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Motivations for social entrepreneurship – Evidences from Portugal



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Abstract The main purpose of this article is to explore the factors that motivate people to create, develop and maintain a social entrepreneurship project and also to explore the difficulties and expectations social entrepreneurs face. The research is based on an exploratory study that includes the collection and analysis of qualitative data, involving 13 interviews to social entrepreneurs from Portugal.

The study provides information about the motivations that take individuals to initiate and maintain a social project, standing out the altruism, the passion, the influence of role models, past volunteering experiences and the willing to create and innovate. The mobilization of financial and human resources, as well as the business bureaucracy, are the most frequent difficulties in the process of social venture creation but the will to fight, the persistence and passion the interviewers have, that is, their motivation, seems to be the motto for continuing to battle for their goals.

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1. Introduction

Although social entrepreneurship receives decreasing attention from academics, it is a phenomenon that needs to be further explored since it is undeniable the important contribution that social entrepreneurs are having at a social,

cultural and environmental level, creating innovative ways to respond to certain economic and social needs (Shaw & Carter, 2007). We need to continue to explore the many motivations that underlie this complex phenomenon since the studies in the area of motivation are lacking (Miller, Grimes, McMullen, & Vogus, 2012). Furthermore, entrepreneurship is a dynamic process and motivations may change over time (Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000), so research seeking to understand these potential changes is lacking (Hessels, Gelderen, & Thurik, 2008; Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003). Studying human motivation is of paramount

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importance if we are to understand, for example, how to motivate people to be more entrepreneurial (Shane et al., 2003). The objective of this research is to explore the motivations that lead individuals to create, develop and maintain a project of social entrepreneurship i.e., exploring what people want to achieve with the project and explore the processes/motivational dynamics to build it, i.e., the initial expectations, the supports they seek to obtain, the obstacles faced and what happened differently from expected.

2. Entrepreneurial motivation

Since there is little research into the motivations for social entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurs are a subtype of entrepreneurs who differ in their mission and in how starting their business, it was necessary to consider the existing literature on motivations for commercial or conventional entrepreneurship (Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010). Motivation, which is used to explain the effort and persistence through a given action (Latham & Pinder, 2005), plays an important role in the creation of new organizations (Segal, Borgia, & Schoenfeld, 2005), since it influences the decision's taking, including the one referring a new business creation (Shane et al., 2003). Motivation influences entrepreneurial behavior in three complementary ways: influences on the choice of the individual, i.e., the direction of the action; influences the intensity of the action, based on the importance or value that the action has for the entrepreneur and influences the persistence of action, based on the clearness of the path to achieve this value (Locke, 2000). The motivations in general, and also in the entrepreneurship domain have been investigated in the light of different theories, commonly referred to content and process theories. Content theories seek to understand the "why" of certain behavior, i.e., what moves individuals, and seek to identify the specific factors that motivate people to a particular choice (Beardwell, Holden, & Claydon, 2004). Allow therefore to understand what leads individuals to create their own business. Process theories focus on understanding the "how", i.e., the intensity of dedication and persistence that the person is willing to put in the activities (Segal et al., 2005), and provide a description and analysis of how the behavior is initiated, sustained and stopped (Borkowski, 2009). They also seek to understand the difficulties and expectations that influence the entrepreneurial process.

All these theories, synthesized in Table 1, provide an analytical framework that allows us to understand the process of setting up a business (Hechavarria, Renko, & Matthews, 2012).

All these theories provide an analytical framework that allows us to understand the process of setting up a business (Hechavarria et al., 2012). These models are implicitly or explicitly based on the basic design that the intentions of an individual to become an entrepreneur are provided for the answer to two questions: (1) entrepreneurship is desirable for me? (i.e., leads me to achieve the results and goals that I desire?) and (2) entrepreneurship is feasible for me? (i.e., do I have what it takes to succeed as an entrepreneur?) (Segal et al., 2005).

3. Social entrepreneurship

Certo and Miller (2008) define social entrepreneurship (SE) as a process that involves the recognition, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities that result in social value which involves the provision of basic needs such as food delivery, health services and education. SE is an activity with community goals, which hopefully is profitable and the profit is used to reinvest in the organization itself (Steinerowski, Jack, & Farmer, 2008). It is more likely to occur in contexts where there are socio-economic, environmental and cultural issues (Dacin et al., 2010) and promotes a lasting, attractive and sustainable solution for social problems (Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010). Social entrepreneurs are people who identify a failure in society and transform it into a business opportunity; they recruit and motivate others to their cause and build networks with essential people at the same time. Also, they face the obstacles and challenges and introduce their own systems to manage their social business (Thompson, 2002).

4. Entrepreneurship versus social entrepreneurship

The key difference is that in commercial entrepreneurship, the main focus is on the economic return, while in social entrepreneurship is in social return, which means that conventional entrepreneurs look essentially for economic profit (Kirzner, 1973), meaning that their performance is attached to financial return (Austin, Stevenson, & Weiskillern, 2006). On the other hand, social entrepreneurs search, generally, to accomplish social goals based on the economic sustainability (Dorado, 2006). Leadbeater (1997) defends that many of the traits and behaviors of social entrepreneurs are the mirror of commercial entrepreneurs, including their determination, ambition, charisma, leadership, ability to communicate their vision and inspire others and maximizing the use of resources; the key difference is that in business entrepreneurship, the main focus is the economic return while in SE is the social return. However, the creation of economic wealth is important for the social entrepreneur, so that he can ensure the sustainability of the organization and for it to become self-sustaining. Profit and wealth creation can be part of the model, but they are only means and not end in themselves (Dees, 1998). Therefore, social entrepreneurs create or apply viable economic models to achieve social or environmental purposes (Whitman, 2011).

5. Research questions

We cannot see conventional and social entrepreneurship in such a dichotomist way, thinking that their distinction is the financial or social point. Reasons for social entrepreneur may also include less altruist motives such as personal realization (Hall, Miller, & Millar, 2012; Mair & Martí, 2006). Other authors contradict this idea and, even though their study is not focused on social entrepreneurship motivations, they add that social entrepreneurs are motivated by a strong desire to change society, a status quo discomfort,

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