

Group activity: Deciding in the gray

Making tough decisions when there is no "right" answer

Overview

Leading change is difficult. One of the (if not THE) most challenging aspects of being a social entrepreneur is making critical decisions when there is a need to react to an unanticipated challenge that is wrapped in uncertainty. It is the result of this decision making when there is limited information and there are no "right" or "wrong" answers that can determine the success or failure of a social entrepreneurial venture. In short, social entrepreneurs thrust themselves (or are thrust) continually into situations where a new type of decision needs to be made that is critical to success, but where there are no black and white answers. Needless to say, this is not only the case for social entrepreneurs but as well for any leader of a team working in a dynamic and innovative environment. However, it is oftentimes a particular challenge for social entrepreneurs given the challenging environments and situations they are confronted with. Apart from drawing on personal, team, and community knowledge and experience (ie wisdom), how do social entrepreneurs make these difficult decisions? What is the bedrock foundation that guides social entrepreneurs in this "deciding in the gray"? What is it that keeps social entrepreneurs' decisions "true" to who they hope their organizations is and what it aspires to be and achieve. It is three things. Either intuitively, instinctively or through practice, social entrepreneurs use the social entrepreneurial vision, mission and core values as their guide posts.

The Activity

This is a group activity that challenges participants to make decisions based on actual challenges that Social Entrepreneur Corps leadership has faced.

How it works

Resources needed:

- A maximum of **one hour** per challenge which includes working in teams and overall group sharing
- A minimum of one facilitator
- A large open space
- Multiple white boards (one or two per team) and/or flip charts that can go on walls or ideally easels.
- One copy per student of the "Social Entrepreneurship Decision Making Foundation" ideally
- One copy for each team of the mini case(s) that will be included in the activity
- Markers and tape

The Activity:

- Print out all of the needed materials and set up the room based on the number of teams there will be.
- Describe the overview and activity to the participants and have them break up into teams of two to five ideally.
- Go over the "Social Entrepreneurship Decision Making Foundation" briefly in whatever way is most interactive

- Choose the challenge or challenges you want to work with and go over the overall assumptions for the category with the group (they should ideally all get a copy of these).
- Tape the challenge you are using to the whiteboard/flip chart of each team and have them work through the challenge using the "Social Entrepreneurship Decision Making Foundation" to guide them
- Mind the recommended time constraints.
- Upon each team's completion, have the teams (or representatives of those teams) present what they concluded to the rest.

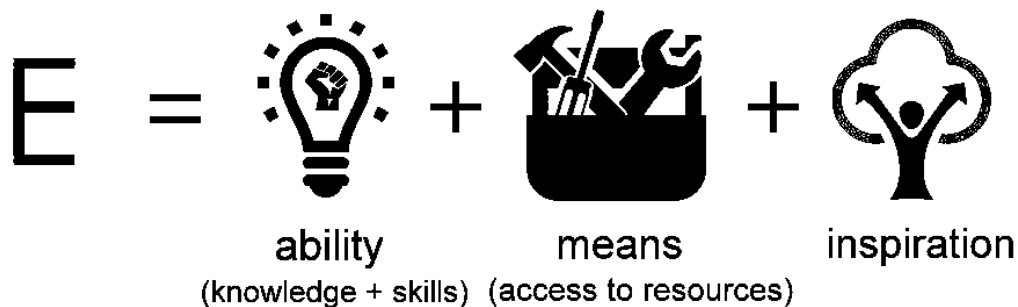
Recommendations for teams:

- Give everyone an equal amount of time to talk/share.
- Possibly assign roles and responsibilities before getting started and shift roles if you do multiple cases.
- Roles and responsibilities include each team member being "responsible" for a number of core values. For example, Anne is responsible for making sure that our decisions are as intentional and innovative as possible. She keeps the group honest and is especially keeping these two core values in mind.
- Challenge each other respectfully.

Social Entrepreneurship Decision Making Foundation

Vision:

Mission: Empowerment



Core values:

- **Empathetic:** We constantly work to understand the situation, needs, wants, limitations, opportunities and aspirations of our team members, collaborators and partners.
- **Inclusive:** We work diligently to empower stakeholders in the problem identification, solution design and implementation process and are “open source”
- **Outcomes-Focused:** We are focused on the change and impact our work has on those we seek to serve over the short, medium and long- term.
- **Dignified:** In our interactions and interventions we treat all with the honor and respect that they deserve and have earned.
- **Intentional:** We are exceedingly thoughtful about how our work affects others and their communities taking into account potential unintended consequences
- **Innovative:** We strive to solve problems and empower solutions in creative, new ways that have never been tried before.
- **Collaborative:** We strive to work with others in ways that leverage strengths and mitigate weaknesses so that everyone has an opportunity to both add and derive value.
- **Endurable:** We focus on things that “last”, are of the highest quality possible, create a sense of agency, and are resilient.
- **Practical:** We are not ideological in our approach but rather are flexible and focus on common sense and actionable work that contributes to us achieving our mission effectively and efficiently.
- **Trusting:** We enter all relationships with the assumption of goodwill, honesty and integrity in the way we would want others to do the same with us.
- **Accountable:** We hold ourselves and others responsible for ethical performance and feel a sense of ownership for the successes and/failures of all stakeholders with whom we are engaged.
- **Catalyzing:** We are constantly seeking ways to empower work that has a positive and high velocity multiplier effect that will influence change over the long term.

Category: The Social Enterprise - Overall Assumptions:

- As always, your goal at a minimum is to do no harm.
- Your focus is on social impact.
- You are leading a social enterprise that uses the MicroConsignment Model to focus on distributing cookstoves, water filters, glasses, solar lamps and the like. Your mission is to create access to technologies that have a positive health, energy and/or economic impact for families.
- There are local regional leaders who lead the mostly women entrepreneurs in their regions who focus on serving rural communities.
- There are an average of 10 entrepreneurs in each of five regions who serve an average of two communities per month.
- The entrepreneurs run community campaigns whereby they promote for one day and then offer people the opportunity to buy things on a day soon after.
- You have limited time already.
- You have limited financial and human resources.
- You want to stay true your mission.
- You want to continue to innovate new solutions that address community prioritized needs.

Challenge: If the Shoe Doesn't Fit.....

You are in one of the countries where SEC/CES works and have been doing consulting work for a large multi national organization that provides big grants. You have a good relationship with your engagement manager there and you want to keep working together in the future as there may be grant opportunities for your organization. You are in his office one day discussing future possible collaborative opportunities and he says "By the way, I have 5,000 brand new Addidas sneakers that were donated to us and I don't have a use for them but need to get them out the door within the next week. This is a real problem for me. Would you like to have them? I need to make a decision and this would be a great help to me." Despite the fact that this is "off mission", you want to continue to cultivate this relationship and so you agree to take the sneakers.

A week later you get a call from someone at the organization who says the sneakers are in a warehouse and you have to go and pick them up. So, begrudgingly you use your limited resources and rent a van and go and pick up the sneakers. You use one entire room of your limited office space to store the sneakers. This gift of sneakers has already now cost you time, money and space. And you have no idea what to do with the sneakers because you have been busy with your priority work and have had no time to figure it out.

Key Considerations:

- The sneakers are all different sizes
- You didn't get any financial resources from the organization, only the sneakers.
- There are people with businesses selling shoes throughout the country but fewer in rural communities.

Decisions you must make:

- What's going on? (5 minutes)
- What do you do now? (15 minutes)
- What system(s)/methods can you set up to avoid this challenge in the future? (15 minutes)

Reflection: What are some general lessons learned that we can take away? (10 minutes)

Challenge: The Entrepreneur Enigma

It is the regional coordinator's responsibility to find potential entrepreneurs and have them go through a self-selecting training process. Some of the regional coordinators are foreign staff and some are local. Upon completing the training successfully the entrepreneurs are equipped with all of the resources they will need to be successful and as well sign a contract that states that they will achieve certain sales goals in the course of a month. Each month they will meet with the regional coordinator and go over successes, challenges, evaluate sales targets and plan for the next month together. The social enterprise has a monthly meeting after these meetings where the regional coordinators all come together with leadership and review how things are going in their respective regions with their respective entrepreneurs. You learn that in several cases the entrepreneurs in several regions are not achieving their monthly sales goals. However, the regional coordinators all give reasons. Someone got sick, someone's children had an illness, someone is trying hard but people just aren't buying, it has been raining on days when the campaigns occur so few people show up. A plethora of reasons are given. You respond by deciding that the entrepreneurs should get another month given all of these stated problematic externalities. The next month the same thing happens.

Key Considerations:

- These entrepreneurs are typically low-income women with very few, if any, other job opportunities.
- Finding new entrepreneurs is a process.
- The entrepreneurs all say they want to keep working.
- The regional coordinators have become close with the entrepreneurs.
- You need the entrepreneurs to be selling the agreed upon number of solutions each month to achieve organizational sustainability.

Decisions you must make:

- What's going on? (5 minutes)
- What do you do now? (15 minutes)
- What system(s)/methods can you set up to avoid this challenge in the future? (15 minutes)

Reflection: What are some general lessons learned that we can take away? (10 minutes)

Challenge: When Affordable isn't Enough...

You are out on a village sales campaign with two women entrepreneurs. They are giving basic free eye exams and selling reading glasses at an affordable price. There are a good number of people showing up because there is no other access to exams and glasses anywhere within an hour. Despite the fact that they are low-income individuals many are buying the glasses that they need. In three instances people get eye exams, truly need glasses but say that they cannot afford to buy them. You can see that they appear to be some of the poorest members of the community. You want to help them but fear that if you give them free glasses other community members will see it or hear about it and demand the same and/or get upset that they had to pay for theirs.

Key Considerations:

- These entrepreneurs very much want to serve these community members.
- This is a small community of roughly 50 families or so.

Decisions you must make:

- What's going on? (5 minutes)
- What do you do now? (15 minutes)
- What system(s)/methods can you set up to avoid this challenge in the future? (15 minutes)

Reflection: What are some general lessons learned that we can take away? (10 minutes)

Category: The Education Center – Overall Assumptions

- You lead an education center in a rural community that offers a library, after school programs, computer classes, healthy snacks and health and hygiene initiatives
- There are three full-time teachers who have been taught new methodologies for teaching with the books that you currently have. This was a long and challenging process but they are doing great work with this new pedagogy and curriculum.
- There is no full time “head teacher”.
- You have limited time already.
- You have limited financial and human resources.
- You want to stay true your mission.

Challenge: Thank you maybe

There is a foreign staff member who is very passionate about the education center. His mother is an experienced teacher in the United States. Every month his family donates a moderate sum of money to the center to support his passion and the work. He goes home for Christmas and comes back with over \$1,000 worth of new, fairly complicated teacher manuals based on a methodology that his mother uses in her own classes and believes in and is passionate about. You did not know this was going to happen. He arrives enthusiastic and says his mother plans on coming down in two months for a week to visit and see how everything is going.

Key Considerations:

- The foreign staff member is a wonderful team member.
- The monthly monetary donation to the center is very helpful.

Decisions you must make:

- What's going on? (5 minutes)
- What do you do now? (15 minutes)
- What system(s)/methods can you set up to avoid this challenge in the future? (15 minutes)

Reflection: What are some general lessons learned that we can take away? (10 minutes)

Category: The Restaurant– Overall Assumptions

- You started and lead a restaurant in an indigenous rural community in Latin America
- From a sustainability/impact perspective one of your priority goals from the beginning has been to get the restaurant to where it is financially sustainable, and then to turn the ownership and leadership over to local individuals.
- The restaurant employs fifteen people in aggregate full time and part time.
- Most of the cooks are local women and waiters are local teenagers. There are two managers who are local men. They all earn more money than they could anywhere else and make critical contributions to their families with these earnings.
- The restaurant has become a center for activity and connectivity within the community.
- You have limited financial and human resources.

Challenge: Romance meets reality...

how everything is going.

Key Considerations:

- The
- .

Decisions you must make:

- What's going on? (5 minutes)
- What do you do now? (15 minutes)
- What system(s)/methods can you set up to avoid this challenge in the future? (15 minutes)

Reflection: What are some general lessons learned that we can take away? (10 minutes)