

Article

An Exit Strategy for the Definitional Elusiveness: A Three-Dimensional Framework for Social Entrepreneurship

Bing Ran * and Scott Weller

School of Public Affairs, Penn State University at Harrisburg, Harrisburg Pike, Middletown, PA 17057, USA; smw360@psu.edu

* Correspondence: bur12@psu.edu; Tel.: +1-717-948-6057

Abstract: Despite the growing utility and prevalence of social entrepreneurship, an accepted definition remains elusive and infeasible. Yet, it is imperative that the principles guiding social entrepreneurship are identified so that common ground is established to facilitate future research. On the basis of a systematic literature review, this conceptual paper proposes a theoretical framework outlining social entrepreneurship as a three-dimensional framework as a function of continua of “social” and “business” logics, “beneficial” and “detrimental” social change logics, and “innovation” and “mundane” logics. The framework accommodates the fuzziness and ambiguity associated with social entrepreneurship whilst remaining a workable, identifiable construct. By accounting for the shifting logics practiced by social entrepreneurship that both influence and are influenced by the organizational environment, this framework provides an exit strategy for the definitional elusiveness of social entrepreneurship. The resultant structures and functions of social entrepreneurship are shaped by these constraints as reflected by the fluidity and flexibility endorsed by the framework. Four avenues for future research regarding social entrepreneurship are recommended on the basis of the framework proposed in this article.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship; definition; social and business logics; beneficial logics; innovation logics



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1. Introduction

When the theme of this Special Issue was announced a year ago, we wanted to examine the nature of social entrepreneurship and how social entrepreneurship and hybrid organizations could help society to address sustainability issues. The traditional way of humans organizing into a “pure” type of organization is no longer viable for the sustainable development of our society, which requires all modern organizations to respond adaptively to their ever-changing environmental constraints. Social entrepreneurship is exactly the means for organizations to effect changes in these complex operating environments via the hybridization of institutional logics. In this essay, we provide a comprehensive conceptual framework to analyze how the nature of social entrepreneurship makes it different from traditional organizations, and we differentiate social entrepreneurship to reduce its definitional elusiveness.

“Social entrepreneurship organizations” (SEOs) represent the growing number of organizations with an entrepreneurial spirit dedicated to changing the social landscape. These organizations practice a “social entrepreneurship” that many researchers and practitioners differentiate from traditional business entrepreneurship and social service delivery (for example, [1–5]). Despite social entrepreneurship’s growing worldwide use, an accepted definition of the phenomenon remains elusive, thus hindering attempts to effectively study it [6–12]. The field is in dire need of a new framework reflecting the nature of social entrepreneurship that extends current thinking and circumvents definitional debates, helps distinguish social entrepreneurship from other types of entrepreneurial and social endeavors, and lays the groundwork for revealing the essence of these types of organizations.

Why is a framework of social entrepreneurship needed? The answer is twofold. First, endlessly debating definitions have distracted and prevented researchers from studying and analyzing social entrepreneurship and the organizations practicing it. A framework provides a starting point for theorizing by considering the ambiguous, fuzzy, and contested nature of social entrepreneurship. Second, the blending of the different institutional logics generates the synergy that defines social entrepreneurship. This blending entails a process of hybridization that continually rebalances the institutional logics that frame social entrepreneurship and generate its associated emergent features. This hybridization of institutional logics and generation of emergent features are generally assumed, but rarely included or discussed, in any previous definitions of social entrepreneurship. Thus, the purpose of this paper in this Special Issue is to carefully examine the prominent characteristics of social entrepreneurship to construct a new framework to accommodate the interacting logics that enable social entrepreneurship. The new framework of social entrepreneurship handles the fuzziness and ambiguity associated with the concept whilst remaining a workable, identifiable construct within the context of hybridization and how that process enacts sustainable and beneficial social changes.

Definitional Problems

The term “social entrepreneurship” is subject to the same criticisms as other fuzzy concepts in social sciences. Terms such as “ethics”, “power”, “democracy”, “public interest”, and “happiness” are conceptually ambiguous, contested, and tenuous. Any attempt to capture fuzzy concepts in a discrete definition results in a debatable representation of their meaning. Gallie [13] (pp. 197–198) recommends clarifying any contested concept by delimiting a set of “generally recognized standards . . . by asking from what vaguer or more confused or more restricted version (or ancestor) (they) have been derived”. Gallie’s approach to essentially contested concepts works well for social entrepreneurship [6] by suggesting researchers identify social entrepreneurship’s core characteristics as derived from its various definitions and other conceptualizations.

Another concern for any definition of social entrepreneurship is the balance between inclusivity and exclusivity. Inclusive definitions introduce too many “nonentrepreneurial efforts . . . and the kernel of true social entrepreneurship will be lost” [14] (p. 30). Social entrepreneurship’s distinctiveness is at risk of dilution if it is defined by too many traits that overlap with other endeavors in the business and social fields. In that case, social entrepreneurship becomes a gimmick or specialism sprouting from other more established domains. For example, Defourny [15] (pp. 19–20) defines social entrepreneurship by delineating the characteristics of social enterprises into five indicators: “an explicit aim to benefit the community”, “an initiative launched by a group of citizens”, “a decision-making power not based on capital ownership”, “a participatory nature, which involves the persons affected by the activity”, and “limited profit distribution”. Related, but distinct, phenomena such as social movements, corporate social responsibility, social activism, social welfare services, business entrepreneurship, and criminal entrepreneurship could all fall into the purview of this broad definition of social entrepreneurship; thus, the definition becomes too inclusive to be useful.

On the other hand, exclusive definitions overlook many key characteristics and activities that exemplify social entrepreneurship [16]. In the extant literature, such definitions focus on entrepreneurial efforts in a particular sector or segment of society. For example, Lasprogata and Cotton [17] (p. 69) define social entrepreneurship as “nonprofit organizations that apply entrepreneurial strategies to sustain themselves financially while having a greater impact on their social mission”. This definition restricts the domain of social entrepreneurship to the nonprofit sector and omits any social entrepreneurship conducted by organizations in the private and public sectors. The boundary created by a definition of social entrepreneurship should be permeable enough to allow organizations in different artificially constructed sectors practicing social entrepreneurship ready entry and exit as their mission, structure, and functions change relative to the definition.

A useful framework of social entrepreneurship balances inclusivity and exclusivity. A balance is achieved by incorporating the essential characteristics of social entrepreneurship into the definition, which not only includes the traits generally agreed upon by researchers and practitioners but also new emergent features that are not yet defined. We critically analyze the most prominent and enduring characteristics of social entrepreneurship using a systematic literature review in order to create a theoretical framework revealing the essence of social entrepreneurship.

2. Methodology

In this study, we carried out a systematic literature review to explore our research question: What are the core defining characteristics of social entrepreneurship as reflected by prototypical social entrepreneurship research? In this systematic literature review, we followed the steps proposed by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart [18]: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting findings. A systematic literature review method provides a schematic and a replicable means for researchers to evaluate a body of literature within their field and enables the consolidation and integration of a wide array of literature for the purpose of developing evidence-based knowledge and building theoretical frameworks [19] (p. 700).

We started the review process from the planning step when we conducted a preliminary review of publications on social entrepreneurship focusing on how social entrepreneurship has been conceptualized. This preliminary review justified the need for a more integrative and consolidated understanding of the definitional problems of social entrepreneurship in the extant literature. In this initial review, we noted that, despite thousands of articles published on social entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship's conceptualization is more or less similar among these articles. Although no universal definition of social entrepreneurship was found, the vast majority of the definitions involved a set of concepts, such as mission, processes, and resources, which made it possible to propose a unified definition [20]. For this reason, there is no need to review each and every publication on social entrepreneurship, given the limited time and resources constraints in this research. We concluded that this review should focus on a set of prototypical social entrepreneurship research published in peer-reviewed journals. We, thus, focus on a reasonable number of selected articles that represent the prototypical research on social entrepreneurship. On the basis of this initial assessment, we developed a protocol for the systematic literature review including search criteria, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and methods of analysis.

In the conducting the review stage, the following specific steps were used:

- We chose Web of Science™ as the database for our search. We first searched articles that have “social entrepreneurship” in their titles. Our conceptual focus was on the definitional issues related to social entrepreneurship; thus, articles with the “social entrepreneurship” likely contain useful, relevant information. The search criteria were as follows: (TITLE: (social entrepreneurship) Timespan: All years. Indices: SCI-EXPANDED, SSCI, A&HCI, CPCI-S, CPCI-SSH, BKCI-S, BKCI-SSH, ESCI, CCR-EXPANDED, IC.). Our search generated a total number of 1712 articles.
- Next, we further filtered the results to retain only peer-reviewed journal articles. We believe peer-reviewed journal articles provide better objective perspectives compared to conference proceedings, book chapters, editorial materials, book reviews, and similar sources, as the articles were scrutinized by editors and reviewers in the field of social entrepreneurship. This filtering reduced the total number of articles to 1082.
- Then, we selected Web of Science disciplinary categories to further refine the results. We chose business and management categories, and we ignored categories in economics, social issues, education research, sociology, environmental studies, development studies, hospitality, leisure, and sport tourism. This decision was based on the main focus of this conceptual review being social entrepreneurship in the business and management domains, rather than other fields in the social sciences more tangentially

related to social entrepreneurship. This refinement further reduced the total number of articles to 610.

- Lastly, we chose journals that have a clear orientation in their publication history toward social entrepreneurship. Only journals that published five or more articles with “social entrepreneurship” in their titles were included. This choice meant that the total number of articles retained for inclusion in the systematic literature review was 272.

We evaluated the full texts of the 272 articles, paying particular attention to the conceptualization and definitions of social entrepreneurship and how social entrepreneurship was used in each article in terms of its connotations, implications, applications, and extensions. The focus of the systematic literature review was not to summarize the current status of social entrepreneurship research on the basis of the 272 articles. Rather, we focused on the elusiveness of social entrepreneurship’s definition. We used the results generated from the systematic literature review to analyze the definitional issues associated with social entrepreneurship with a goal of proposing a framework that might provide an exit strategy for the definitional elusiveness. Using a meta-synthesis approach, we identified three most important characteristics across all conceptualizations of social entrepreneurship: the blending of business and social logics, the centrality of creating social value that leads to beneficial social change, and the importance of innovation.

In the reporting stage, we presented the conceptual framework comprising the three most prominent and interdependent characteristics of social entrepreneurship. This framework best describes how the shifting dynamics between these logics practiced by SEOs both influence and are influenced by the organizational environment.

3. The Three Prominent Characteristics of Social Entrepreneurship

3.1. *Blending of Business and Social Logics*

The most prominent characteristic of social entrepreneurship raised in the systematic literature review was the blending of business and social logics. Organizations function within the constraints and context of multiple operating environments. The reviewed literature repeatedly indicates that SEOs interact with two particular environments: the business market and the social community [5,6,10,21,22]. SEOs rely on entrepreneurial activities within the business market to satisfy their mission in the social community. Conversely, the social activities of SEOs depend on the business market for transacting their public goods and services and fostering sustainability. Di Domenico, Haugh, and Tracey [23] (pp. 682–683) acknowledge the influence and interplay of the two environments when defining SEOs as having four characteristics: the pursuit of revenue generation strategies through trading, the aim to achieve social and environmental goals, the generation of increased social capital and enhanced community cohesion, and their location in communities characterized by limited access to resources. The business environment shapes SEOs via pecuniary forces such as revenue generation strategies and resource procurement and allocation. The social environment shapes SEOs via satisfaction of social needs and creating social value. Business and social logics are integrated internally by the organization and its members to effectively respond to, interact with, and impact the SEOs’ external and internal environments [24].

Businesses engage in the exchange of packaged goods and services via numerous, ongoing transactions in the economic marketplace for the purpose of developing a customer base that provides a profit [25]. Hammer and Champy [26] (p. 53) further describe this business process as “a collection of activities that takes one or more kinds of input and creates an output that is of value to the customer”. Thus, a business process is an internal mechanism shaped by external forces such as consumers, political pressures, stakeholders, and the social environment [27]. Businesses are influenced by an institutional logic to implement an effective and efficient business process that satisfies the businesses’ goals within the constraints of its external operating environment. Businesses’ goals, in their order of priority, are survival, creating a customer base (and adding economic value to

society), and profitability [27]. Businesses that fail to meet or deviate from these goals and processes are considered inefficient, illegitimate, and/or irresponsible. When judged by the norms of this business logic, SEOs implement an inefficient business process since they purposely divert resources to the social value creation and fail to optimally maximize their profitability. Friedman [28] (p. 32) critiques firms, such as SEOs, for engaging in any social ends outside of the “one and only one social responsibility of business—to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits”. Thus, SEOs adopt and utilize the business logic, but this logic inherently experiences a partial failure due to its interconnectedness with the social logic.

Social logic is both similar to and different from business logic. Again, an exchange of public goods and services via ongoing transactions occurs, but the purpose is social value creation and provision of a social return to the organization [11]. A profit, or any financial surplus, is not the expected outcome of the transactions in social entrepreneurship. Rather, a beneficial social change and a social return on the organization’s social value creation are the desired outcomes. The social change is the social bottom line or “the social outcome measurement that parallels the financial bottom line” [29] (p. 117). Dees [30] emphasizes the importance of social mission to the social logic of an organization. Any connection between the processes of an SEO and the economic market are incidental and tangential as the market cannot assign value to social change [30]. Instead, the relationship between SEOs and the recipients of the SEOs’ services is vital. The recipients are the ends of the SEO’s processes, not the means through which it produces its output [6]. Thus, social logic is considered action-oriented and person-oriented. The processes are intended to produce a change in the social base through the dissemination of the SEOs’ goods and services to needy, marginalized, and powerless people.

Social logic relies on social returns, not profits, as a means of survival for the SEOs. Social return is the social impact of an organization’s operations relative to the investment required to create that impact [29]. An organization providing a useful social good or service reaps the social returns of its endeavors including, but not limited to, legitimization, attracting new or additional resources, and networking and collaboration. These returns are not the inputs placed directly back into SEOs processes, but they are antecedents for the inputs. Note that social returns must undergo a transformation of some sort to become usable by SEOs. A feedback mechanism exists via which the social returns created by the social logic are reinvested much like the profits created by the business logic are reinvested, albeit the social returns are reinvested in totality without any disbursements prior to reinvestment as occurs with profits in businesses.

Clearly, social entrepreneurship is neither the extension of business practices using a social orientation nor the extension of social practices using a business orientation. The business logic and social logic are distinct, but interconnected, institutional logics. Boschee and McClurg’s [31] (p. 3) definition of social entrepreneurship, provided below’ reiterates this point.

Any person, in any sector, who uses earned income strategies to pursue a social objective; a social entrepreneur differs from a traditional entrepreneur in two important ways: traditional entrepreneurs frequently act in a socially responsible manner . . . but their efforts are only *indirectly* [emphasis in original] attached to social problems . . . Secondly, traditional entrepreneurs are ultimately measured by financial results.

Businesses purporting to address social needs without integrating a social logic into their purpose, structure, and processes are only paying lip service to social entrepreneurship. The impetus for that social action may be socially oriented, but the mechanism for achieving the organization’s mission is firmly grounded in business logic, not the social logic. Thompson and Doherty [32] (p. 362) reinforce this premise asserting “social enterprises—defined simply—are organizations seeking business solutions to social problems”. This definition emphasizes the misrepresentation of social entrepreneurship as the businesses simply divesting into social service delivery or social service organizations embracing some business practices. Instead, these two logics are hybridized by SEOs and

fully incorporated into the structure and processes that help the SEOs survive and meet a social need during a specific moment in time.

The Center for the Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE) (<https://centers.fuqua.duke.edu/case/about/what-is-social-entrepreneurship/>) (p. 1) adopts the opposite tack, omitting the importance of the business logic, by maintaining “social entrepreneurship is the process of recognizing and resourcefully pursuing opportunities to create social value”. SEOs that create social value without paying sufficient attention to fiscal matters cannot survive nor meet a social need. Nobel Laureate Robert Shiller succinctly notes that “finance underscores every worthwhile pursuit. Every human activity that matters has to be financed” [33] (p. 1). Social entrepreneurship is the utilization of the two logics to simultaneously navigate the financial and social markets in order to obtain resources, produce goods and services, transact with the clientele, create social value, satisfy the mission, and survive.

The simultaneous utilization of the business logic and social logic requires the hybridization of these two seemingly incompatible approaches. The business logic and social logic are neither applied discretely nor mutually exclusive [34]. Instead, their integration results in a combined organizational form wherein the logics are jointly applied and interacting synergistically. The resultant organizational forms exist along a continuum ranging from the firms concerned primarily with private value to the organizations concerned primarily with social value [2,4,21,35,36]. The endpoints of this continuum are the ideal organizational forms for pure business firms using only business logic and pure social organizations using only social logic [21,35]. As ideal types, these forms do not exist in reality. Instead, every organization incorporates some degree of business logic and social logic, thus making the organizations hybrids. Consequently, all organizations are hybrids. The degree of centrality and/or peripherality of the business logic and social logic in an organization corresponds to their relative position along this continuum [4]. Therefore, a specific point does not exist on the continuum that readily and discretely identifies or separates SEOs from other business or social organizations.

3.2. Centrality of Social Value Leading to Beneficial Social Changes

The second most common characteristic defining social entrepreneurship as found in the systematic literature review is the centrality of social value leading to beneficial social change [3,12,21,23,34,37]. Social value is an expression of the costs and benefits assigned by society to SEOs’ exchange of goods and services and the mutual interdependence between both parties [11,38,39]. Business entrepreneurs consider social value to be an unintended byproduct, and possibly a wasteful use, of their economic transactions, whereas social value is a central premise of social entrepreneurship and any profits are considered residual outputs [37]. Similarly, the recipients of any goods or services perceive social value differently depending on whether the interaction with the organization was based on economic and/or social needs. In any case, social value is a positive externality associated with an organization’s production and distribution of goods and services [25]. Profitability and social value are separate, but not mutually exclusive, double bottom lines for any organization [40]. Whereas business entrepreneurs tend to focus more on profits than social value, social entrepreneurs tend to focus on social value over profits [2].

Dacin, Dacin, and Tracey [7] (p. 1204) further emphasize the centrality of social value when defining “the primary mission of the social entrepreneur [is] one of creating social value by providing solutions to social problems”. Apparently, the social problems that necessitated an entrepreneurial response are merely a vehicle to satisfy the primary mission of social value creation. The social value does not alleviate necessarily the actual social problem. Instead, the social value satisfies the mission of the SEOs and the needs of its recipients whilst impacting society to some degree [21]. Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, and Shulman [41] (p. 5) reiterate the centrality of creating social value, stating “social entrepreneurship encompasses the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities in order to enhance social wealth by creating new ventures or

managing existing organizations in an innovative manner". Again, social value creation dominates the functionality of SEOs. Thus, social value has a central place in social entrepreneurship relegating resolution of the social problem (the progenitor of social entrepreneurship) to a secondary role.

This tendency to elevate social value creation is evident in Acs, Boardman, and McNeely's [42] (p. 791) simplistic definition of social entrepreneurship: "entrepreneurship that creates social value". Social value creation is treated as the key distinguishing feature of social entrepreneurship. In fact, social value is no more unique to social entrepreneurship than private value (i.e., profits) creation is to business entrepreneurship [10,43]. Businesses and SEOs both generate private value and social value, albeit to levels commensurate with their organizational mission. After all, businesses such as Walmart generate social value as a byproduct of their business activities. Social value is purposely created by SEOs, but its mere presence is insufficient to define what social entrepreneurship is [6]. The presence of social value creation in any organization means that creation is not unique to social entrepreneurship. As previously mentioned, social value is a byproduct of any production activity. Defining social entrepreneurship on the basis of normal outputs of any organization's activities is too inclusive. Social value creation's presence in organizations does not add to the demarcation of a new definition of social entrepreneurship. Instead, that presence broadens the definition beyond a semblance of usefulness.

We argue in this paper that social entrepreneurship is an active, specific effort to enact beneficial social change, rather than a derivative of a normal organizational function such as social value creation, albeit social value contributes greatly to social change. Social value creation impacts the recipients of SEOs' goods and services by easing the social problems plaguing them and improving the community around them [8]. However, SEOs are interested in more than temporary fixes; they desire long-lasting change. Social value creation is a building block toward that social change, but it is not the actual social change. Hartigan [44] (p. 45) notes this important difference, stating social entrepreneurship involves "entrepreneurs whose work is aimed at progressive social transformation". Thus, social value is a short-term output of an organization, whereas beneficial social change represents a long-term outcome of an organization. That difference makes beneficial social change an essential characteristic of social entrepreneurship.

3.3. Innovation

Entrepreneurs embody innovation, and this distinguishes them from those practicing the mundane. The creativity, resourcefulness, dynamism, opportunity recognition, risk tolerance, and vision associated with innovation separate the entrepreneur from other business and social actors. Although innovation is not unique to social entrepreneurship as its origins lay in the business realm [11,14,22,39], many researchers refer to innovation as a distinguishing characteristic in their definitions of social entrepreneurship [6,10,12,14,45–47]. Alvord, Brown, and Letts [48] (p. 262) specifically mention innovation when asserting social entrepreneurship "creates innovative solutions to immediate social problems and mobilizes the ideas, capacities, resources, and social arrangements required for sustainable social transformations". Existing approaches to social problems oftentimes are inefficient and/or ineffective, allowing the status quo to continue unabated. Innovation addresses this stagnation, whereby new, novel, and better answers are created to solve problems [15,49]. Social problems are wicked, complex, and dynamic, requiring particularly innovative solutions. Social entrepreneurs utilize innovation to pursue their social mission, structure their organizations, procure and maximize the available resources, provide goods and services to the public, create social value, and manage risk [14]. Entrepreneurs, in a general sense, "[carry] out new combinations in the production process" [47] (p. 66). Innovation moves the organization toward an end that was previously unavailable.

Many examples demonstrate the importance of innovation in social entrepreneurship. For instance, healthcare services are woefully deficient in Indian villages. The shortage of healthcare practitioners in rural areas was overcome with an innovative technology

developed by Sawarkar and Kumar developed a technology, ReMeDi™ (Remote Medical Diagnostic), which consolidated medical professionals into a single service delivery platform (<http://www.neurosynaptic.com/>). This technological innovation provides mobile and teleconference capabilities to rural clinics. The platform allowed physicians to hold on-line medical consultations, patients to retrieve and update vital statistics and records, and medical providers to bill medical fees at a significant cost savings. This innovative solution gave impoverished, rural villagers readily available access to previously unavailable and costly qualified medical care. ReMeDi™ is an example of the social entrepreneurship that Austin, Stevenson, and Wei-Skillern [21] (p. 2) defined as “innovative, social value creating activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, business, or government sectors”.

3.4. Interdependence of the Three Prominent Characteristics

An organization is a composite of its business logic and social logic that dictate how it operates in the business market and social community. Although the proportionality of the business and social orientation varies, they are ever-present in any organization. Framing social entrepreneurship on the basis of the blending of business and social logics is essential; however, without additional delimiters, the framework becomes all-encompassing. Emphasis on how the logics are blended and implemented helps differentiate SEOs from other organizations. This blending, or hybridization, process is an organization's response to the prevailing economic and social needs. Therefore, the logics are blended, and synergistic and emergent features develop to maximize the double bottom line. This maximization frequently requires innovative solutions. Understanding that hybridization process provides deeper insight into what social entrepreneurship is and is not relative to other organizations.

Similarly, social value creation and the enactment of social change have more meaning for social entrepreneurship when presented in conjunction with an SEO's business-social orientation and innovative practice than when social value creation and enactment of social change are presented by themselves. Given that social value is a product in varying degrees of any organization's goods and services, it is not a characteristic unique to social entrepreneurship [6]. The centrality of social value for SEOs does not distinguish social entrepreneurship from business entrepreneurship or other related fields. Social value emanates from SEOs' production process, but its mere presence is insufficient to define what social entrepreneurship is. Social value is simply an anticipated short-term output of any organization that leads to a long-term outcome such as social change. Social value creation may lead to social change, but it is not equivalent to social change.

The previous discussion of social value and social change focused on beneficial social change, but social change can also be detrimental. Every organization creates social value and organizations enact social change, but the outcomes of both may not be helpful [42]. For example, ShoreBank, an SEO banking firm, provided progressive banking services for nearly four decades to anyone seeking capital. The firm's beneficial social value created diminished after ShoreBank was no longer self-sustaining. Instead, a detrimental social value emerged as ShoreBank became a financial and political lodestone on the community. Previous definitions of social entrepreneurship imply, but do not state, that the social value created via social entrepreneurship must be beneficial. However, the social change may have either a net beneficial or detrimental effect on the social problem. Thus, a continuum exists between beneficial and detrimental social change in the same vein as the aforementioned business–social orientation continuum.

Innovation is considered a defining characteristic of social entrepreneurship per the systematic literature review. Frank [50] (p. 200) makes the case that social entrepreneurship specifically is “embodied in an innovative action that is catalyzed by discovering an unmet need in the marketplace and capitalizing on that need”. Yet, Frank's explanation accurately describes business entrepreneurship as well. Innovation is a quality that entrepreneurs possess, and it is a term broadly applied. Trivedi and Stokols [22] (p. 12) try to contextualize innovation noting that “whereas innovation, competition, and profits are the driving force for commercial entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs foster *innovation* and *inclusiveness* [em-

phasis in original]”. This comparison buttresses the argument that innovation is not unique to social entrepreneurship. Additionally, Wolfe [51] argues that the concept of innovation by itself is low in explanatory power and offers little guidance as to a practical meaning regardless of the context. For example, Microsoft’s Windows operating system changed the way people used computers. Moreover, Microsoft assists the efforts of Synergos Arab World Social Innovators via computer and communication support. Yet, Microsoft is not categorized as an SEO. Microsoft’s innovative practices regarding Synergos Arab World Social Innovators become more readily recognizable when contrasted with its more mundane practices that people have come to expect. Inertia and the failure of established normative practices to address social problems by existing organizations provide opportunities for innovative SEOs. Innovation challenges the status quo surrounding a social problem that is maintained by existing mundane practices. The degree of innovative and mundane practices represents the final continuum in our framework and the continuum functions in a similar vein to the business–social orientation and beneficial–detrimental social change continua.

3.5. A Framework for Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is best described by its three prominent characteristics. Unfortunately, the ambiguous, fuzzy, contested, and fluid nature of these logics makes defining social entrepreneurship a foolhardy endeavor [7,8,10,11,14,22,52,53]. Choi and Majumdar [6] argue that researchers may agree that certain elements distinguish social entrepreneurship, but these elements are best understood as a clustering of concepts framing, not defining, social entrepreneurship. A framework that captures these core elements offers both a conceptual and practical perspective on social entrepreneurship. The constraints of static definitions are avoided when using a more flexible framework for describing social entrepreneurship; this flexibility better accommodates and mimics the dynamic environments SEOs face [54]. A conceptual framework describing what social entrepreneurship is on the organizational and individual level is noticeably absent from the literature [7]; researchers instead focus on the race for an accepted definition of social entrepreneurship (see [55]) or “how-to-do it” strategies (see [56,57]). Our framework affords researchers and practitioners an exit strategy from the never-ending definitional debate.

Our framework integrates three core institutional logics—business vs. social orientation, beneficial vs. detrimental social change, and innovative vs. mundane practices—that can be used pragmatically to identify, describe, and understand social entrepreneurship [6,10,58]. Although organizations comprise many logics, these logics were selected on the basis of two factors. First, the logics are the most common and prominent elements found in the definitions of social entrepreneurship we examined. Our chosen logics are commonplace throughout the social entrepreneurship literature. Thus, they were not arbitrarily selected for inclusion in the framework; the logics are firmly grounded in the extant literature. We acknowledge our potential selection bias, but our previous arguments about the three logics and their relevance to social entrepreneurship minimize that bias. Second, although organizations comprise many institutional logics, organizations and their members may struggle to understand the totality of institutional logics. Any attempts to identify, study, understand, and implement these many institutional logics in a given organization is a daunting endeavor that may lead to confusion, inundation, and rational ignorance [59]. Rather, social entrepreneurship should be studied according to a much smaller subset of concepts, which, in our framework, entails three core logics.

The aforementioned logics are commonly presented as dichotomous, mutually exclusive relationships conceptually and graphically depicted as continua [4,12,35,60]. The continuum has two endpoints and a midpoint that represent the “pure” forms and “perfect blend” of the logics, respectively. These three points are unachievable in the real world, but their presence grounds the continua conceptually. These continua are mentioned frequently throughout the social entrepreneurship literature, but they suffer from an inherent flaw—an implied tradeoff between the partnered elements generating the institutional

logic [21,61,62] and an inability to account for hybridization [63]. For simplicity purposes, consider the social–business orientation continuum as a line extending from 100% “pure” business orientation endpoint (and, thus, 0% “pure” social orientation) to 0% “pure” business orientation endpoint (and, thus, 100% “pure” social orientation). An SEO may have an initial 55%/45% business/social orientation until such a time as external and/or internal events require an adjustment in that logic to 40%/60% business/social orientation. Clearly, a tradeoff has occurred as the SEO adjusted to the new conditions; yet, why must it be considered a tradeoff? The SEO in the example became more socially oriented, but that does not necessarily mean it had to become less business-oriented [64]. Thus, an SEO should not be defined by a single point on a continuum. Instead, an SEO’s social–business orientation falls within a vast range of possible combinations. For instance, an SEO with a prominent business orientation can have a prominent, or not, social orientation as well [5].

The three continua depict SEOs without placing SEOs within the context of a larger universe of all organizations. Our framework bounds a conceptual representation of all organizations of which SEOs are a subset. Graphically, this new framework integrates the social–business orientation, beneficial–detrimental social change, and innovative–mundane practices continua into a comprehensive three-dimensional ball of possible points wherein any organization can be found [65]. This ball is composed of the social–business orientation on the x -axis (0 to +A for social orientation, 0 to –A for business orientation), beneficial–detrimental change social change on the y -axis (0 to +B for beneficial social change, 0 to –B for detrimental social change), and innovative–mundane practices on the z -axis (0 to +C for innovative practices, 0 to –C for mundane practices). The endpoints of each axis still represent the “pure” form of the respective logic and remain unachievable. Similarly, 0 remains the midpoint of each axis, and the center of the ball represents an unachievable “perfect” blend of the three institutional logics. All other points within the ball are possible forms organizations can take via hybridization of these three logics [54]. For example, social entrepreneurship is a socially oriented, beneficial, and innovative approach to organizing. Therefore, SEOs tend to fall within the positive hemisphere of the ball (beneficial social change and innovative practices), with more SEOs located in the positive quarter (social orientation) of that hemisphere than in its negative quarter (business orientation) [8]. A single point in that area of the ball does not represent an SEO at all moments in time. Attempting to do so leads one back into the quagmire of absolute, static definitions of social entrepreneurship. Rather, a fuzzy area around that single point best depicts the nature of the SEO. This fuzzy area in the ball has fluid boundaries that capture a collection of points within the ball or a conceptual clustering of social entrepreneurship as practiced by a given SEO [6,53]. The fuzzy area may take any shape that adequately captures what social entrepreneurship means pragmatically for the given SEO according to how the SEO applies each of the three logics [21,66]. Both the boundaries of the fuzzy area in the ball and the SEO’s true, but unidentifiable, placement within those boundaries change as constraints of the SEO’s complex operating environment change [21,67,68]. Furthermore, the “true” position of a given SEO within the ball at a given time is indeterminable by this framework. This framework provides possibilities, not actualities, by depicting the range of possible configurations of the three institutional logics for a SEO at a given moment in time [10].

The fuzzy area in this three-dimensional ball portrays social entrepreneurship not only on an organizational level, but also on an individual level. Each member of an organization cognitively hybridizes the three institutional logics to create their personal conceptualization of what social entrepreneurship is as practiced by their SEO [21,22]. An individual’s fuzzy area will not be a perfect duplicate of the organization’s fuzzy area; yet, some degree of overlap likely exists. Additionally, every individual’s conceptualizations of the SEO [66] recursively influence the SEO’s configuration of the three logics. Thus, our framework recognizes the role social construction plays in SEOs’ configuration of the three logics [58,69].

4. Discussion

In this paper, we frame social entrepreneurship using three common logics and emphasize it is the hybridization of those three logics (and others) that gives social entrepreneurship its emergent qualities. Emergent features are sufficiently different and similar to their hybridized elements such that one can recognize them as something new by comparing the features to the elements that created them [70]. The emergent qualities of social entrepreneurship include, but are not limited to, creative means of resource acquisition and management, trailblazing social and economic niches, unexpected social benefits, enactment of social change, and exceptional adaptability. These qualities are not unique unto themselves; rather, each emergent quality contributes holistically to the overall emergent feature of social entrepreneurship. The emergent nature of social entrepreneurship differentiates it from organizations practicing the independent elements of business and social logics, innovation, and social change without ever hybridizing those features. El-sner, Hocker, and Schwardt [67] (p. 2) note “complexity immediately triggers evolutionary processes. The latter, in turn, may lead to emergent structures”. SEO are hybrids that address the wickedly complex social problems that organizations comprising unconnected logics cannot solve [65,71]. The paradoxical logics pose a particularly troublesome scenario for traditional organizations that consider the logics as mutually exclusive, dichotomous elements in perpetual conflict [58,60]. Haraway [72] (p. 129) proposes “evidence is building of a need for a theory of ‘difference’ whose geometries, paradigms, and logics break out of binaries”.

Hybridization is a reconciliation process that accommodates the differences between institutional logics whilst accentuating those same logics’ similarities. Additionally, entrepreneurship is a “synthesizing agent” that coalesces various logics and facilitates hybridization in SEO [73]. The outcome of these processes is an organizational form that constrains and frames a SEO structurally, functionally, symbolically, culturally, and normatively on an organizational and individual level [66]. Otherwise, SEOs and their members needlessly devote their already scarce resources to reconciling ever-present conflicting logics.

Social entrepreneurship is not conducted in a vacuum. Changing external and internal conditions continually affect SEOs over time [68], requiring organizational flexibility and dynamic hybridization processes. The aforementioned complexity, emergence, and adaptation associated with hybrid organizations and the interconnectivity between SEOs and their operating environments blur and shift their organizational forms, boundaries, and identities [67]. Given its fuzzy and fluid nature, defining social entrepreneurship is a daunting and impractical endeavor. A theoretical framework outlining social entrepreneurship’s key elements sidesteps the pitfalls apparent with defining the term.

The framework is grounded with three presumptions that further mitigate the necessity for an all-encompassing definition of social entrepreneurship: sensemaking, dialectics, and pragmatism. Sensemaking entails ongoing, socially oriented, plausible, post hoc construction by those exposed to a phenomenon [74]. Sensemaking is an activity whereby individuals interpret new or recurring phenomena in terms of already familiar criteria. Organizationally, the result is a collection of disparate yet interconnected organizational forms that are not intended to capture the true essence (or definition) of the organization and its composite logics; rather, sensemaking produces an understandable and workable framework [58]. Thus, the inevitable changes that impact organizations can be reconciled even when those changes pit paradoxical logics against each other. Individuals resolve this dissonance precipitated by continually hybridizing the institutional logics. Organizations shape and are shaped by their members’ shifting social constructions as they relate to the organizations. Thus, hybridization and sensemaking are interrelated and generate a continuous loop of dialectical change.

Where do the phenomena, stimuli, and cues come from that foment sensemaking? Pragmatists suggest that practice, not theory, provides the answer [75,76]. Peirce [77] (p. 132) presented the following pragmatism maxim: “Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have.

Then, our conception of those effects is the whole of our conception of the object". This practice-oriented approach to understanding is not intended to glean the entirety of the phenomenon; rather, the approach identifies those elements discernible, pertinent, and useful to the observer. Pragmatism helps create a workable framework for social entrepreneurship [78]. A pragmatic framework is essential for understanding and describing the complexity and changing conditions SEOs face and how they adjust their logics accordingly. SEOs constantly evaluate their institutional logics on the basis of their present mission, processes, outputs and outcomes, and returns (relative to their environment), and they incorporate this pragmatic analysis into how they configure their organizational form [77]. SEOs adopt organizational forms according to "what is" rather than "what might be".

Tension best defines the relationships between the interconnected institutional logics. Dialectics is the process which, in combination with pragmatism, contributes to how and why SEOs hybridize and organize the logics in a particular way [79]. Dialectics is a dualistic examination of two competing logics so that sense is made of them jointly, not separately, from a pragmatic perspective [80]. A given logic's dominance may be fleeting or enduring; however, over time, its positioning is dependent on its relationship with other interconnected logics and any qualitative shift in that relationship [79,81]. For example, a qualitative change in the relationship between the business logic and social logic shifts an SEO's positioning within our framework [80]. Consequently, what the SEO appears to be one moment may quickly change next moment, and defining this "lightning in a bottle" is infeasible. Our framework constrains that "lightning" sufficiently that a description of the SEO is possible.

5. Conclusions

The three-dimensional framework for social entrepreneurship moves the field away from the definitional debate that has led to the ambiguity and fuzziness associated with the current conceptualization of social entrepreneurship in the extant literature. Avoiding that debate frees researchers to examine social entrepreneurship conceptually and empirically. Our intention in this paper and throughout this Special Issue was to push the conceptual and empirical development of social entrepreneurship research and practice.

On the basis of the proposed framework in this article, we suggest four promising future research directions in social entrepreneurship. First, more research should be done on the governance of the interface between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, and civil society. Social entrepreneurship, as a field of research and practice of its own, is linking the traditional sectors that we have been using to demarcate disciplines. It is located at the intersection of public agencies, private businesses, nonprofit organizations, and even civil societies; thus, it is imperative for social entrepreneurship scholars to investigate how public sectors and private sectors are interfaced in the social entrepreneurship domains, and how nonprofit sectors and civil society play a critical role when interfaced with public and private sectors in the context of social entrepreneurship. The attention to these interfaces will largely reveal the essence of social entrepreneurship. Second, scholars should study social entrepreneurship by focusing on the juxtaposition of different levels of analysis: individual/interpersonal (micro), organizational/interorganizational (meso), and institutional/international (macro). Most current social entrepreneurship research focuses on a particular level of analysis, but we call for a refocusing that will center on cross-level phenomena in social entrepreneurship. A research topic in social entrepreneurship at a single level could also be studied in juxtaposition with different levels. For example, the blending of business and social logics has been studied extensively at organizational/interorganizational levels, but this topic could also be studied at the individual level— that is, we could study the micro-foundation of meso-/macro level topics. Innovation has been extensively studied at the micro/meso levels in social entrepreneurship research, but it could also be investigated at the institutional level (the macro-manifestation of micro/meso level topics). Such research will strengthen our un-

derstanding of social entrepreneurship using this juxtaposition of different levels, such as how meso-/macro level concepts emerge from micro level concepts when doing social aggregation, and how micro level concepts are manifested in meso/macro levels to impact governance of social entrepreneurship. Thirdly, more research should be done on the paradoxical nature of social entrepreneurship. When different logics in social entrepreneurship are interfacing and different levels of analysis are juxtaposing, social entrepreneurship is unavoidably confronted with different interests, preferences, resources, and powers, which undergo a continuous process of negotiation and contestation over allocation of social and material resources and political power. Thus tensions, conflicts, and paradoxes are heightened. We call for more research to reveal essential reasons leading to paradoxes in social entrepreneurship by analyzing the nature of “wicked problems” tackled by social entrepreneurship as the root cause for the paradoxes. Fourthly, we call for more research on the key question of how to determine which approach is most suitable for which circumstance under what conditions in managing social entrepreneurship—a contingency approach to social entrepreneurship. More research should be done on the mediating effects, moderating effects, and other contingent effects that are becoming increasingly important in social entrepreneurship research.

In summary, this paper contributes to the field of the social entrepreneurship by analyzing the core characteristics of social entrepreneurship, proposing a framework for an exit strategy to the definitional elusiveness of social entrepreneurship, and proposing four future research directions for the field. We call for more research on the governance of social entrepreneurship in the interface between public, private, nonprofit sectors, and civil society, where juxtaposition of different levels (individual, organizational, interorganizational, institutional) contributes to the paradoxical nature of social entrepreneurship that should be managed contingently. We are confident that social entrepreneurship will move forward as a preparadigmatic field when well-developed theories contribute to better practice and vice versa.

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