of the lone social entrepreneur we contend that social entrepreneurship does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, social entrepreneurship happens across levels and between actors, drawing on markets, movements and alliances as templates for success. We propose the concept of collective social entrepreneurship in an effort to understand the multitude of external actors that often collaborate to form and support entrepreneurial ventures, as well as to illuminate the mechanisms which aid in the success of such collaboration.

In identifying and emphasizing the need to examine collective forms of social entrepreneurship we contribute to the growing body of research in this area in several ways. First, we locate and situate the need for the concept of collective social entrepreneurship as an important research area. In doing so, we see the emergence and impact of collective social entrepreneurship operating in multiple arenas such as markets, movements, and organizations. Indeed, our illustrative examples highlight the role of collaborations and movements as both important inputs and outcomes of collective social entrepreneurial work.

Extending these ideas, future research may consider the extent to which collective social entrepreneurs manage their portfolio of relationships within and across sectors, and the dynamic nature of these portfolios. Examining how portfolios shift over time may include research on changing collaborations as the need for resources evolves, as partners’ resources change, and as projects reach completion or social needs vary. In addition, given the social motivation of social entrepreneurial collectives, considering the impacts on partnerships as collaborators’ credibility and legitimacy fluctuates over time will provide important insight into the nature of such alliances. For example, both Greenpeace and some scientists deem the Marine Stewardship Council’s certification of select fisheries as “unsustainable” (Cressey 2012; Smith 2011). If perpetuated, such criticisms may challenge the MSC’s relationships with its own fisheries and retail collaborators, with its ISEAL Alliance partners, and ultimately with consumers and policymakers.

Second, borrowing from the alliances literature we focus on resource flows and examine the extent to which pooling and trading arrangements vary across a broad range of collective social entrepreneurial work. As acknowledged in prior work (e.g. VanSandt et al. 2009), an understanding of strategic partnerships and resource flows is central to the success of both collective and individual social entrepreneurial ventures. As social entrepreneurs face significant resource voids, it is important to understand the ways in which they can mobilize certain resources and the extent to which strategies for resource acquisition and mobilization may vary within and across sectors. While for illustrative purposes our conceptual examples associated with Table 1 focus on each form of collaboration in isolation (e.g., same sector pooling of resources or cross sector trading, etc.) we acknowledge that for a collective social entrepreneur, engaging in only one form of collaboration is most likely not the norm. In reality, much collective social entrepreneurial work must leverage collective action within and between sectors while simultaneously pooling and trading multiple sets of needed resources over time.

Future researchers may wish to explore this complexity. For example, in his work on cross-sectoral collaboration

Austin (2000b) points out unique challenges that occur in cross-sector versus same sector alliances. These include different organizational cultures, varying performance objectives and incentive structures, distinct competitive environments, and even differences in professional languages (Austin 2000b, p. 93). While our paper suggests numerous advantages to cross-sectoral resource flows, understanding the challenges of such collaboration is also important. For instance, while same sector resource flows are likely to benefit from ease of communication between actors how do collective social entrepreneurial ventures balance between collaboration and competition between sectors when selecting partners? Cross-sector collaborations are likely to have very different challenges. For instance, as pointed out above (Austin 2000b) cross-sectoral actors will not “speak the same language” requiring translation between actors in the collective.

Research that examines the shifting temporality of resource needs and flows will also be valuable. Examples such as EcoPeace illustrate how a social issue such as the Arab–Israeli conflict, and the business solution for it, can fluctuate over time, calling for increasingly complex trading of cultural knowledge and cross-sectoral resources. Researchers might ask how the resource and alliance needs of collective social entrepreneurs vary over time, and how collectives respond to this ongoing need to restructure resources and relationships.

Third, we illuminate three strategic activities to effectively mobilize collective social entrepreneurship—framing, convening, and multivocality. Although preliminary, these suggest numerous opportunities for future research illuminating the strategies and activities required to bring about collaboration for social change efforts. Considering issues of partner selection and communication in these various forms of collaborative alliances will be particularly important. How does one identify, target and prioritize collaborators within and across sectors? Also, to what extent might framing play a role in moderating the extent to which cross-sector partners become interested and willing to collaborate for social change? Are convening strategies in this space different (more or less difficult, for example) if collaborating within the same sector or across sectors? Further, how could collective social entrepreneurial ventures pro-actively build multivocality so as to overcome partnership barriers, mitigate resource voids, and build legitimacy for their work?

Examining how actors overcome unique challenges related to same sector and cross-sector collaborations will also be fruitful for future research. The translation required in many cross-sectoral collectives may demand individuals who can work as intermediaries to broker between sectors, ‘speak’ both languages, and overcome these voids. For example, the U.K. based Partnership Brokers Association is

itself a not-for-profit running workshops to train individuals in the not-for-profit sector to perform the often challenging task of negotiating and managing cross-sectoral partnerships (PBAS 2012). Further research on the techniques and strategies required by these essential cross-sector intermediaries, brokers, and translators will be important for furthering such collaborations. Also, although we focus on sectors in this paper (i.e., government, for-profit, and not-for profit) considering industry membership of partners may also be important. For example, we might ask whether Habitat for Humanity may be better able to overcome cross-sectoral boundaries in communicating with its private sector donors because their organizations both belong, broadly speaking, to the building industry?

In addition to the above contributions we also note that collective action frequently demands collaboration and cooperative relationships with other forms of entrepreneurs including traditional, cultural and institutional entrepreneurs. Overlooking these important overlaps and intersections with other forms of entrepreneurship, and attempting to suggest that social entrepreneurship is unique, may in fact dilute both the depth and richness of the important entrepreneurial work undertaken by social entrepreneurs. Valuable future research might consider the means by which, and circumstances under which, these forms of entrepreneurship overlap and reinforce one another, especially where broad collectives of social entrepreneurial actors are working together to enact far reaching social, cultural, and institutional change.

For instance, institutional entrepreneurship suggests that collaborative change efforts are particularly effective, or necessary, in addressing important social and environmental issues including climate change (Wijen and Ansari 2006) and the use of the insecticide DDT (Maguire et al. 2004). This research emphasizes the collective dimension of institutional change and the involvement of a variety of actors (Battilana et al. 2009; Dorado 2005; Wijen and Ansari 2006), leading some researchers to conclude that a lone actor is “unlikely” to be solely responsible for institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire et al. 2004, p. 173). We also see important overlaps with cultural entrepreneurship. As Dacin et al. (2010) noted, there exists a “striking resemblance” between many social entrepreneurship ventures, which protect cultures and unique heritage, and the literature on cultural entrepreneurship. As we recognize the need for collective social entrepreneurs to cross-levels and sectoral boundaries the requirement to work with and incorporate multicultural and cross-cultural lenses and voices is vital for ventures working with local communities and seeking credibility (DiMaggio 1994). Collective social entrepreneurial ventures such as the Latino Community Credit Union and PeaceWorks, among others, highlight the importance of this cultural lens.

Finally, we note important interrelationships with, and implications for, markets, movements, and institutions. Collective social entrepreneurship leverages existing movements (environment, poverty, child labor, homelessness, etc.), drawing on this embeddedness to frame issues and convene and mobilize stakeholders. As well, we see collectives such as the United Way, EcoPeace, and ISEAL supporting existing movements and even creating new movements. Bringing together unique actors, collective social entrepreneurship also leverages market mechanisms in industries ranging from seafood to forestry and artisan jewelry, to drive demand and create novel markets. As well, social entrepreneurship collectives are able to leverage and mobilize numerous cross-sectoral actors to press for far-reaching institutional change. These activities stand in contrast to much of the work, although important, of lone social entrepreneurs. As Bornstein (2007) notes, “relatively few social entrepreneurs have achieved the levels of scale needed to excite state- and nation-level policy makers” (p. 14). Others have noted similar concerns about the relatively small “footprints” of social entrepreneurs (VanSandt et al. 2009, p. 419) and the limited scope for solving “large-scale social issues” (Sud et al. 2009, p. 201). However, by drawing on numerous actors, combining resources across sectors, and strategically using tools such as framing, convening, and multivocality to mobilize support and action, collaborative social entrepreneurial ventures may be more likely to move beyond these limitations, driving important and substantive social change.

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