The Evolution of a Social Entrepreneur: Turning Passion into Skill

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Management/leadership Friday, June 5, 2015 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Richelieu)

Abstract 2015-136 2:35 PM

Introduction
Although sport-for-development (SFD) research has increased in popularity in recent years, unique approaches and longitudinal investigations are needed to further illuminate the long-term impact and sustainability of these initiatives (Coalter, 2010; Kidd, 2007). Beyond identifying the impact these programs may have, there is a need to investigate the traits and characteristics of the cause champions (e.g., social entrepreneurs) involved within these endeavors. As Maguire (2009) notes; "athletes are not simply champions of their sport, but also of their local community and nation and sometimes, humanity as a whole" (p. 260).

During a long-term monitor and evaluation collaboration with Street Soccer USA (SSUSA), a non-profit organization using soccer as a means to help the homeless “score goals on the field, and achieve their goals in life” (SSUSA, n.d.), one storyline emerged meriting further attention. Lisa Wrightsman, a 33-year-old, white, Sacramento native and a formerly homeless woman, went from star college athlete, to recovering addict, to community activist. Lisa became a cause champion and began to show tendencies of social entrepreneurship as she continued to work within SSUSA to give back to her own community. An initial study was conducted two years ago with Lisa in order to understand her experiences, expectations, and motivations towards becoming a cause champion and social entrepreneur. It was found that three background influences – sport, life, and traumatic experiences – influenced her social entrepreneurial leanings, and that people, opportunity, and capital intersected to create her social value proposition (Authors, 2014).

However, what this study did not reveal was how Lisa continued to evolve as a social entrepreneur over time, the challenges she faced, and how she continued to build and grow the SSUSA team in Sacramento. Little research has examined the long-term development of social entrepreneurs, particularly in a SFD context. Thus, the purpose of this longitudinal study is to examine Lisa’s evolution as a social entrepreneur, the challenges she is facing, and her growth strategies. To guide the current study, three research questions were developed: (a) How has Lisa continued to evolve as a social entrepreneur?; (b) What challenges has she faced; and (c) How is she addressing these challenges and continuing to grow the program?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
In a meta-analysis of social entrepreneurship literature (Dacin, Dacin, & Matear, 2010), 37 different definitions were uncovered with the focus on four key factors: (a) the characteristics of individual social entrepreneurs, (b) their operating sector, (c) the processes and resources used by the social entrepreneur, and (d) the primary mission and outcomes associated with the social entrepreneur. As recognized by Shaffie et al. (2012), a traditional entrepreneur is associated with financial gains and business acumen, while social entrepreneurs are often judged by social returns and “profitability remains a goal, but not the main goal” (p. 4). Just as business entrepreneurs transform industries and maximize profits, social entrepreneurs act as change agents and attempt to maximize their outreach. A social entrepreneur can be found in nearly every aspect of society such as health, education, and the economy (Barendsen & Garden, 2004; Okpara & Halkias, 2011; Thompson, Alvy, & Lees, 2000). However, there has been very limited research conducted in the sport context with regards to social entrepreneurs, as most research of this nature has centered upon CSR (Ratten, 2011).

To guide the current study, Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern’s (2006) framework and definition was utilized; “We define social entrepreneurship as innovative, social value creating activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, business, or government sectors” (p. 2). To differentiate social entrepreneurship from commercial entrepreneurship, Austin and colleagues designed the social value proposition (SVP) model, stating: “The distinctive
nature and central role of the mission in social enterprises and the multifaceted nature of the social value give the SVP a logical centrality in the framework” (p. 16). The SVP involves the intersection of capital, people, and opportunity. Considering the influence and following sport has around the world, the marriage of social entrepreneurship and sport has strong potential if harnessed by philanthropists driven to solve an existing problem.

Method
The current longitudinal study is a continuation of work begun two years ago, and will be completed before NASSM. Ongoing data collection methods for this qualitative investigation include personal interviews, document analysis, and direct observations. We are currently conducting face-to-face, personal interviews with Lisa, as well as individuals we interviewed two years ago about Lisa: eight players she currently coaches or has coached; other volunteer coaches who work with Lisa; the executive director of SSUSA; and her co-workers and supervisor at her place of employment (16 total individuals). A document analysis is also being conducted of media reports, social media feeds, and other published documents related to the development of the Sacramento team over the past two years. Finally, we are spending three days in Sacramento to observe Lisa coaching and mentoring her players, and to attend team fundraising activities. All interviews are being audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data analysis consists of open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and dependability and credibility are being enhanced through establishing intercoder reliability between the authors and by conducting member checks with study participants.

Findings and Discussion
Building off previous findings which illustrated the beginning steps of Lisa’s emergence as a social entrepreneur (Authors, 2014), the current study found an evolution in her skills and the outcomes of her initiative. Previously, Lisa recognized her lack of knowledge in entrepreneurship, particularly in areas such as fundraising and outreach (Authors, 2014). Following Austin et al.’s (2006) model, our current findings recognize the shifts in people, opportunity, and capital that have taken place. One of the principal shifts in Lisa’s entrepreneurial efforts has been her gains in capital. Over the past two years, her grassroots efforts to grow her initiative financially and in participation numbers have been successful. She has formed community partners, utilized social media for donations and public relations, and applied for grants. In regards to people, Lisa has shown ability to network with key stakeholders in her local community (e.g., relationship-building with local practitioners, awarded a Fellowship in an ‘Emerging Leaders Program’ in her local community). Lisa’s opportunity has also grown as the program has become more recognized and sustainable in the community, allowing her to leverage the program to enhance visibility, awareness, and funding options. However, challenges to growth still remain, such as generating larger sets of resources, logistics of business operations, and recruiting participants. Currently, we are conducting interviews with Lisa and others to ascertain strategies for overcoming these challenges.

Theoretically, implications of this study illustrate the continued evolution of a social entrepreneur in an SFD setting beyond the initial stages, extending Austin et al.’s (2006) framework of initial social entrepreneur development. This study highlights additional skills that emerged (e.g., fundraising and outreach) which have yielded greater results, although not without challenges. Considering the nature of SFD non-profits, and the competitive process in obtaining donations and grants, as well as participants and volunteers, elucidating the long-term skills and strategies employed by a social entrepreneur can be valuable to creating sustainable visions for other SFD organizations and social entrepreneurs.