Social Innovation & People Know How

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Abstract

Society faces various issues every day, with different sectors creating their own solutions. Often, these solutions are a band aid which does not tackle the root causes that exist in the first place. By creating a collaborative environment, socially innovative ideas can not only be created but also implemented in a way that is sustainable, transformative and scalable.

Here at People Know How fostering an environment for social innovation to flourish has become increasingly important to us. We have learnt from our work over the years of ways of facilitating social innovation, and now we want to share that, and invite others to join us in the learning process. Here we will outline what we have found the issue to be, what others have found before us, and what social innovation means to People Know How.

Keywords

Social innovation, social change, collaboration, exchange, third sector, private sector, academic sector, business sector

The issue

In society, there is a variety of different public, private and third sector organisations which attempt to tackle the various issues society faces, from homelessness, poverty, isolation and more. Frances Westley and Nino Antadze, however, highlight how "the social sector struggles often with band-aid solutions which address the immediate symptoms but not the underlying causes."[1] For solutions to societal issues to address the underlying cause, they must tackle the system that created them. Social Innovation Generation is an organisation in Canada which realised exactly this:

"taking a systems approach, it becomes clear that messy, longstanding problems are created by the systems in which they exist. To innovate on these social and environmental problems, it's necessary to find ways to see, understand and use the system itself."[2] The main problem is that different sector organisations often develop ways of tackling social issues which show real potential but a lot of these innovative projects never make it beyond the local level. As the president of the Rockefeller Foundation, Judith Rodin, pointed out "[s]olutions to many of the world's most difficult social problems

[1] Westley, F. and Antadze, N., 2010. Making a difference: Strategies for scaling social innovation for greater impact. Innovation Journal, 15(2), p3

[2] http://sigknowledgehub.com/2012/01/03/dive-into-social-innovation/ (accessed 12/08/19)

don't need to be invented, they need only to be found, funded, and scaled."[3] SiG states that if an idea which tackles a social issue is to be truly transformational and long lasting, "the innovation should have a measurable impact on the broader social, political and economic context that created the problem in the first place."[4] There must, therefore, be engagement beyond the social sector into a collaboration of all areas which impact society, including those who are impacted. Unless all members of society are involved, we cannot address the system to create and support social innovation.

What does the research say?

What social innovation means, and how to support an environment which allows for and nurtures social innovation, has been addressed by a variety of different academics and sector organisations. It is from here which we have drawn some of our inspiration for our own take on social innovation.

- According to Centre for Social Innovation, "[s]ocial innovation refers to the creation, development, adoption, and integration of new and renewed concepts, systems, and practices that put people and planet first."[5]

- Westley and Antadze see social innovation as "a complex process

that profoundly changes the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which it occurs."[6] Further to this, it involves those affected, "[s]o [it] not only serves vulnerable populations, but is served by them in turn."[7]

- For SiG Canada, social innovation profoundly changes the way a system operates. It can be not only "a product, production process, or technology (much like innovation in general), but it can also be a principle, an idea, a piece of legislation, a social movement, an intervention, or some combination of them."[8] They hold that "[r]eal innovation in social systems requires that change happen across these different [sector] levels or scales so that impact is strong and lasting; so that something that seemed impossible to change in the world becomes very different."[9]

- Stephen Huddart thinks that "[i]n a turbulent age, social innovation becomes everyone's work. This produces the "strange bedfellows" effect so productive of innovation, generating hybrid models and, when they prove themselves, introducing transformative change."[10] Social innovation often requires interaction among groups who normally would not connect, and as a result it can generate innovative

[3] Davis, S. 2011. Social Innovation: A matter of scale. McKinsey Quarterly, 11 November 2011, p1
[4] www.sigeneration.ca/home/resources/primer (accessed 12/08/19)
[5] https://socialinnovation.org/ (accessed 21/08/19)
[6] Westley, F. and Antadze, N., Making a Difference, p2
[7] Westley, F. and Antadze, N., Making a Difference, p5
[8] www.sigeneration.ca/home/resources/primer/ (accessed 19/08/19)
[9] http://sigknowledgehub.com/2012/01/01/introduction-to-social-innovation/ (accessed 12/08/19)
[10] Huddart, S., 2010. Patterns, principles, and practices in social innovation. The philanthropist, 23(3), p12

solutions not possible otherwise. Further to this, to provide a successful innovation environment, "[t]rust is essential and is founded on shared commitment to the public good, transparency, and accountability" with "[i]nter-sectoral collaboration [being] a rich source of innovation."[11]

- Westley and Michele-Lee Moore highlight how the structural change which social innovation generates "will typically require resources and a source of authority or power that may not previously have existed for those seeking the change."[12] This is where the need to cross over all sectors and levels comes in, as true innovation cannot succeed in change without the power and authority of those within the system.

- Rafael Ziegler writes how "[i]nnovation is not simply having a new idea but carrying it out in practice. As such, innovation is an inherently social process, requiring interaction with others: social processes of discussion, group formation, and networking."[13] It is not enough to simply have an innovative idea, we must also collaborate with others to make the idea truly successful.

- Duygu Kambur, Head of Strategy, Buisness and Partnership Development at IMACE, speaks of power of social innovation first

hand having worked with the Social Innovation Exchange; "Normally, you work limited by the policy, mindset and know-how that you have in your own ecosystem. When you realise that you are part of the global system, it makes you a more powerful and motivated social innovator."[14]

Social innovation is seen as a way of looking to the systems as a whole, interacting with organisations and people on all levels to bring about a change which would be hard to achieve without such crosscutting. It is seen as a way of tackling societal issues at their root, working to prevent problems before they arise as opposed to treating the symptoms. Social innovation can be a product, a process, an idea, a movement or all of the above. By taking part in inter-sectional collaboration, only then it appears can social innovation occur, generating change which lasts.

Our take on Social Innovation and how we plan to generate and support it

Social innovation has become increasingly important to us at People Know How, and this is why we are outlining what it means to us. Following from our research, we take Social Innovation to be the process of developing innovative solutions to address social issues, solutions which look

[11] Huddart, Patterns, p17
[12] Moore, M.L. and Westley, F.R., 2011. Public sector policy and strategies for facilitating social innovation. Horizons: innovative communities, agents of change, 11(1), p6
[13] Ziegler, R., 2017. Social innovation as a collaborative concept. Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research, 30(4), p389
[14] https://socialinnovationexchange.org/sites/default/files/uploads/sixintroduction_online.pdf (accessed 21/08/19)

beyond the symptom and instead to the system which generates it. Through our various projects working with people and communities to develop innovative strategies and services we have gained increasing experience in social innovation. It has taught us that if we are to achieve our vision for the future, we must also make it our mission to empower people with tools, resources and a framework to deliver positive social change themselves, and the collaborative connections which channel this change to every level of society.

We have come to recognise that sometimes systems have unintended effects or can stifle a community's wellbeing. By collaborating across all sectors and all levels, we hope to reduce these unintended effects by creating communication among partners who may not normally interact. We aim to help everyone understand each other's part in society, thereby helping to build a learning culture and engaging in positive social change towards common goals. This is because we believe that the best innovations come from working alongside the people who face the very challenges we're trying to solve, bringing them together with the public, private, third and academic sectors to generate substantial solutions which facilitate real change.

Going forward we will be focussed on maximising social impact through developing and delivering a new Social Innovation Programme supporting individuals, communities and organisations to unlock their ideas. We plan to make this programme a reality by taking the following steps:

1. Work with partners and collaborators to design and develop a Social Innovation Network

2. Establishing a Social Innovation Programme to support individuals, communities and initiatives to be socially innovative

3. Creating a Social Innovation Toolkit to share what we have learnt and provide support to others

4. Launching a Social Innovation Mentoring programme to follow our progress, ensuring we are achieving our goals

We want to share our leaning, inviting people, partners and communities to help drive our plans for social innovation together.

At People Know How for us social innovation means supporting and championing new ideas which lead to systematic change for the benefit of all. To do this we will bring together all levels of society to foster the connections and environment needed to turn these innovative ideas into a long-lasting reality.

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