

# A Conceptual Framework of Understanding Social Enterprises

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## Abstract

Social entrepreneurship has been the important subject in the entrepreneurship literature. However, there are not clear consensus among academics and practitioners. This paper explores and clarifies the significance of analytical framework of social enterprise. We present a conceptual framework for understanding of social enterprise, presenting theoretical and practical insights into social enterprises and social entrepreneurship. A conceptual framework for understanding the complexity of social enterprises integrates five major perspectives in entrepreneurship; characteristics of the individuals who start the social enterprise focusing on social value creation, organization's trait which is their identity, performance which creates the social impact beyond the financial performance, sustainability which has a high level of innovation, business model which can be replicable and scalable, and partnership with local organizations. The authors explore the implications of social enterprises' identity and identification in explanations with comprehensive 5 factors. We conclude by outlining implications for social entrepreneurs, policy makers and practitioners advancing an agenda for further research.

Keyword: Social Enterprises, Social Entrepreneur, Social Entrepreneurship, A Conceptual Framework, Entrepreneurship

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## I . Introduction

As social entrepreneurship scholars, we could often feel that what we are talking about when we talk about social enterprises. Or we wonder if audiences have same definition of social enterprises when we talk about social enterprises. Even if we are using a same word, social enterprise, we all in discussions have a different view of social enterprises. The phenomenon of social issue has a long history. Since inception, no general consensus has been reached regarding its definition. The social entrepreneurship is used to describe as poverty reduction(Seelos & Mair, 2005, Hockerts, 2015) or reaching all the way to the protection of environmental resources(Hockerts, 2015).

Social enterprises have developed from and within the social economy sector for a long time. The distinctive organizational forms that social enterprises adopt depend on the existing legal frameworks, on the political economy of welfare provision and on the cultural and historical traditions of non-profit development. As a result, the social enterprises sector today includes both new typologies of organizations and traditional third sector organization re-fashioned by a new entrepreneurial dynamic (OECD). In this respect, the social enterprise concept doesn't see to replace concepts of the non-profit sector or social economy. Rather, it is intended to bridge these two concepts, by focusing on new entrepreneurial dynamics of civic initiatives that pursue social aims.

Based on the OECD, social enterprises are organizations that take different legal forms across OECD countries to pursue both social and economic goals with an entrepreneurial spirit. With this explanation, at least we have consensus that social enterprises have goals and metrics to achieve social and economic value creation with different legal forms. Mair and Noboa(2006), and Hockerts(2015, 2017) propose the antecedents of social entrepreneurial behavior. The model explains the empathy and moral judgment, self-efficacy, and social support can be important factors to define social entrepreneurship. Yet, an abundance of scholarly effort, the majority of definitions proposed have not been clear with respect to what constitutes the major

elements of a definition.

Our research is trying to propose an acceptable general definition of social enterprises among entrepreneurs, policy makers and entrepreneurship scholars. We are trying to examine of extant definitions in social entrepreneurship literature to define the major elements of social enterprises. Especially we use the analytical perspectives of social enterprises: antecedents (motivations), processes and outcomes. Therefore, this paper provides a conceptual framework that allows understanding the growing phenomena of social entrepreneurship through showing the conceptual framework of describing social enterprises.

## **II. Towards a conceptual framework of social enterprises**

The definitional aspects of social enterprises has highlighted the immense efforts of scholars in defining the conceptual determinants and borders of social enterprises. However, most extant definitions has been conducted from two analytical perspectives of social enterprises which are antecedents and outcomes (Aygoren, 2014). Only a few researchers define social enterprises by reference to process perspective.

We suggest in this paper that we need to consider three perspectives, antecedents, processes, and outcomes to define social enterprises to understand their distinctive characteristics.

### **2.1 Social Entrepreneur and Social Enterprise**

#### **2.1.1 Social enterprise**

Nobel Prize Muhammad Yunus defined the social businesses as an organization with the aim of creating social impact. Also he emphasized that social businesses are created and designed to address a social problem. In the early 1980s, Bill Drayton publicly asked why enterprise couldn't be to solve social problems. He began to build a global organization, Ashoka, to put such an approach in place.

In many scholarly literature, social enterprises pursue the multi-faceted goal of creating value for and capturing value from customers, while also creating social value (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Dohrmann, Meyskens & Carsrud, 2011; Pache & Santos, 2013; Raith, & Seibold, 2015). Social value is defined as specific improvements to societal dimensions including health, nutrition, community development, education or improvements to the natural environment (Florin & Schmidt, 2011). This value is considered to be a positive externality that extends beyond the enterprise and its customers (Mendoza-Abarca, Anokhin & Zamudio, 2015).

### 2.1.2 Social entrepreneur

What is special about the social entrepreneur? Social entrepreneurs are known as social entrepreneurial suggests a few distinguishing traits and skills. Some researchers explains that social entrepreneurs as creative individuals with a powerful new, system change idea (Alvy et al., 2000; Mair, 2006). Other researchers are talking about social entrepreneurs characteristics such as the ability to recognize opportunities, a collaborative leadership style, a long-term community-oriented motivation, and teamwork capability(Morse & Dudley, 2002, Mair 2006). However, lots of papers have criticized that many of these characteristics may not be exclusive to social entrepreneurs but many very well be shared by non-entrepreneurs.

Thake and Zadek (1997) that social entrepreneurs are driven by a desire for social justice. They said that social entrepreneurs seek a direct link between their actions and an improvement in the quality of life for the people with whom they work and those that they seek to serve. They also said that social entrepreneurs aim to produce solutions which are sustainable financially, organizationally, socially and environmentally. Social entrepreneurs play the important role of change agents in the social sectors, by 1) adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value), 2) recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities

to serve that mission, 3) engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning, 4) acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and 5) exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created (Dees, 1998). Reis (1999) emphasizes what social entrepreneurs can create social value through innovation and leveraging financial resources.

## 2.2 Analytical Perspectives of Social Enterprises

For understanding of distinctive characteristics of social enterprises, we suggest three analytical perspectives, antecedents, process and outcomes to define social enterprises. Compared to the antecedents and outcomes, the studies on the processes of social entrepreneurship are limited. In our research, we try to use the balanced perspective to see the distinctive characteristics of social enterprises.

Even though extant research try to find what motivates social entrepreneurs, there is a heterogeneity in individual's motivations. At the individual level of analyses as antecedents for social entrepreneurship, diverse factors such as motivations, skills, and competencies are investigated. However, it doesn't have consistent conclusions so it is not well theorized (Miller et al., 2012). Miller et al. (2012) proposed that the other-oriented emotional construct, compassion is an important motivational antecedent. Even if we still need to see the antecedent with a perspective of institutional condition and processes mitigating individual motivations and skills, we try to consider compassion as an antecedent of individual level in this research.

The studies of process are very limited in social entrepreneurship research. Most literature in process are about social entrepreneurial opportunity recognition and exploitation process, process concerning the hybrid nature of social ventures, forms of organizing, and innovation. Venkataraman (1997), studying traditional entrepreneurship, sees the creation of social wealth as a by-product of economic value created by entrepreneurs. In social entrepreneurship, by contrast, social value creation appears to be the primary objective, while economic value creation is often a by-product that allows the organization to achieve sustainability and

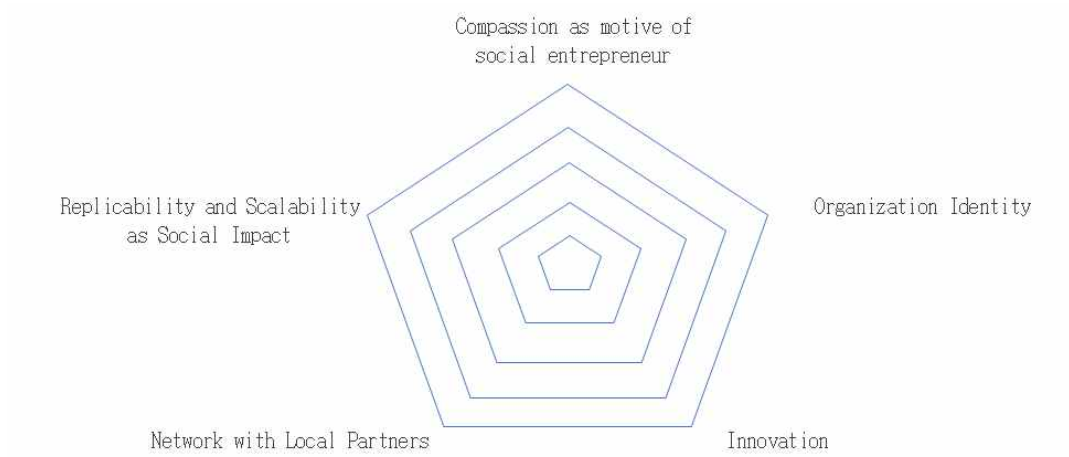
self-sufficiency. In our paper, we will see the organizational identity, and innovation aspect as a process perspective.

Compared to the processes of social entrepreneurship, the outcomes of social enterprises research have been well conducted. The outcomes of social enterprises can be classified with individual and social group empowerment, organizational sustainability, local, regional and community development, societal and institutional transformation and change, and environmental sustainability (Aygoren, 2014). However, many research consider and focus on social impact and sustainability even if there are more important factors which are very important to describe social enterprises as outcome perspective.

As we use the three analytical perspective to explain social enterprises, we can have better understanding and deeper perspective to clarify social enterprises.

### **III. A Framework for Describing Social Enterprises**

We contend that there are five major elements that collectively should describe social enterprises. Further, we argue that no one element can be considered in isolation of any one of the other elements if we are to understand the contribution of each element. So it is through consideration of what elements interact that we have developed our conceptual framework of social enterprises. Figure 1 presents a framework for describing social enterprise across five dimension: (1) compassion as a motive of social entrepreneur, (2) organizational identity, (3) innovation, (4) network with local partners, and (5) replicability and scalability as a social impact measurement.



<Figure 1> A Conceptual Framework

### 3.1 Compassion as motive of social entrepreneur

There have been lots of discussions about the antecedents of social enterprises. Especially the social entrepreneurship literature has shown that motivations and behaviors are influential factors to create the socio-economic impact (Zahra et al., 2009). Also, extant literature reports that the relationship between the characteristics of social entrepreneurs and the socio-economic impact they create (Alvord et. al., 2004; Zahra et al., 2009). Townsend and Hart (2008) conclude that the entrepreneur's motivations not only affect the opportunity search process but also influence the organizational strategies and the tactics employed to deal with environmental and institutional ambiguities. Their research expand the importance of social entrepreneur's motivation to the overall strategies of the company. In addition, the literature on social entrepreneurs' skills provides a plethora of competences, which are influential at various stages of the entrepreneurial process and in different contexts. Miller at al. (2012) goes deeper to identify a common pool of competencies. They show as important competencies of social entrepreneurs that (1) the ability to problem solve, management of financial capital, (3) innovation and creativity, (4) formulating strategy, and (5) developing collaborative relationship.

However, those researches are focused on the characteristics related to social enterprises' success. As you see the literature in social entrepreneurs' characteristics and skills, it is not a clear factor for only social entrepreneurs. In our research, we are trying to identify the factor which is related to social enterprise as antecedents. We want to see what kind of motivation factors make social entrepreneurs to start to social enterprises. We try to find which factor can be a differentiated factor compared to other entrepreneurial start-ups.

In early research of entrepreneurship, founder's motivation was not enough to explain why an individual would engage in the process of starting up a social enterprise (Carsrud & Brannback, 2011; Miller et al., 2012). Some results reveal that financial returns as compensation for their personal risk taking, and independence from organizational bureaucratic situation are important motivation factors (Casson, 1982, Kirzner, 1985, GEM Global Report, 2015).

Recently, Miller and his colleagues (2012) developed a conceptual model to define social entrepreneurship. Their research focuses on compassion among many motivational factors. Also, they show that compassion can transform into social entrepreneurship with three mechanisms such as integrative thinking, prosocial cost-benefit analysis, and commitment to alleviating others' suffering. And several scholars have suggested that compassion may act as a prosocial and emotional motivator of social entrepreneurship (Dees, 1998, 2007; Fowler, 2000). Traditionally, individual will choose to engage in activities when the personal benefits outweigh the personal costs. However, there are so many evidences and theories to talk about individual's irrational decision making. Many research shows that the other-oriented and emotional nature of compassion challenges such a traditional atomistics analysis of the costs and benefits of possible actions (Miller et al., 2012; Dees, 1998, 2007; Fowler, 2000).

Proposition 1. Social entrepreneur(s) are more likely to be motivated by compassion than traditional rational and self-oriented motivations.



### 3.2 Organization Identity

There are so many legal forms of social enterprises, cooperatives, public bodies, private ventures including social orientation, and philanthropies agencies. Most organizations identify themselves as social enterprises with different mission and orientation. Most organizations, ranging from cooperatives to philanthropies agencies, have hybrid characteristics of having social and economic value-oriented identity. Sometimes this kind of mixed identity can be a beneficial to pursuit two sides of value creations. However, it can create ambiguity and organizational confusion associated to dual orientations (Glynn and Dacin, 2000; Dacin et al., 2011).

Organizational identity is defined as the enduring attributes of an organization that contribute to its uniqueness and distinctiveness (Albert & Whetten, 1985). On Albert & Whetten (1985) research, they said that organizational identity is defined as the shared and collective sense of an organization and is typically singular in focus. Even if many researchers have suggested that organizations may hold multiple identities, empirical research examining these assertions has been scant (Foreman & Whetten, 2002). In Moss et al. (2010)'s research, they empirically show that there are two different types of organization identities. One is utilitarian organization identity (i.e., entrepreneurial, product oriented) and another is normative identity (i.e., social, people oriented). They compared with the mission statements of other high-performing entrepreneurial enterprises culled from the Inc. 500 with social enterprises. They said that social enterprises have a tendency to dual identities which are a utilitarian organizational identity and a normative organizational identity. Also, another research shows that the organizational identity of a social enterprise is intrinsically dualistic because it borrows distinctive elements from both the social and commercial sector (Pharoah, Scott, & Fisher, 2004; Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

Proposition 2. Social enterprises are more likely to have a dual identities which borrows distinctive elements from both the social and commercial sector.

### 3.3 Innovation

There are three kinds of sustainability: operational, financial and environmental in social entrepreneurship. Sustainability is the term for enterprises that will last, and be around for the long-term. Operational sustainability refers to managerial and human capacity, while financial sustainability refers to having the financial resources to meet strategic impact goals. Non-for-profit enterprises often struggle with financial sustainability because they are dependent on donor generosity. Often social enterprises are better positioned for sustainability, because they are generating revenue as they pursue social impact objectives. Environmental sustainability for social enterprise is often heightened by the reliance of many people, like developing world farmers, who are dependent on predictable climate conditions for their very survival. Those three kinds of sustainability are related to innovation.

Many social entrepreneurs start with their compassion to contribute to society and passion to pursue their goals without their solid business model based on innovation. They confront the situation that they don't have enough revenue sources to continue businesses because of the lack of innovation of their products and services. Also, their orientation leans to the social value creation identity. Without innovation, they can't achieve their social and economic goals. Innovation is essential for social enterprises to perform well and to achieve their social and economic goals (Bradley et al., 2013; Chell et al., 2010).

Social enterprises refer to organizations that pursue innovation with a social objective, which can include for-profit, nonprofit, or hybrid forms of organizing (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Like for-profit organizations, innovation is also a fundamental capability of social enterprises (Roberts & Woods, 2005; Short et al., 2009). Dees (1998) emphasizes that social entrepreneurs create the value through continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning. Social entrepreneurs should have radical innovation capability to produce products or services and generate social value by creating ways to solve problem that throughout time have

been unsolvable. Therefore, high innovation capabilities is one of desired traits for social enterprises to have sustainability.

Proposition 3. Social enterprises are more likely to develop their own innovation processes to have sustainability.

### 3.4 Network with Local Partners

All too often intentioned people create projects and enterprises to solve problems that they connect to emotionally, but haven't experienced directly. Good intentions to help others are important, but the best social enterprises are those that are built by or in close collaboration with local people or organization as partners, to address their problems in a way that they can truly own at a grassroots level. Thompson (2002) shows that a social entrepreneur's community network is especially important because the resources needed to create value and support the community are embedded within the community network. It is the sum of social resources embedded in a social relationship, yielding benefits of referral, timing, and information (Burt, 1997; Coleman, 1988). Extending these research, Peredo and Chrisman (2006) explain that social capital is a vital ingredient in the emergence of community based enterprises. Larger networks present greater opportunities to gain resources and survival (Baum & Oliver, 1991; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998).

Network and partnership as resources of firms is not only for social enterprises. However, the core value of network and partnership in social enterprises can be different. Social entrepreneurs may exploit their network to enlist volunteers and devote time and money to the organization, to maintain or fund operations, and to undergird initiatives (Haugh, 2007; Thompson, 2002). Community-led, making community-based networks are critical resources for social enterprises and distinctive characteristics (Haugh, 2007).

Proposition 4. Social enterprises are more likely to have a large size of network

with local partner to continue their businesses.

### 3.5 Replicability and Scalability as Social Impact

Social enterprises' ultimate goal is to maximize their social impact (Austin et al., 2006). Performance in social enterprises is conceptualized around mission-related 'social value creation' or 'social value proposition' (Austin et al., 2006; Martin and Osberg, 2007). Even if there have been lots of research, it is also very ambiguous (Peredo and McLean, 2006). Also, there are lots of challenges of measuring performance of social enterprises. On the actual measurement of social value, the literature offers little guidance. Even if there are lots of challenges and argument of social impact measurement, the distinctive characteristics of social enterprises are related to replicability and scalability.

Replicability means the capacity to reproduce or adopting the social enterprise's structure, processes, products or services, and habit (Dees et al., 2004; Winter and Szulanski, 2001). Bradach (2003) emphasizes replication as an important dimension of scalability to move an organization's theory to change to a new location.

Scalability is built for growth and greater impact. The best social enterprises are both replicable and scalable (Seelos and Mair, 2005). There are inconsistent definitions of replicability and scalability. So there are various efforts and several theoretically and empirically grounded approaches and model that suggest key components for determining the scalability and replicability of social enterprises.

There are three critical success factors for scaling social impact by Bradach (2003). In that research, author shows that the definition of growth strategy, design of network and role of national could be the three critical success factors for scaling social impact. Aspen Institute (2008) shows that there are six key drivers of scaling of social enterprises: adaptation of traditional business model, confrontation with tensions implicit in scaling-up opportunities for earning revenue, engagement in strategic partnerships, use of subsidies effectively, practice of solid business fundamentals. These two characteristics are distinctive traits compared to

profit organizations.

Proposition 5. Social enterprises are more likely to seek sustainable solutions which are replicability and scalability than to seek sustainable advantage.

#### **IV. The Implication of the Proposed Conceptual Framework**

Around us, socially conscious individuals have introduced and applied innovative and sustainable business models to address social problems by business, governmental and non-governmental organization for many years. Recently we are aware of the importance of social enterprise as an engine of new economic area. The movement is not only certain countries but all over the world. This kind of new wave has expanded to the social service sectors to other sectors (Cox and Healey, 1998). Despite the growing scholarly interest and social movement in social entrepreneurship (Hemingway, 2005), there is no clear definition of its domain. In addition there is ambiguous words around social enterprise and social entrepreneurship (Mair and Marti, 2004; Zahra et al., 2009).

The present paper has tried to identify the distinctive domain of social enterprise. It has been argued that social enterprises differ from other forms of organizations in that it gives high priority to social value creation by change makers. The current definitional aspects of social enterprises are not enough to clarify the social enterprises' constructs. This paper has tried to have a holistic approach to use three perspectives, antecedents, processes, and outcomes of social enterprises. We conclude our paper with showing a comprehensive conceptual model to describe social enterprises. It fills the gap by providing a conceptual framework for understanding how compassion, organization identity, innovation, networks with local partners, and replicability and scalability a social impact explain social enterprises. This paper attempts to organize the many variables that have been used in past research to describe social enterprises into a comprehensive

framework. Far from being reductive, the new view of the social entrepreneurship literature should provide valuable insights into the social enterprises by showing it to be a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. A primary value of the framework for describing social enterprises presented here is that it provides a systematic means of comparing and contrasting complex social enterprises; it provides a way to conceptualize variation and complexity.

Even if there were lots of researches about motivation of social entrepreneurs (Dees, 1998, 2007). However, many scholars have argued that the decision to start a social enterprise is not explained with self-interest and motive. This research shows that social entrepreneurs are substantially motivated by the other-oriented emotion of compassion. Compassion is characterized by its other-orientation and emotional connection linking an individual to a suffering community (Goetz et al., 2010, Lazarus, 1991; Nussbaum, 1996, 2001). Compassion services as a powerful motivation of social activities, compelling individuals to alleviate others suffering (Batson and Shaw, 1991; Omonto et al., 2009). As this results, we can tell that compassion motivates social entrepreneurs. This leads us to think about the social entrepreneurship education contents.

In addition to find the important factor, compassion of describing social enterprises, this research can show the differentiating social entrepreneurship from other organizational forms. Social enterprises have a strong social mission oriented organization identity than typical commercial entrepreneurship. Many researchers have focused on the social mission of the social enterprises, this research shows that the organization identity of social enterprise is a key factor. By introducing innovations, entrepreneurs successfully and profitably exploit opportunities by addressing those customer needs not yet realized by current providers. Even if commercial entrepreneurs seek profits by identifying and exploiting market opportunities, the needs that social entrepreneurs identify and pursue typically center on creating social impact and social wealth. To pursue the social impact and social wealth, innovation should be a core key driver for social entrepreneurs. In addition to innovation of social enterprises, distinctive characteristics of social

enterprise compared to commercial business are replicability and scalability to maximize the social impact. Unlike commercial worlds, social enterprise should create the bigger impact to the focus area as well as other regions. For doing that social enterprises need to have local partners and power of replicability and scalability.

Our article has some implication for the practitioners of social entrepreneurship or social entrepreneurship focused government organization. We have talked about the successful social enterprises with 5 key factors. Since many countries are driving the social entrepreneurial activities in the societies, the policy makers should focus on the education to build the compassion based motivation which means the skill and attitude to understand others. Many Korean universities have started to teach social entrepreneurship courses at the undergraduate level. The social entrepreneurship framework will give them a guideline to evaluate social enterprises and understand social entrepreneurial activities.

For the policy makers, the government subsidiary itself can be a good source of resources for social enterprise, but social enterprises need an ability to innovate their products or service and business models to have sustainability.

The lack of research and consensus of the definition of social enterprises mislead the direction and focus of social entrepreneurship research and policy. This research could give a clear guideline to the researchers and practitioners.

For the further research, we propose the empirical study to understand social entrepreneurial behavior and attitude and social enterprises success factors.

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## 사회적 기업 분석을 위한 개념적 모델

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### 논문초록

최근 사회적기업의 수가 늘어나고 급속히 성장하고 있으며 이에 상응하여 중요한 연구 이슈로 활발한 논의가 시작되고 있다. 사회적 기업은 단순히 개인의 이익보다는 기업이 사회의 이익을 극대화 할 수 있도록 한다는 특징이 있다. 일반적으로 사회적 기업은 기업의 존재의 이유가 사회적 가치를 추구한다는 점에서 공공성이 강하지만, 동시에 시장경쟁을 통하여 수익창출을 해야 하기 때문에 영리기업과 유사하다는 점에서 양면성을 가지고 있다. 이렇듯 사회적 기업은 일반 기업에 비해 복잡한 개념을 가지고 있다. 하지만, 지금까지 제시된 대부분의 사회적 기업의 정의들은 무엇이 정의의 기본 요소들을 구성 하냐는 점에서 뚜렷하지 못했다. 이 논문에서는 사회적 기업의 복잡성을 이해시키기 위해 다음의 다섯 가지의 주요 관점에 대해 논의 하고 사회적 특성을 반영하여 사회적 기업에 대한 통합된 개념적 틀을 제시한다. 제시한 사회적 기업의 다섯 가지 특성은 1) 사회적 기업가의 특성 2) 조직의 정체성 3) 높은 수준의 혁신을 통한 지속가능성, 4) 지역 협력자들과의 네트워크 5) 비즈니스모델의 반복가능성과 확장성 이다. 이 논문에서는 사회적 기업가의 개념적 틀을 제안함으로써 사회적 기업가정신에 대한 이론적이고 실제적인 이해를 돕고 나아가 사회적 기업의 정체성을 탐구하고자 한다.

주제어: 사회적 기업, 사회적 기업가, 사회적 기업가정신, 개념 모형, 기업가정신

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