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Stakeholder Journey Mapping: An Educational Tool for Social Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

While social entrepreneurship is a promising model for addressing social challenges, the success and sustainability of a venture is reliant on an entire stakeholder structure external to the entrepreneurial team. Across academic and professional programs, social entrepreneurship curriculum spends a great deal of time stressing this point; however thoroughly understanding a venture's stakeholder structure is difficult. Especially for novice teams in the early stages of venture development, current methods for collecting critical data points on the identities, needs, and motivations that shape a venture's stakeholder structure can be prohibitively difficult and expensive in terms of time and money. Programs need tools that empower aspiring social entrepreneurs by accounting for their unique needs and constraints without compromising results. In this article, Stakeholder Journey Mapping is presented as an adaptation of current customer journey mapping methods, capable of being an educational tool that lowers barriers and costs for new social entrepreneurs. A methodology for creating Stakeholder Journey Maps is presented in the form of a workshop plan, and is followed by a case study.

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1. Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is an increasingly popular model for addressing some of society's most immediate challenges, but like traditional for-profit ventures, they are dependent on profit generation for success and sustainability. Designing a social venture for profitability is difficult and is complicated by the involvement of critical stakeholder groups external to the entrepreneurial team. Academic and professional programs interested in training aspiring entrepreneurs spend a great deal of effort stressing the importance of determining the identities of a venture's stakeholders and considering them throughout the development process. Gaining an understanding of the stakeholder structure around a social venture helps design for their needs and increases confidence that the proposed value propositions, market penetration strategies, business model, etc. will be profitable in context. Many of the formal tools to support gathering stakeholder data today have been borrowed from traditional private sector applications.

In traditional for-profit ventures, the largest groups of stakeholders are customers and/or consumers. Numerous methodologies, frameworks, and models have been designed to facilitate the processes of conducting research, contextualizing, and mobilizing customer insights during various stages of a venture's lifecycle and planning. However, for aspiring social entrepreneurs seeking insights about a venture's stakeholder structure, these tools have too narrow a scope and are often prohibitively expensive in terms of time and money. In this article, Constructed Stakeholder Personas—pre-constructed archetypal profiles of critical stakeholder groups—are activated through a process of Stakeholder Journey Mapping.

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Stakeholder Journey Mapping, an adaptation of customer journey mapping, broadens its scope beyond customers/consumers to include all the relevant stakeholder groups that influence a venture's profitability. Through the use of Constructed Stakeholder Personas, it lowers barriers to research and insight generation and makes the tool accessible to entrepreneurs who are heavily burdened by time constraints, limited funding, and few opportunities to travel or work onsite in the early stages of venture development.

This article reviews existing customer journey mapping practices, introduces Stakeholder Journey Mapping as a new educational tool, and ultimately proposes a methodology and case study for delivering a team-oriented Stakeholder Journey Mapping workshop.

2. Review: Customer Journey Mapping

Customer journey mapping – also known as user journey mapping, customer experience mapping, user scenario mapping, or customer lifecycle mapping – is a visualization tool used to gain insight about how customers interact with a business. The tool has seen a sharp increase in use over the last five years in both the private and public sector—across businesses, consulting and designing firms, and government agencies. Practitioners across the board have suitably acknowledged the potential of customer journey mapping to reveal customers' real and latent needs and to improve business by making sure that every experience a customer has with a product, service, or brand is as positive as possible. When used well, customer journey mapping can augment traditional approaches to customer insights research and evaluation and bring ventures closer to their customers [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. While there is no standardized approach or methodology for customer journey mapping, a survey of current practitioners and an evaluation of surrounding literature revealed four universal traits: (1) a team-oriented execution, (2) a highly visual non-linear nature, (3) the use of touch-points, and (4) an emphasis on real customers and consumers.

The team-oriented nature of journey mapping, coupled with a visual approach for organized discussion, has four major benefits. First, collaboration has the potential to create positive team dynamics and strengthen mutual commitment to execution of the project. According to several practitioners, the visual nature of journey mapping facilitates active participation and listening within a diverse group where members have various strengths and weaknesses and prefer different communication methods. For example, while many modern communication methods, such as email, texting, instant messaging, and phone or video conferencing, rely heavily on written and verbal communication, creating visuals stimulates visually-oriented participants to articulate their thoughts and insights in ways other than through written or spoken word. In this way, the visual nature of journey mapping encourages participants who would otherwise be discouraged, and directly facilitates team diversity [7]. Working with a diverse team (in terms of discipline, culture, learning styles, and/or orientation) is more likely to spark ideas and generate more creative approaches than brainstorming with a homogenous group [8]. Second, creating visualizations also promotes creativity and divergent thinking among participants and encourages productive dialogue and debate [7]. Third, the creation of visuals allows teams to address the complex non-linear nature of customer journeys and promotes system-level thinking. It also proves the importance of context as situations are allowed to intertwine and interconnect. Some practitioners frame this dynamism as the most important component of their map. Lastly, the final visual product allows observers to quickly digest the system overview of a given customer's journey and can easily be used as a communication tool.

Touch-points, which are simply the points at which customers interact with a business, serve as the foundation of journey mapping. Although practitioners disagree about exactly when to define touch-points during the mapping process—some believe touch-points should be defined before mapping so that they can be used as navigation points, while others believe touch-points should emerge naturally throughout the process— all agree that they function as a critical part of mapping the customer journey. The Institute of Design at Stanford described touch-points in the following example: imagine an innovator is tasked with designing a new aspect to attract customers to a particular coffee shop; if the sole understanding is that people get coffee and then they drink it, the innovator has missed out on many different steps and stages in between [9]. By following the journey through a customer's eyes, journey maps are able to see all the touch-points that a customer sees which leads to a more meaningful understanding of the context.

Finally, practitioners emphasize the importance of collecting as much primary data about the real experiences of customers and end consumers as possible. They use tools including video, focus groups, mystery shoppers, direct observation, and customer personas to collect data and use journey mapping to bring that data to life. This allows current practitioners to augment the scope of customer insights research and evaluation tools and put the real demographic, psychographics, and geographic variables at play in customers' lives at the core of decision-making. When used well, this is the ultimate key to identifying the real and latent needs inherent in customers' lives and thereby developing products and services that not only meet needs but also generate sustainable demand.

Despite its increasing popularity in industry, customer journey mapping has seen only a modest uptake in the educational space which is limited in scope. Several firms have been established to teach students and professionals how to use journey mapping and take it back to their respective projects, but there are no significant instances of journey mapping being used as a tool to facilitate learning and discovery. The nuance is this: in the first instance, students are learning to mobilize and analyze their understandings of customer insights in a new way, and in the second instance, educators are using journey mapping to teach the concept of customer insights and illustrate the importance of placing them at the core of business development. This allows

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