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The great divides in social entrepreneurship and where they lead us

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Abstract While social entrepreneurship (SE) as a field of study has progressed some distance over the past four decades, it is plagued by many unanswered, yet fundamental, questions. The SE literature is filled with an abundance of disputes, controversies, and alternative perspectives. Although this can suggest a healthy and robust discipline, it can also raise questions regarding the legitimacy and relevancy of the field, and uncertainty regarding where it is headed. In this research, we provide a systematic overview of major unresolved issues characterizing the contemporary study of SE in the form of thirteen divides. These divides cover such issues as social value creation, social innovation, nature of the process, agents, entrepreneurial orientation, scalability, venture creation, revenue sources, organizational outcomes, efficacy, and the appropriate disciplinary home. Rather than taking sides on each divide, we discuss how these diverse perspectives can be accommodated based on the process perspective. We present an inclusive approach to SE that provides a common platform for advancing the field while allowing for diverse streams of research.

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1 Introduction

Social entrepreneurship (SE) has always been with us, but only in the last 40 years has it become a subject of study by scholars, and something policy officials and community leaders have overtly attempted to facilitate. It is a field (or, according to some, a sub-field) that remains fairly ambiguous. Beyond widely acknowledged disparities in how SE is defined and what its boundaries are (e.g., Bacq and Janssen 2011; Dacin et al. 2010), it represents an area of study where there is far more disagreement than agreement over a wide range of issues. Such vagueness can serve a positive purpose in terms of enabling the field to advance but ultimately holds the field back and can be its undoing. Not only does the lack of clarity work against theory development and conceptualization, but it also makes the ability to prioritize research questions or determine acceptable ways for investigating these questions problematic. It has led some to question the very value of, or need for (efficacy of), this field (Cook et al. 2003; Spicer et al. 2019).

At the heart of the controversy is the term social entrepreneurship. Combining these two words may not represent an oxymoron, but each takes us in very different directions. Social in this context concerns social relationships and change, the social good, and addressing societal needs that are not adequately met by the marketplace or government programs (Nicholls 2010; Ruebottom 2013). Entrepreneurship is, alternatively, about action or agency in recognizing and exploiting opportunities (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). At its essence, the idea of recognizing and exploiting opportunities to create social value would seem fairly clear, coherent, and ultimately, desirable. Less clear, however, is what constitutes social value, what are acceptable trade-offs in its creation, and what makes its creation entrepreneurial (i.e., compared to social value created by government agencies or private firms in the normal pursuit of their missions).

The purpose of the present research is to provide a systematic overview of major unresolved issues characterizing the contemporary study of social entrepreneurship. We capture these issues in the form of thirteen divides or debates, with each reflecting meaningful disagreement in the viewpoints of scholars. While additional areas of contention exist, we select these thirteen based on their potential to significantly impact the direction of SE as a field of study. Further, while differences of opinion can fuel the advancement of a discipline, the fundamental nature of these questions suggests that failure to find common ground among these disparate viewpoints can serve to hold back or marginalize SE as a field of study. Our approach is to introduce each divide and present prevalent perspectives on the underlying issues found in the published research. We then propose a unified perspective that, on the one hand, provides a common platform for advancing the field and, on the other hand, allows for disparate views and diverse streams of research.

2 The great divides

Would the substantial amount of social value created by Mother Teresa not just in the slums of Calcutta, but across the globe, be considered social entrepreneurship? What about a single individual who develops a new math curriculum that, when adopted by schools through her personal efforts, results in significant improvement in math performance by students living in poverty? And if someone successfully (or unsuccessfully) launches a nonprofit entity whose mission is to conserve the natural environment in Alaska using approaches successful in some other parts of the world, is this social entrepreneurship? What if this same nonprofit has come up with a novel way to financially sustain itself? What if the same initiative was instead launched by an established company or public agency? A reading of the contemporary SE literature would not produce any sort of consensus regarding the answers to these questions.

In attempting to unravel the complex mix of issues underlying these scenarios, we have identified a number of disputes, controversies, and alternative perspectives in the SE literature and recast them in the form of thirteen divides (see Fig. 1). Here, we use the term “divide” to refer to a contested issue having at least two opposing points of view. Our objective is not to take sides, but instead, demonstrate how these diverse perspectives can be accommodated in a manner that enables SE to progress. We begin with the meaning of the term “social entrepreneurship.”

2.1 Divide 1: What is social entrepreneurship?

Unfortunately, perhaps the biggest divide concerns ongoing disagreement regarding the very definition of SE. This has created such controversy that published studies have cited as many as thirty-seven (Dacin et al. 2010) and fifty-eight (Dato-on and Kalakay 2016) definitions. Bacq and Janssen (2011) offer seventeen definitions of a social entrepreneur, twelve of social entrepreneurship, and eighteen of a social entrepreneurship organization. Yet, researchers continue to put forward new perspectives, and the definitions proposed by the leading scholars or that appear in the top journals do not seem to take root in terms of adoption by others. Some of this disparity may be due to the various disciplines (e.g., entrepreneurship, nonprofit management, sociology, anthropology, political science, public policy) represented in the discussion, as well as issues associated with the geographic location of the researcher (e.g., government policies) (Bacq and Janssen 2011; Peattie and Morley 2008).

Based on attempts at a synthesis of these definitional perspectives, some of the more common elements of social entrepreneurship can be identified. Dees (1998) stresses social goals, the mission-based recognition and pursuit of opportunity, innovation, and proactive

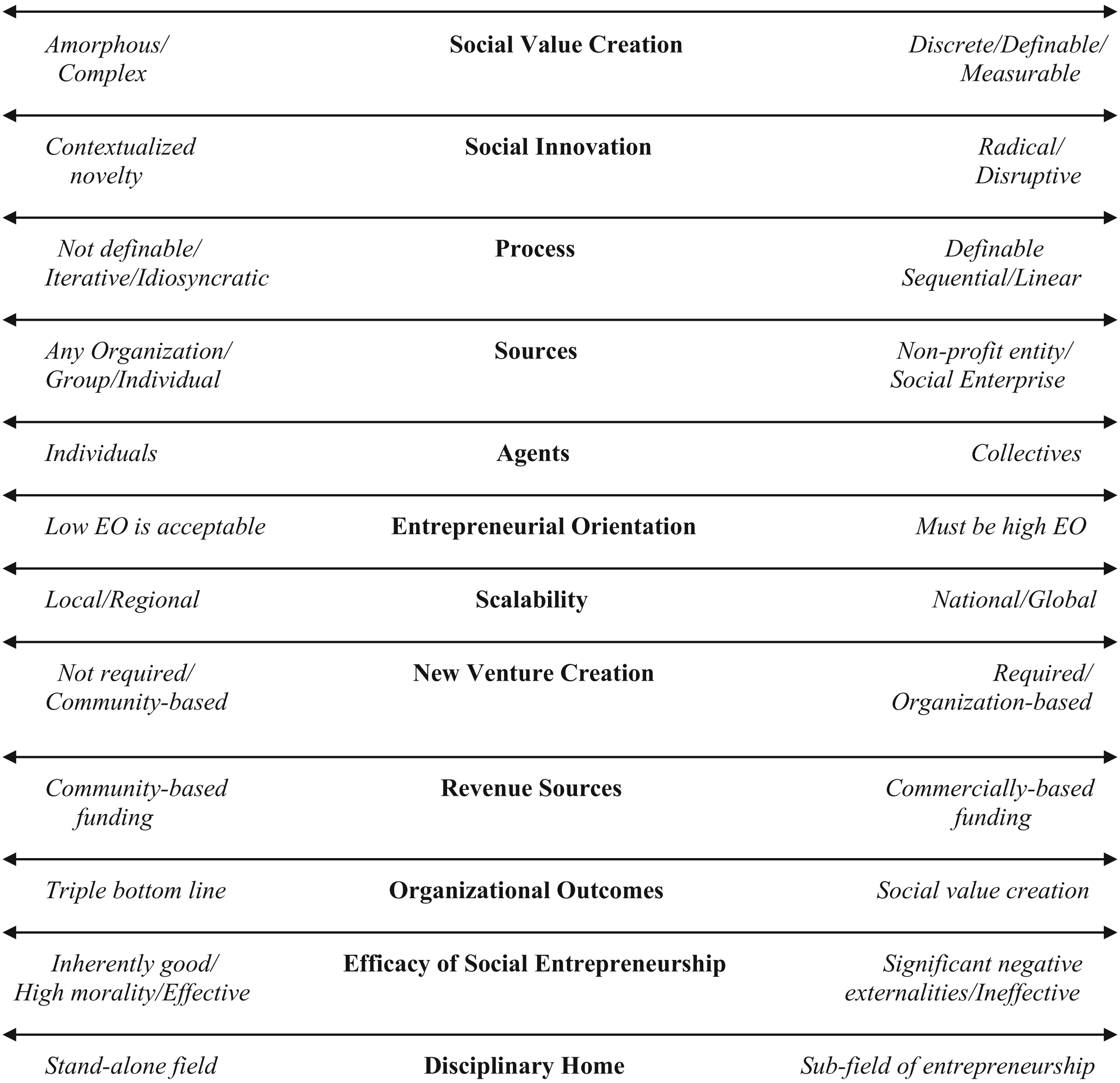

Fig. 1 Sample of critical dilemmas in social entrepreneurship

behavior in spite of resource constraints. Peredo and McLean (2006) highlight social value creation, engagement in a process, and creation of a social enterprise. Steiner and Teasdale (2017) add building a sustainable business model and the scaling of social impact. Bacq and Janssen (2011) include the role of commercial, market-based activities in contributing to social value creation. Helm and Andersson (2010) discuss offering a new social solution in an unserved place or space. Each of these elements is cited by multiple sources, but each raises questions or controversies.

A troubling aspect of the confusion over how SE is delineated is the tendency to incorporate variables into the definition which might not universally apply to SE in practice, in effect delimiting the field in ways that would appear to be arbitrary. The variable in question may indeed be relevant for the study and understanding of SE, but not central to how it is conceptualized. For example, the use of business methods and means (e.g., business models, earned income strategies) may (or may not) represent effective vehicles for accomplishing social purposes. But, neither would seem core to how SE is defined.

An alternative approach is to determine what social entrepreneurship is not. Here, there may be some consensus on at least four aspects. First, it is not charity (Dees 2007), even if the recipient of social value is not paying for it. Second, it is not nonprofit management (e.g., Austin et al. 2006), even though the large majority of social ventures are organized as nonprofit entities. Third, SE is not the same as social innovation (e.g., Battilana et al. 2018), even though many believe that social innovation is a prerequisite for SE. Fourth, it is not the same as corporate social responsibility (e.g., Choi and Majumdar 2014), even though some initiatives undertaken in the name of social responsibility could constitute SE.

Our other divides, and how they are resolved, may be instrumental in helping scholars and other involved parties arrive at a common definition. Most of them address variables highlighted above. The first of these concerns social value.

2.2 Divide 2: What qualifies as social value creation and how is it measured?

All organizations can generate social value, including commercial enterprises (Mair 2010). However, with SE initiatives, the generation of social value (SV) is their raison d'être. Here, social value refers to "the fulfillment of basic and long-standing needs such as providing food, water, shelter, education, and medical services to those members of society who are in need" (Certo and Miller 2008, p. 267).

While this definition seems fairly straightforward, less clear is what makes a need basic or long-standing, where one draws the line in terms of who is in need, and how one differentiates the quality from the quantity in determining the value. Hence, providing food to the poor (however defined) may represent the creation of SV, but what about providing them with cell phones (Santos 2012)? And what if the food is less nutritious or healthy? A related question concerns "value at what level?". The social entrepreneur may adopt a micro focus, emphasizing value to the beneficiary (i.e., the illiterate person who becomes literate, the person who had no accessible water supply but now does). Here, if we think of value as the difference between benefit and cost, the value proposition seems readily apparent for a user who is not paying anything. Of course, we may want to consider any non-economic costs to the beneficiary. However, most observers suggest we consider value at a more macro level, such as to the community or society (e.g., Dees and Anderson, 2006; Lumpkin et al. 2013). Capturing value at a macro level is more complex, as it introduces additional dimensions to whatever type of SV one is emphasizing.

In a related vein, we might distinguish the type of SV emphasized in an organization's mission statement from other social impacts resulting from its operations. If an enterprise or activity produces significant social value through a unique approach to housing the homeless (its mission), but the approach produces negative environmental impacts, leads to a rise in crime, or somehow breaks up families, should we not be concerned with the net amount of SV creation? Santos (2012) speaks for those who advocate a broader or more holistic concept of value. Consistent with economic theory, his focus is on the increase in the utility of society's members (after accounting for the opportunity cost of all the resources used in the activity). With this approach, we focus on all the values created by the social entrepreneur, including economic value. This could aid the ability to compare across organizational types.

SV tends to be subjective, malleable, and variable in nature (Mulgan 2010). As such, knowing how much value is being produced is a unique challenge varying in complexity based on one's purpose (e.g., cleaning up rivers vs. preventing AIDS vs. making spaces user-friendly for those with disabilities). This has led some to lament a shortage of subject matter experts, best practices, and precedents to follow when creating social value (Lumpkin et al. 2013).

The messiness of SV leads to divides over how (and even if) it can be measured. Despite the large volume of approaches to measuring social value and social return on investment put forth over the years, these debates continue. For instance, the validity and reliability of measures are criticized for their lack of rigor, the arbitrary estimate of costs and paybacks, questionable proxy measures to capture social benefits, key externalities produced by the SE initiative, failure to include other factors contributing to the benefit, and an inability to capture the temporal dimension of SV (e.g., Arvidson et al. 2013; Eurodiaconia 2013; Tuan 2008). Mulgan (2010) finds metrics rarely guide actual decision-making because different measures are not used for accounting to external stakeholders, managing internal operations, and assessing societal impact.

2.3 Divide 3: What is the nature and role of innovation in SE?

Like SE, social innovation has been defined in various ways (Cahill 2010). Examples include "a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals" (Phills et al. 2008) and "a new idea that has the potential to improve either the quality or quantity of life" (Pol and Ville 2009).

The "social" dimension of the concept is interpreted in different ways. There are those who interpret it exclusively in terms of outcomes, or the social benefit to society of a new approach (Pol and Ville 2009). Others suggest it is about social interactions, or new ideas regarding how people should interact, collaborate, and organize personal activities, such that society's ability to act is enhanced (Howaldt and Kopp 2012; Martinelli, 2012). Still others are concerned with innovations that change cultural, normative, or regulative structures in society (Heiskala 2007).

What do social innovations look like? Within SE, they take many forms, including new products, services, operating and distribution processes, business models, organizing approaches, community practices, and conceptualizations (Anderson et al. 2014; Pol and Ville 2009; Westley et al. 2014). Some are facilitated by new technologies/technology applications, but technologies are frequently not at the center of social innovations. While the general emphasis would appear to be on developments that are transformational (Cahill, 2010) or system-changing (Avelino et al. 2017), there is some sentiment that they can be more incremental improvements (Dawson and Daniel 2010; Gerlach 2003). Must we solve poverty or is it enough to creatively manage it? In fact, most real-world initiatives cited in the SE literature have an element of innovation included, but it is well short of being radical or disruptive. Even here, there is no real standard for what constitutes transformational innovation (and is it transformational in design, in the value created, or in its actual impact on society?). An approach that is new or novel is not necessarily innovative, although some suggest newness is enough (e.g., Choi and Majumdar 2014). The question becomes one of establishing how much of a departure from established approaches is necessary to label a social initiative as innovative.

Most would agree that social innovation is not social entrepreneurship (Phillips et al. 2015; Portales 2019), although some use the terms interchangeably. Innovation and its associated processes can result in a solution to a problem. However, once an innovation is produced in one form or another, it will confront any number of parties who do not believe it is viable, stakeholders who find it threatening, and potential adopters who resist the change it represents. Social entrepreneurship is concerned with overcoming the obstacles, creating an organization or other platforms for the innovation's development and diffusion, attracting and deploying the financial and non-financial resources necessary for the initial launch and sustainability, and implementing the innovation in a manner that actually resolves the social problem.

The issue then becomes whether or not social innovation is a necessary component of social entrepreneurship. If an individual or organization engages in actions that create social value and is able to address a social problem or need, but the approach is not new and innovative (e.g., they just do it better, with greater tenacity and perseverance, or in a different context than it has been done before), are we still talking about SE?

2.4 Divide 4: To the extent that SE represents a process, what does the process look like?

As a method for bringing about social change, SE is said to involve a process (Lumpkin et al. 2013; Short et al. 2009). A process perspective is valued because (a) processes are manageable, indicating there is a logical set of steps to be followed, with techniques available for addressing the issues in each stage; (b) processes are learnable, suggesting SE is not the province of an elite group but instead that anyone can do it; and (c) processes can be applied in differing contexts, allowing for SE in the nonprofit, for-profit, and other contexts. It is a perspective that is dominant in mainstream entrepreneurship (Baron and Shane 2007).

In spite of the benefits, the actual nature of the SE process is not well established. One explanation would be that identifying a common process is problematic as every social entrepreneur's journey is idiosyncratic. Another argument is that the relevant steps to be traversed depend upon how one resolves the other divides presented here. If innovation must be involved, a formal organization must be created, a venture must be scaled, or the activity centers on collectives more than individuals, we are likely to conceptualize a different process.

Yet, a synthesis of work addressing aspects of the SE process enables us to identify some of the major steps or stages involved. Examples include social opportunity recognition (Murphy and Coombes 2009), formulation of a social value proposition (Corner and Ho 2010), establishment of an entity or delivery platform and an associated mission (Chell 2007), assessment of resource needs and mobilization of resources (Desa and Basu 2013), addressing stakeholder concerns and requirements (Diochon et al. 2011), social value production and dissemination (Lumpkin et al. 2013), collective action (Corner and Ho 2010) and scaling of social impact (Dees et al. 2004).

If a definable process is involved, the related question concerns how the social entrepreneur navigates this process. In mainstream entrepreneurship, there are signaling mechanisms that serve to guide the entrepreneur on his/her journey. The profit mechanism signals bad decisions and a need to revisit one's approach. The price mechanism signals (in)effective differentiation and the perceived value being created. For the social entrepreneur, the signals can be vague, infrequent, and mixed. They come from interfaces with multiple stakeholders (donors, volunteers, recipients of services, employees, board members, community leaders, strategic partners) who can differ meaningfully in their goals and priorities, and hence the kind of feedback they provide.

2.5 Divide 5: Where does social entrepreneurship originate?

Social entrepreneurship is often associated with the nonprofit sector (Austin et al. 2006), and this is certainly the most prevalent source of SE. The fact that nonprofits are mission-driven, and reinvest any net revenues into serving the mission, would seem consistent with SE. Of course, there are nonprofits that do not necessarily serve societal needs or create social value (e.g., many political action committees in the USA). For those that do serve this purpose, many would argue that creating social value is not enough for the activity to be considered social entrepreneurship—there must be innovation (Dees 1998; Lumpkin et al. 2013).

Consider the YMCA, a nonprofit that today provides services related to youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. It creates social value through many of its community-based and community-building programs, has scaled to 120 national associations around the world, and relies on a mix of revenue drivers to sustain the organization. One could make the case that the founder of the YMCA, Sir George Williams, was a social entrepreneur, as he launched an innovative approach for men to escape the hazards of life on the streets of London while crossing rigid lines separating English social classes (Winter 2002). At some point in its evolution, however, did the organization become an effective social service provider, not a source of SE, based on adherence to an established operating model with no major innovation?

The bigger question is whether nonprofit status, which provides an organizational context conducive to SE, is a requisite condition. One school of thought would be that it is not, but this is due to new organizational forms that have arisen in some countries. Hybrid structures, such as the Community Interest Company in the United Kingdom, and various types of social and solidarity economy enterprises in France, have been created to foster SE.

An alternative perspective allows for SE to be pursued by for-profit organizations (Kistruck and Beamish 2010; Weerawardena and Mort 2006). Here, there appear to be two pathways. The first is social-purpose commercial ventures, such as Tom's Shoes with their "one for one" model of giving away a pair for shoes for every pair sold. Here, we might also include benefit corporations in the USA, which are traditional for-profits where directors and officers must consider the impact of decisions not just on shareholders but also on employees, customers, the community, and the local and global environments. We might also include the Certified B Corporation, where companies in many countries can earn a private certification based on achieving a minimum score for their social and environmental performance. The second pathway concerns SE activities pursued by conventional profit-seeking organizations. An illustration can be found with Starbucks, which has successfully partnered with Conservation International to facilitate environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable coffee production around the world. This latter pathway differs from the broader concept of corporate social responsibility, or a company's self-regulatory actions in the areas of corporate citizenship, community engagement, support for social causes, and corporate philanthropy (Crisan and Borza 2012).

More controversial is whether government agencies can initiate social entrepreneurship (Bellone and Goerl 1992; Shockley and Frank 2011). Dees (2007) questions government as a platform for SE, viewing it more as a facilitator (e.g., through policy formulation and funding). However, growing interest in public sector entrepreneurship would suggest government entities can play more proactive roles, where successful implementation of public sector innovations creates social value and addresses unmet community needs (Leyden 2016; Moore 2005; Shockley, et al., 2006). We see this in the case of ACCESS Miami, a citywide, comprehensive empowerment initiative that increases citizen access to financial tools and education needed for economic prosperity. Working with local partners, the ACCESS model seeks to equip the entire community with the wealth-building capability necessary for economic self-sufficiency and financial resiliency. Many of these kinds of initiatives originate at a local or regional government level (e.g., an innovative recycling initiative, a novel program to target at-risk families before they became homeless) but then become replicable models, where the originator helps with dissemination to officials in other locales, enabling a kind of scaling. The case has also been made that public policies themselves can represent a form of social entrepreneurship (Carnes, et al., 2019; Leyden and Link 2015; Mintrom and Norman 2009). An example is the Bayh-Dole Act, which changed the system of technology transfer in the USA and contributed to a significant increase in applied research in many scientific fields.

Another possibility, one especially promoted by scholars outside entrepreneurship or business disciplines, is that community action can result in SE (Spear 2010). For instance, Seyfang and Smith (2007) discuss grassroots innovation and the potential for locally based groups to generate socially embedded changes in behavior related to sustainable production and consumption (e.g., of food). Wamuchiru and Moulaert (2018) describe how active engagement of marginalized communities resulted in social provision of water and sanitation services but also in building new institutional structures and a nonconventional technological model of water supply and sewage disposal in Kenya's informal settlements. Unfortunately, as reflected in some of our other divides, much of the current architecture of SE does not fit well with these scenarios.

The same can be said for solo individuals operating independently. This final potential source of SE finds one or more individuals developing a social innovation and working tirelessly to foster its diffusion. This could include our earlier instance of the inventor of a novel way of teaching math in underprivileged schools, or a software platform to provide access to the sharing economy to those in adverse or remote circumstances.

2.6 Divide 6: Is social entrepreneurship about collectives or individuals?

SE is arguably more about people than organizations. However, the relative importance of individuals versus collectives is a subject for discussion. One can identify an anti-individualism sentiment informing scholarly work on SE. Nicholls and Cho (2006, p. 206) decry the emergence of an "innovative, romantic hero" who is engaged in the "untrammeled pursuit of a messianic social vision." Some of this is based on the argument that SE is inherently social, and so the focus should be on relationships, collectives, and the community as facilitators of novel solutions to social problems (e.g., Dey and Steyaert 2012; Rimac et al. 2012). Further, SE initiatives are likely to be more sustainable and lessen negative spillover effects if approached from a collective vantage point. There may also be an anti-capitalism school that associates individualism with the values and logics of a type of economic system and challenges the consistency of these values and logics with the advancement of social well-being (e.g., Hervieux et al. 2010; Spicer et al. 2019). The divide gives rise to questions concerning the role of democracy in SE, and the extent to which individual action becomes inconsistent with democratic principles. To date, we have few insights regarding the implications of more (or less) democracy at different stages in the SE process.

The other side of this divide argues that SE does not happen without the agency of key individuals (see Ruebottom 2013), such that there would be no Grameen Bank without Mohamad Yunus, and no Habitat for Humanity without Millard and Linda Fuller. Individuals formulate a vision that reflects an alternative picture of reality and what is possible. They put together teams, take personal risks, assemble and combine resources, motivate employees and volunteers, and persevere in moving a social initiative forward. In this view, a process driven by collectives or a quest for consensus will require much more time to get things done (if they ever get done) and will result in solutions that are less radical or demonstrate lower degrees of innovativeness (Pinillos and Reyes 2011).

Proponents of the instrumental role of individuals in the SE process do not necessarily endorse the hero mythology (Light 2006). It is a type of rhetoric that seems to elevate the individual and make SE the province of a select group of people who have the "right stuff" in terms of key characteristics (Dacin et al. 2011;

Nicholls 2010). Acknowledging the central importance of individuals need not lead to this kind of elitist conclusion and is compatible with the idea that any individual can be a social entrepreneur.

There was, similarly, early interest shown by mainstream entrepreneurship scholars in the nature of the entrepreneur. Scholars focused on identifying personal characteristics and traits, and this was roundly challenged based on both the methodologies employed and the relevance of the findings (Bird 1989; Shaver and Scott 1992). Part of the problem is that entrepreneurs tend to be more different than similar (Morris et al. 2012). However, the work on the individual was not abandoned. It moved into new arenas that would also seem quite relevant in SE, such as competencies and cognitive styles that contribute to entrepreneurial success and are learnable (Morris et al. 2013; Sarasvathy 2009).

Like most of our divides, empirical evidence does not drive the discussion. Yet, underlying this discussion are important issues that go to the very root of our understanding of how SE happens, and the associated dynamics of individuals, groups, and their interplay. It would seem both matter and each plays a variety of roles. Each affects and is affected by opportunity discovery and assessment, innovation processes, recognition and acquisition of resources, power dynamics, decision-making processes, social resistance, outcomes, and a host of other variables.

2.7 Divide 7: What role does entrepreneurial orientation play in SE, and particularly risk?

Similar to our example of the YMCA, it would seem that Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus is a social entrepreneur based on his founding and scaling the Grameen Bank. But in a world where many models of microfinance have successfully emerged and spread across the globe, do we continue to consider the contemporary Grameen Bank to be engaged in SE? The answer, according to some (e.g., Helm and Andersson 2010; Lurtz and Kreutzer 2017), is that it depends on the organization's current entrepreneurial orientation (EO).

Well established in mainstream entrepreneurship, the EO concept has three behavioral dimensions: innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness (Wiklund and Shepherd 2003). Organizations are more entrepreneurial based on higher performance across all three dimensions. As such, EO offers a partial solution to the question of whether something is, or is not, social entrepreneurship by eliminating the dichotomy. If SE involves acting on opportunities for value creation by developing and implementing novel solutions to social problems, those who do so will vary in terms of how entrepreneurial their solution or approach is. Accordingly, an initiative can be less innovative, risky, or proactive and still be considered social entrepreneurship. Aspects of the SE context contributing to a stronger or weaker EO (e.g., nature of social opportunities, stakeholder expectations, access to resources) have been explored by Lumpkin et al. (2013).

The counter view questions the centrality of EO to how we approach social entrepreneurship. One issue concerns how entrepreneurial the solution to the social problem is versus how entrepreneurial the organization implementing the solution appears to be. If a solution is very entrepreneurial and the organization is organized in a manner that it is very effective in implementing the solution, but is not engaged in ongoing decision-making that reflects high levels of risk or continuous innovation, it has a low EO score. Yet, it may be a superb illustration of social entrepreneurship.

A more troubling challenge lies with the temporal nature of EO. An organization may go through periods where it demonstrates a high EO, and others where EO is much lower. If we equate a higher EO with social entrepreneurship, does this imply discrete periods where something is considered to be SE? If EO scores tend to be highest when something is first launched, and decline once a working model and sustainability are established (such as with Habitat for Humanity today), has it stopped being social entrepreneurship?

Another issue concerns the dimensions of EO. Morris et al. (2011) have identified fundamental ways in which these dimensions must be reconceptualized to fit a social context. Such a reconceptualization adds significant complexity within and across the dimensions. Yet, the available empirical work in SE relies on minor adaptations of the EO measures used in conventional entrepreneurship (e.g., Lurtz and Kreutzer 2017; Pearce et al. 2010; Morris et al. 2007). Risk-taking is an especially vexing challenge, as it is difficult to identify the relationship between risk levels and prospective social returns. Further, one must simultaneously consider financial risks, risks associated with not achieving the social purpose, and those related to various stakeholders—and the interdependencies among the three. What represents less risk to one stakeholder can mean more risk to another. Issues such as these may explain the relatively limited attention devoted to EO in work on social entrepreneurship, especially relative to the significant attention it receives in the conventional entrepreneurship arena.

2.8 Divide 8: If it does not scale or attempt to scale is it still social entrepreneurship?

Steiner et al. (2018) suggest the ability to scale social impact is central to how SE should be approached. Scaling is typically associated with aggressive growth, which in a social context is defined as "closing the gap between the real and ideal conditions as they pertain to certain social needs or problems" (Bloom 2012). Entirely closing such a gap would suggest the elimination of sex trafficking, poverty, or hunger, which are laudable goals, but scaling likely involves something less than this (unless the social problem is only local). The question is whether an innovative approach that creates social value at a local level does not count (or counts less) when it is not replicable, or, if replicable, is not scaled to reach other communities or contexts. How many replications are necessary? Is Habitat for Humanity, which now operates in over seventy countries, considered social entrepreneurship, but a social innovation developed and successfully implemented by a community action group to provide clean water to low-income households in Flint, Michigan, somehow not SE? Would it not be SE if it was not transferable? How about if it was transferable but no attempt is made to apply it elsewhere? What if it was transferable but failed for other reasons when attempting to extend the solution to other communities?

Dees et al. (2004) make clear that many social entrepreneurs are not adept at scaling, and, while they stress the importance of scaling and provide approaches for doing so, acknowledge that it is rare. One of the most surprising aspects of SE research is how little scholars seem to know about the landscape of ventures and initiatives that ostensibly represent social entrepreneurship. If we consider mainstream entrepreneurship, between 45 and 55% of new ventures fail within 5 years (Morris and Kuratko 2020). There is no similar statistic available for social entrepreneurship. Further, less than 1% of for-profit start-ups result in aggressive growth ventures that scale. This does not mean that the other 99% are not entrepreneurial or do not count. When extended to social entrepreneurship, if it is discovered that only 1% of social initiatives ever achieve scale, the field of social entrepreneurship must decide whether its focus is just the 1% (as Shane (2009) argues it should be for conventional start-ups), or whether scaling is a desirable but not requisite aspect of SE?

2.9 Divide 9: Is it necessary to create a new enterprise to be considered a social entrepreneur?

Does something become social entrepreneurship when a new solution is implemented and social value is created, when an organization is launched, or at some other point? Much of the contemporary work on SE presupposes the creation of an organization and the adoption of business/commercial means to sustain it (Chell 2007; Hervieux et al. 2010). Hence, the social entrepreneur launches a nonprofit or for-profit entity whose primary purpose is to create social value through some innovative means. This emphasis on organization creation may be a vestige of mainstream entrepreneurship, where scholars such as Gartner (1988) suggest that entrepreneurship must be conceptualized as the launch of a new business.

Peredo and McLean (2006, p. 57) allow for the fact that "the relationship between social entrepreneurship and social enterprises, i.e., particular organizations or institutions, is more complex." Many examples exist in entrepreneurship where no new venture is created, such as with many forms of corporate entrepreneurship (Morris et al. 2013), or where no existing organization is required as the initiator, such as with institutional and cultural entrepreneurship or sustainable entrepreneurship (Maguire et al. 2004; Wry et al. 2011; Shepherd and Patzelt 2011). Within SE, Kistruck and Beamish (2010) use the term "social intrapreneurship" to describe existing for-profit and nonprofit organizations that engage in SE, often without launching a new entity. Consider the case where a university launches a community engagement initiative based on an innovative approach to helping those in poverty receive health care. They manage to attract a donor who endows the program, and they create a network of other universities that adopt the same innovative approach. It is SE based on a novel, social value-creating initiative, not the launch of a new organization.

SE is about recognizing and addressing social opportunities, and, in the process, producing a social return. The central concern is social value creation. Creating an organization can help facilitate this process and, in some cases, may be a necessity. Further, the ability to scale the value creation effort would seem dependent on an organization platform. But, social entrepreneurship can be effected without the creation of a new organization. Further, it can be effected without the presence of an existing organization. As we have discussed, it is also possible for individuals or communities of individuals, operating without a formal entity, to develop innovative solutions that create social value and leverage community resources.

The alternative view that a new venture must be created is especially prominent within what Bacq and Janssen (2011) refer to as the social enterprise school in the USA and the EMES school in Europe, where the focus is on commercial strategies (self-generated revenue streams and professional management practices) when pursuing a social mission and/or the material interest of capital investors is subject to limits. Here, we prioritize an organization that usually has nonprofit or hybrid status, but it frees itself from dependence on grants and gifts by developing sustainable revenue streams. Consistent with this view, governments in some countries have instituted new hybrid organizational forms where the purpose is to extend or go beyond the traditional nonprofit entity in ways that encourage SE (Artz et al. 2012).

Finally, if an organization must be created, it becomes relevant to ask how many of these enterprises a society can support. Stated differently, is there a natural rate of social entrepreneurship? Scholars in mainstream entrepreneurship refer to such a rate, implying that a nation can be too entrepreneurial (Audretsch et al. 2007). With SE, how much is too much? If we assume that an enterprise need not be created, would there still be a natural rate?

2.10 Divide 10: What role does finding a self-generating revenue stream play in SE?

Considerable attention in recent years has been devoted to the revenue models of ventures created to serve a social purpose (Dey and Steyaert 2012; Kerlin and Pollak 2006). As nonprofits are historically dependent upon some mix of grants, endowments, gifts, sponsorships, and periodic fundraising events, the lack of stability or dependability of these sources has encouraged the development of internal sources of revenue based on earned income. This means a fairly steady stream of revenue is generated from such activities as fees for program services, dues and assessments, income from special events, and profit from sales of goods.

Some observers make the establishment of a self-generated revenue stream a defining characteristic of a venture engaged in SE (e.g., Boschee and McClurg 2003). With this line of thinking, these nonprofits become entrepreneurial based on achieving economic self-sufficiency and sustainability (Abu-Saifan 2012). Further, establishing a more commercially based funding model is thought to represent a source of legitimacy (Steyaert and Dey, 2010).

The alternative viewpoint is that the economic sustainability of an organization is an issue independent of SE. All organizations strive to sustain themselves, and developing new revenue streams can certainly contribute to this. Consider a nonprofit symphony that, based on the experiences of other symphonies, adds a gift shop that proves to be lucrative. Arguably, this is simply good management practice. Creativity in resourcing is an everyday requirement. In SE, new revenue streams (or lines of business) are facilitators. Further, terms like "earned income strategies" suggest that grants, sponsorships, and gifts are unearned and so less desirable. The relevance (and legitimacy) of a particular revenue source would seem dependent on the context.

There are also plenty of cases where a nonprofit flourishes without dependency on an internally devised revenue source. Two good illustrations can be found in Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontiers) and Benetech. The first of these provides medical care to people in distress, including victims of political violence and natural disasters, while the second crafts technological solutions to meet social needs, ranging from literacy to human rights and landmine detection. Organized as nonprofit entities, with revenue models that are highly dependent on gifts, grants, and crowdfunding, both ventures have managed to achieve significant scale.

Some critics go further and suggest the quest for market-based revenue streams actually undermines the legitimacy of social entrepreneurship, and particularly its concern with equity and community need (Hervieux et al. 2010; Spicer et al.2019). It is based on a market logic and not a civic logic. In this view, centering SE on self-generated revenue is predicated on market values that can only serve to erode the values around which the mission of a social initiative is built.

2.11 Divide 11: How does the double- or triple-bottom line factor into SE?

What role do financial, social, and environmental bottom lines play in SE? The assumption that any organization involved in SE has to attract resources to remain viable leads some to spend considerable effort exploring where the money comes from and its relationship to accomplishment of the social mission. When that revenue is from commercial activities, concerns are raised about the extent to which this complements, comes at the expense of, or actually compromises social value creation (e.g., Weisbrod 2004). Consistent with this concern, Santos (2012) suggests we delineate something as being SE based on the extent to which an organization demonstrates more concern with value creation than value capture, while Arend (2013) indicates a need to look at the proportionate emphasis on social returns versus commercial or economic returns. The discussion gravitates towards determining what the optimal balance between social and economic benefits should be.

Those who reject this line of reasoning believe that it makes no difference where revenue comes from, or if the organization is disproportionately emphasizing commercial returns. To the contrary, so this argument goes, the only bottom line that matters is the social value being created through an innovative approach to societal problems or needs. This phenomenon is our subject of interest—with everything else being contextual. As a result, the double- or triple-bottom line raises interesting research questions, but it is not central to the conceptualization of SE. And distinguishing these other bottom lines may not be relevant in certain contexts.

Also important here is the distinction between social and environmental bottom lines. Some posit that these must be approached separately (Shepherd and Patzelt 2011), while others see them as part of a single concept (Bacq and Janssen 2011). Many examples exist of SE initiatives directed at saving the environment, such that environmental action can produce social value. More complicated is the situation where the social entrepreneur produces social value in one area (say poverty), but at some environmental cost. Does the negative environmental value simply negate the social value produced by the poverty initiative, should it be subtracted from the social value, or should it be ignored?

2.12 Divide 12: Is social entrepreneurship inherently "good," and does it actually work?

Our penultimate divide concerns the perceived goodness of SE. As Dey and Steyaert (2010, p. 88) note, "the grand narrative of social entrepreneurship comprises, among other things, a high level of univocity, unambiguousness, one-sidedness as well as a quasi-religious makeover." SE is good because of the innate goodness involved in creating social value, and is even better to the extent that it brings sound business practices to otherwise less efficient approaches to social value creation. It is approached as a guardian of virtue and morality and is based on a script of harmonious social change (Dey and Steyaert 2012; Mair and Marti 2006).

The counter-position is that even if social entrepreneurship is based on good intentions, it almost always results in negative outcomes or externalities. For instance, evidence has been provided regarding a number of adverse outcomes from the microcredit movement in base of the pyramid contexts (Dichter and Harper 2007). Beyond this, the social change that is part of any successful SE initiative can have economic, social, psychological, and emotional costs that one can only hope are exceeded by the social benefit. SE represents an allocation of societal resources, which implies an opportunity cost that again one hopes is less than the social return on investment generated. Accordingly, it would seem important to acknowledge the potential for these various costs to exceed the benefits, and so to question any SE initiative on this basis. Even if the major social costs are estimated and factored into the equation, we are not especially good at assessing social performance and impact (Mair and Marti 2006).

The efficiency of social entrepreneurship initiatives is also not well established. The argument that a contemporary focus on employing effective management practices heightens the efficiency of these efforts (Bacq and Janssen 2011; Nicolopoulou 2014) suggests that historical efforts at social value creation were inefficient, but there is little evidence of the relative efficiency of most social enterprises. Consider the attempt by Boyan Slat, a Dutch social entrepreneur who launched Ocean Cleanup, to remove large garbage patches in the Pacific Ocean. While the ultimate success or failure of his efforts after raising millions of dollars in social venture capital is yet to be determined, he has encountered numerous setbacks, and it is not at all clear that his approach to innovation has been executed in an especially efficient manner (Kart 2019; Krathowill 2019). Again, under-emphasizing this inefficiency simply based on the assumption that reducing plastics in the ocean is good can only serve to undermine the legitimacy and advancement of SE as a field of study.

A more striking position is taken by Spicer et al. (2019) (see also Sud et al. 2009). The authors posit that the social entrepreneurship approach to solving social problems does not work. It actually does damage by "eclipsing proven, effective strategies for solving major social problems, in particular the political approach to organizing communities of interest." (p. 197). Although they produce no specific evidence of ineffectiveness, the authors note a lack of empirical proof of success or evidence of meaningful social change. In their data-gathering efforts, they found little evidence of rigorous assessments by SE organizations regarding their impact, or their failure rates. The reliance on social return on investment tools by these organizations is faulted for not being based on rigorous social science research methods.

2.13 Divide 13: Does SE have an academic home?

The extent to which social entrepreneurship is a sub-category of mainstream entrepreneurship, a stand-alone field, or has some other disciplinary home is an open question. Is it similar to ethics in the sense that it is rooted in one discipline but is inherently driven by contributions from across disciplines? The field of entrepreneurship routinely refers to SE as a sub-field (Nicolopoulou 2014; Steiner 2017), where aspects of conventional entrepreneurship can be directly applied (e.g., opportunity recognition, resource leveraging, risk mitigation, the value proposition, the business plan, and business model). In this view, social entrepreneurship is not simply "like" entrepreneurship—it is entrepreneurship. Both entrepreneurship and SE are action-based pursuits, where the initiator is constructing a new social reality, and much of what works emerges through a process of trial and error, learning, and adaptation.

At the same time, the extent to which this relationship is embraced by mainstream entrepreneurship scholars is debatable. Although social entrepreneurship courses are offered as part of the entrepreneurship curriculum in many business schools (perhaps to fill a gap), they are also frequently offered by departments outside of business schools (Steiner et al. 2018). The leading journals in entrepreneurship and management publish relatively few articles on social entrepreneurship. Academic units in business schools rarely hire social entrepreneurship specialists for tenure track positions, and most have not established a career track for a scholar focused exclusively on social entrepreneurship. It is rare to find entrepreneurship programs where a specific research agenda in SE has been established and is actively supported.

At a more fundamental level, we might question the extent to which the scholarly findings in mainstream entrepreneurship inform research advances in the SE arena, and how much the theories, principles, concepts, and frameworks that are core to mainstream entrepreneurship are the most effective when dealing with social value creation. One wonders how much from entrepreneurship is being forced to fit the SE context when it does not naturally apply. Certainly one can adapt concepts such as Osterwalder and Pigneur's (2010) business model canvas or Mullins's (2012) opportunity assessment matrix to the SE context, but might there be better tools built upon different conceptual underpinnings? There are novel aspects of SE that represent more than simple nuances. Social value is less concrete than economic value and much harder to measure in terms of both quality and quantity. Its measurement can differ dramatically from one context to the next. Further, much of the social value being created is not being captured by the social entrepreneur, as the price mechanism, profit measurement, and related architecture taken from the marketplace (e.g., a focal customer base, competitive advantage) may not directly apply. Other concepts, such as equity ownership, deal structures, and an exit strategy, may be less meaningful. Alternatively, the roles of community action, mobilization of diverse stakeholders, confrontation, political negotiation, and the fostering of behavioral change are more central to SE.

It is these central differences that raise the question as to whether SE is better approached as a stand-alone field. This possibility (or at least further distancing SE from mainstream entrepreneurship) is ostensibly endorsed by Dey and Steyaert (2012, p. 101) in their lament that "instead of being seen as an instrument for unsettling ruling conventions, paradigms or dominant (economic) systems, social entrepreneurship is mostly envisioned as a pragmatic instrument for expanding entrepreneurial forms to the social sphere, for saving tax money, or simply rendering people and organizations in the non-profit sector more responsible and accountable." If anything, the actions of social entrepreneurs should take them away from both the existing norms of entrepreneurship and the existing norms of nonprofit organizations, suggesting that new norms have to be defined (Hervieux et al., 2010, p. 39).

Spicer et al. (2019) expand on how SE has evolved as a stand-alone field, but one that has, on the one hand, appropriated a mix of logics, practices, and discourses of preexisting fields to achieve legitimacy, while, on the other hand, ultimately being predicated on free market logic. As a result, SE fails to come to grips with the power relationships that stymie social change. Rather than representing an additional or complementary channel for addressing social needs, SE is problematic because it "deflects energy, focus, capacity and attention away from collective public action (and) to individual private action" (Spicer et al. 2019, p. 197). They find that SE has emerged by encroaching on (not displacing) these existing fields in a manner that may make it impossible to achieve long-term stability or global coherence. In the final analysis, SE's lack of defined boundaries and exclusive field space make it fragile and vulnerable to being encroached upon or displaced by other fields.

The conclusion from such critics would seem to be that, as a distinct field, SE needs to be freed to evolve in a different way than it has. In this view, it has emerged as a form of neoliberalism that undermines citizen rights and replaces the objective of social justice with social control predicated on the values of social entrepreneurs. Further, it has serious moral limitations based on its reliance on market dogmatism and economic self-sufficiency (Dey and Steyaert, 2018; Dey and Steyaert 2012). Thus, instead of business and commercial models being central to SE, a framework of advocacy and social change should be the centerpiece (Cook et al. 2003; Nicholls 2010).

3 Where does this lead us? Finding common ground

Are the disparate perspectives reflected in these divides holding back SE as a field? The answer would appear to be an unqualified "yes." Dey and Steyaert (2012, p. 91) characterize the extant research as "clearly less imaginative and diverse than one would initially assume" and in a period of "stasis." Hervieux et al. (2010) lament the lack of theory building. Others (Nicholls 2010; Short et al. 2009) observe a serious shortage of empirical evidence in SE, and an over-reliance on anecdotal case studies. Cook et al. (2003) raise the possibility that SE is a field based on false premises, and Dey and Steyaert (2012) provide examples of unverified assumptions and accepted myths having no basis in fact. From a descriptive standpoint, we have little data on how much SE activity takes place, where it originates, the extent to which it takes differing forms, the degree to which it scales, and its net impact.

For SE to move to the next level as a field of study, we need to revisit two basic questions:

1. *Where do we find the entrepreneurship is SE?* Here, it is our position that is not so much about entity creation, internally derived revenue sources, or reliance on professional management practices. Instead, our concern is the application of the entrepreneurial mindset to all the activities and challenges involved in successfully effecting social change.
2. *Where do we find the social in SE?* Our suggestion is that it involves not just the social need being addressed but also the social processes, relationships, and dynamics necessary to solve community problems in innovative ways.

Based on this foundation, it is possible to accommodate all the perspectives reflected in the divides if we reconsider the direction SE appears to have taken as a field of study. Although mainstream entrepreneurship has much to offer, there are limits to how much it can or should inform SE. Suggestions (e.g., Dacin et al. 2010) that SE merely represents a context for studying the broader phenomenon of entrepreneurship—in effect relying on its theories and methodologies—only serve to stifle the field. Further movement of SE in the direction of conventional business practice can alienate scholars from other disciplines—fields offering rich insights into social change, political negotiation, community mobilization, social structures, class consciousness, coalition building, institutional power dynamics, and related topics.

Apart from insights regarding the nature of the entrepreneurial mindset and how it can be nurtured, perhaps the greatest contribution of mainstream entrepreneurship is the process perspective. Within SE, we are concerned with the process of creating social value through unique resource combinations to address social problems. Figure 2 represents an attempt to conceptualize this process when pursuing a social entrepreneurship initiative. This process then serves as a platform for accommodating the many perspectives contained within the divides and can help drive the ongoing research agenda.

The two cornerstones of this process model are social innovation (stage 2) and social value creation (stage 4). As a result, a distinction is drawn between the essence of SE and the kinds of activities that serve as conduits, facilitators, and supportive architecture (reflected in column 3 of Fig. 2). We allow for, *but do not require*, an organization to be created or even exist, any particular kind of revenue source to be relied upon, and commercial strategies and professional management practices to be incorporated. We allow for both individuals and collectives operating in a wide variety of contexts, including the private and public sectors. We include many

SE Process

STAGE	PURPOSE	SAMPLE ACTIVITIES	SAMPLE ISSUES
Opportunity/Need Identification	Specific social need being addressed, target audience to be served	Various types of research, pattern recognition, needs analysis, stakeholder assessment, segregation of audiences	·Triggers, alertness & motivators of SE activity ·Trade-offs in addressing stakeholder needs ·Determining root causes of unmet social needs ·Defining the nature & scope of a given social need ·Establishing boundaries on who is to be served
Social Innovation	Develop innovative solution and social value proposition	Ideation, concept development, feasibility analysis, concept testing, concept revision	·Models of the social innovation process and roles for technology ·Informal processes surrounding grassroots innovation ·How degrees & forms of innovation impact social value creation ·Relationships between social innovation & cultural values, norms ·Displacement effects of social innovations
Organizing and Resourcing	Create platform for value creation and assemble resources.	Community organizing, planning, creation of an entity or operating platform, mission specification, leveraging of resources, mobilization of various forms of capital (social, intellectual, financial, cultural, etc.)	·Assessing fit between type of social initiatives and informal/formal structures ·Relevance of cognitive decision-making styles in different SE contexts ·Efficacy of different community organizing techniques ·Accessing resources not under one's control in different organizational contexts ·Interaction effects of revenue source, legitimacy and mission accomplishment
Social Value Creation & Dissemination	Deploy resources to implement the social innovation	Political negotiation, creative approaches to: obstacles, community action, logistics management, resource deployment, confrontation, systems development, social marketing, experimentation, adaptation, learning	·Collective decision-making & social value creation ·Standardization & customization practices in social value delivery ·Power dynamics, conflict resolution, negotiation with diverse institutional players ·Efficiency, effectiveness, quality and the motivation of volunteers ·Communication issues with diverse stakeholders when implementing social change
Growth	Extend the social value proposition to other contexts	Adjustments to model so it can be replicated, expansion into new community/spaces, building of infrastructure (systems, processes), scaling of the approach, sustainable growth financing	·Infrastructure design to enable scaling of the social initiative ·Characteristics of social initiatives undermining transferability or scaling ·Maintaining identity and legitimacy while expanding the social initiative ·Implications of modifying social initiatives when extended to new contexts ·Centralization and decentralization when achieving scale
Impact Assessment	Determine extent to which social need has been addressed	Assessment of individual community/societal impacts, cost benefit analysis, calculation of SROI	·Reliable & valid approaches to measuring social value created ·Competencies associated with successful SE initiatives ·Environmental costs and other externalities in social value creation ·Estimating trade-offs when both social & economic value must be created ·Distinguishing value creation at different levels of analysis and over time

Fig. 2 An inclusive process perspective on social entrepreneurship

activities not explicitly tied to marketplace assumptions, logics, or values. Finally, the dotted line after stage 4 suggests scaling and assessment may not always apply or occur.

Figure 2 approaches SE as a spectrum of activities (Alter 2004; Dees 1996) which anyone can pursue. Further, SE would appear, based on these divides, to be a question of degree. The pursuit of a new solution to a social problem that is relatively lower in innovativeness, risk-taking, and proactiveness is still a form of SE. Similarly, we allow for variability in terms of how much value is created, what sort of scale is achieved (if any), and the amount of social impact that results. One must also keep in mind that SE is not a linear process. Social value creation is often messy and inefficient, especially in the formative stages. The process is chaotic, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. Stages interact and overlap and can be pursued simultaneously, with feedback loops where developments in one stage require revisiting an earlier stage. Activities such as innovation and resourcing are ongoing. It is ultimately an emergent process with ongoing learning and adaptation, where what one creates is often quite different than what one intended.

Finally, the SE process can be influenced by a variety of logics (see Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). Hervieux et al. (2010) highlight the importance of civic logic and tensions between it and market logic. At the core, SE is a form of development and, as such, we offer a form of civic logic (and potentially of other logics) as a guiding philosophy: integral human development (IHD) (Goulet, 1995). As espoused by Sendak (2019), IHD refers to "the development of the whole person and of all persons." It suggests social entrepreneurs must look holistically at both the concept of social value and the people affected by its production and delivery. It argues that the value in SE should be co-created by social entrepreneurs, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. Social entrepreneurs must be embedded in their community context. Goulet (2006, p.60) explains, "societies are more human, or more developed, not when men and women 'have more' but when they are enabled to 'be more'." Being more goes to the potential of SE to empower individuals, groups, and communities in service of the common good.

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