

An Exploration of Contemporary Meanings of Social Enterprise¹

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At the Fifth Social Enterprise Alliance Forum in 2004, Charles King³ the outgoing and Founding President of the Forum recounted how in its early history, SEA expended great amounts of energy and time on attempts to define the term *social enterprise*. In a North American context this would seem to be not unusual. The debate about social enterprise has been ongoing with two well established 'camps' represented by Greg Dees from Stanford University focusing on social enterprise as 'innovation' and 'social impact'; and Jerr Boschee from the Institute for Social Entrepreneurs and Jim McClurg from SEA emphasising the centrality of 'earned income'. Many others in the background of the debate especially in university Business Faculties have adopted range of approaches to defining social enterprise including psychological trait theory and descriptive attributes (for example, social entrepreneurs are persistent, creative, resilient etc...).

In this paper I want to explore some recent understandings of the meanings of social enterprise⁴. While the topic appears jaded and well-worn as Charles King suggests, it needs addressing constantly if only to remind social entrepreneurs that the intrinsic attributes or elements in their understanding of the word *in practice* and in operational terms are themselves in a constant state of change; and that they need to continually self-evaluate their social enterprises and practices if they are to achieve their social goals and to effect real and not just nominal change in their enterprise projects.

The paper begins with a review of recent statements or definitions of social enterprise. It then briefly abstracts some of the words or phrases that represent key attributes best representing meanings of the term social enterprise. From the 'conclusion(s)' made in this (limited) analysis, the discussion then focuses on the ideas of value and outcomes as core integrating ideas for defining and describing social enterprise. In doing so, it draws upon the recent work of Emerson (2003; 2004). Finally, the discussion turns to typologies of social enterprise as analytical constructs (Alter, 2004) to help us to better understand the meanings of the concept.

CONTEMPORARY MEANINGS OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

There are many authors who have proffered definitions of social enterprise. Mort, Weerawardena, and Carnegie (2002), Johnson (2000), Emerson (2002a), and

¹ The paper follows and in part derives from a recent presentation at the ANZTSR Conference in November 2004 entitled Bartlett, L. (2004) *Social Enterprise and the Third Sector: An Exploratory Review of Mission-Market Relationships*, Paper Presented on behalf of the Australasian Institute for Social Entrepreneurship at the Australia and New Zealand Third Sector Research Conference (ANZTSR), Queensland University of Technology, Faculty of Business, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, 24-26 November

² The Australasian Institute for Social Entrepreneurship (AISE) was established in early 2005 to support social entrepreneurs and communities, and especially small-to-medium and micro social enterprises in regional areas; and to work with schooling and Higher Education sectors in the areas of learning and skills-development, enquiry and research, and information society technologies including community informatics.

³ Charles King is a founder and President of Housing Works, Inc., a minority-controlled, community-based, not-for-profit organization that provides advocacy, housing and support services for homeless men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS, including people who are chemically dependent and/or mentally ill.

⁴ The term *social entrepreneur* refers to a person. *Social enterprise* refers to a project or organisation in/through which the social entrepreneur works; the term therefore is an institutional expression of social enterprise. The term *social entrepreneurship* refers to the state of being and practising in/through a social enterprise. In the literature and in common usage, the term social enterprise and social entrepreneurship are often used interchangeably.

several other scholars have argued and provided particular meanings and often precise definitions. However, in a general and broad sense it is accurate to characterise *social enterprises as initiatives that operate on a business model (that is, aim to make a profit from activities) but where the profit is used to provide community or social services, in the pursuit of social aims* (Smallbone, Evans, Ekanem, & Butters, 2001; Iqbal, Cox, & Whittaker, 2003; UK Department of Technology and Industry, 2002; Welsh, 2003). In a private enterprise, profit is the key aim – the end in itself; in a social enterprise, profit is the means to an end – profit enables the organisation to achieve community or social aims with the funds generated from the enterprise (Tregilgas, 2001).

The OECD provides a good but generalised description of social enterprise:

Social enterprises straddle the border between the public and the private and breaks new ground in the allocation and management of economic resources... they integrate disadvantaged groups into the labour market while providing goods and services. Social enterprises are an entrepreneurial approach and draw upon the local environment to enhance their economic and social performance.

OECD (1999) *Social Enterprises*

The element of disadvantage highlights the kind of values underpinning a social enterprise, values such as access-equity, inclusiveness, social justice etc. We are also reminded in the statement that a fundamental of social enterprise is its entrepreneurial character in local contexts and communities.

The 'definition' provided by the UK Government's Department of Trade & Industry in its strategy for social enterprise provides the broadest possible definitional meaning of the term when it says that a social enterprise is:

a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community (rather than being driven by the need to deliver profit to shareholders and owners)..... There is no single model, but social enterprises may include co-operatives, mutuals, employee owned businesses and private companies limited by guarantee.

An important implicit attribute in this statement is the issue of diverse and multiple organisational forms that can be observed in many social enterprises.

A further definition offers a similar broad conception of the term social enterprise:

A social enterprise is any nonprofit-owned revenue-generating venture created for the purpose of contributing to a social cause while operating with the discipline, innovation and determination of a for-profit business
(VirtueVentures: <http://virtueventures.com>).

Similar to the DTI's definition, the value of this definition lies in its 'specificity of purpose' (Alter, 2004) and, like the previous definition, its potential applications to a wide range of ventures that have been characterised as social enterprises. But further attributes of the statement are its phrases "contributing to a social cause", thereby assuming that social enterprises must bring about some social-cultural change; and the phrase "non-profit owned" emphasising that social enterprise is about material and social ownership as a means of achieving a (common) good. This

statement is probably one of the better definitions in that it emphasises owner operation of social enterprises.

The Ashoka Foundation's position is clearly focussed on social change and social transformation. The context of its work in developing countries at least in its initial period of formation, may well account for this emphasis.

"The job of a social entrepreneur is to recognize when a part of society is stuck and to provide new ways to get it unstuck. He or she finds what is not working and solves the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution and persuading entire societies to take new leaps. Social entrepreneurs are not content to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry."
Ashoka Foundation, www.ashoka.org

Other discussions on social enterprise indicate a similar focus on its *transformative intent* (Alvord, Brown, and Letts, 2002) while yet others adopt an historical or evolutionary approach to the emergence of social entrepreneurship and its *innovative character*. For example, in their excellent 'treatise' Borzaga and Defourny (2001) compare the different national experiences of different countries, and trace the most significant developments in social entrepreneurship emerging in Europe. Borstein (2004) also traces the broader movement of social entrepreneurship and its role in inventing the future.

In the US, the current debate centres on the essential elements of social enterprise as *earned income strategy* (Boschee and McClurg, 2004), and social enterprise as a form of *social impact and innovation* (Dees, 1998; 2003). The former social entrepreneurs claim that social entrepreneurs are different because their earned income strategies are *tied directly* to their mission. This is because they either employ the disadvantaged or sell mission-driven products and services that have a direct impact on a specific social problem (e.g. providing home care services that help elderly people). The latter scholar (Greg Dees) claims that far too many people adopt this narrow view by assuming that the critical attribute of a social enterprise is earned income. The claim is made that it draws attention away from the ultimate goal of social impact, and suffers the real or potential problem of focussing on one particular method of generating resources. Earned income, it is claimed, "is only a means to a social end, and it is not always the best means".

A similar situation to the above is observed in the US's REDF definition of social enterprise [<http://www.redf.org>] as "a revenue generating venture founded to create economic opportunities for very low income individuals, while simultaneously operating with reference to the financial bottom-line." In contrast, NESsT [<http://www.nesst.org>] uses the term social enterprise to refer to "the myriad of entrepreneurial or 'self-financing' methods used by nonprofit organizations to generate some of their own income in support of their mission." Both these definitions from peak US groups include the social and the financial; but the former adopts a programmatic approach and the latter a funding approach.

One way of defining social enterprise is to outline what social entrepreneurs **do** or define their attributes. For example, Handy (1998) traces the rise of the social entrepreneur and characterises the latter with a number of defining traits. Gucli, Dees and Anderson (2002) trace (through theorising) the process of turning an idea into an enterprise opportunity and thereby define in part the nature of social enterprise. Elsewhere, we find other author's descriptions such as the following:

The core of social entrepreneurship is *good stewardship*. Good stewards don't just rest on their laurels, they try new things, *serve people in new ways*, are lifelong learners, try to have their organizations be fonts of excellence.

Social entrepreneurs have these characteristics:

- They are constantly looking for new ways to serve their constituencies and to add value to existing services.
- They are willing to take reasonable risk on behalf of the people that their organization serves.
- They understand the difference between needs and wants.
- They understand that all resource allocations are really stewardship investments.
- They weigh the social and financial return of each of these investments. They always keep mission first, but know that without money, there is no mission output." (Peter Brinckerhoff in *Social Entrepreneurship*)

And:

"Social entrepreneurs play the role of change agents in the social sector, by:

- Adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value),
- Recognizing and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission,
- Engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation, and learning
- Acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand, and exhibiting a heightened sense of accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created." (J. Gregory Dees in *Enterprising Nonprofits*)

And:

By adopting entrepreneurial strategies, social entrepreneurs are able to:

- Identify and expand their most effective and needed programs:
- 'Productively' dispose of their more peripheral programs
- Selectively identify new programs where there is an identified need...and revenue to support them"
- To actually start new business ventures that are rooted in the core competencies of their organizations and become increasingly self-sufficient financially – less dependent on government and charity." (National Center for Social Entrepreneurs, www.socialentrepreneurs.org)

This mode of defining what constitutes social enterprise may be useful and makes explicit what has been defined in the previous definitional statements.

When we turn to the UK context, the impact of cultural difference shows itself in the ways social enterprise is positioned. Social Enterprise London (SEL) identifies three core elements in any social enterprise:

- *Enterprise orientation*: social enterprises are directly involved in producing goods or providing services to a market.
- *Social aims*: social enterprises have explicit social aims such as job creation, training or the provision of local services. Their ethical values may include a commitment to developing skills in local communities.

- *Social ownership*: social enterprises are autonomous organisations, whose governance and ownership structures are normally based on participation by stakeholder groups (eg employees, users, local community groups, social investors).

The third of these distinguishing ‘trademarks’ of a social enterprise is probably the most important (and perhaps underdeveloped in the literature). In a second report however, Social Enterprise London (SEL) in 2000 notes that social enterprise in the UK has emerged as an important policy area in Blair’s Labor Government thinking in that social enterprises provide a practical response to three of its important policy drivers;

1. *Competitiveness* - in harnessing commitment through stakeholder ownership and team based management structures;
2. *Social inclusion* - by turning local needs into markets, especially at a local level, and promoting sustainability rather than a grant dependency culture.
3. *Modernising agenda* - by providing innovation as intermediary organisations in the delivery of a wide range of services.

“Turning local needs into markets” highlights the necessity for social enterprises to be income-generating (and as we observe later, there is a need that this income be *earned-income*), and to create financial wealth if they are to qualify for inclusion under that term. Another way of expressing this is that trading must occur for a project to be defined as a social enterprise. The impulse to be *innovative* and to demonstrate *social goals* and intent, that is, to create cultural-social capital (including natural and environmental capital) appear to be two other necessary attributes to qualify for adoption of the term social enterprise. It also has the underlying assumption (in the phrase “turning local needs”) that social participation an important element of social inclusion is valued. At least one of the core values of social enterprise, participation, is foregrounded.

What can be said about the Australian scene? One can expect difference in positioning because of cultural differences with US and UK/European cultures. The reality is little rigorous and systematic research has been conducted on social enterprise in Australia. The contemporary ‘movement’ received its initial stimulation with the founding and then demise of the Social Entrepreneurs network (SEN). But SEN with its close adoption of the UK Community Action Network (CAN) model, its lack of strategic focus, and its inability to formulate an earned income and sustainability strategy, had barely begun to consider a research capability⁵. By way of contrast, organisations such as ACCORD have made useful research contributions and no doubt will continue to do so as they develop further. There are currently signs of some interest in the social enterprise movement in Australia from university Business Faculties but this research appears as yet not to have demonstrated productive outcomes. Organisations such as Australian and the New Zealand Third Sector Research (ANZTSR) undertake useful research in the nonprofit sector. There are also the excellent nonprofit research centres located within universities such as QUT’s Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights at Deakin University, and UTS’s Centre for Australian Community Organisations and Management. None of these institutions appear to have direct

⁵ In the last three months of its operations and through its then CEO it commissioned the planning of an “academy” or “institute” which was to be its vehicle for service delivery in learning and research. Its future was blocked with the liquidation of SEN in late 2003; since then it has emerged in a new form called the Australasian Institute for Social Entrepreneurship (AISE)

links with social enterprise or at this time produced rigorous research focused directly on social enterprise.

One of the first statements about social enterprise in recent times may be found in the publication by Talbot, Tregilgas and Harrison (2002). Their musings are based on professional and personal experiences on doing social enterprise. They define it as:

Social enterprise is the means by which people come together and use market-based ventures to achieve agreed social ends. It is characterised by creativity, entrepreneurship, and a focus on community rather than individual profit. It is a creative endeavour that results in social, financial, service, educational, employment, or other community benefits.

Elsewhere the authors describe the elements of social enterprise in terms of purposes, namely:

- To create benefits for a community
- To build upon mutuality and self-help; and
- To create wealth and opportunity for community benefit.

The statement is one of only a few to emphasise outcomes. "Wealth creation" is another outcomes focused term that is often used in the language of many Australian social entrepreneurs.

The influence of the UK view of social enterprise (and especially the work of CAN) may be evident here, but never-the-less there are two important features associated with this description. First, there is the emphasis on "*community*" and "*mutuality and self-help*" both of which must be regarded as essential aspects of Australian social enterprise. Second, the authors highlight the *multiple outcomes* of any social enterprise initiative.

More recently, another readable Australian authored publication called *Defining Social Enterprise* (Langdon and Burkett, 2004) differentiates between the purposes and processes of social enterprise. The former is characterised as "centred on working for a public good, public interest/collective benefit rather than the private interest or private gain"; and the latter as "achieving social purpose through an enterprise orientation". It provides a summary of differences between social enterprise as business and business enterprise in terms of core business, means and ends, 'who benefits', and production and support. It also provides (albeit in brief) what many other discussions fail to address, namely the values expressed through social enterprise.

The excellent work of Social Ventures Australia (SVA) which uses a venture capital model in its approach to philanthropy is reflected in its offering of specific services through its Institute. The latter, established in 2003 focuses on best practice learning in social enterprise and describes its work as "a unique vehicle offering the opportunity to showcase outstanding social ventures, build best practice and capture and share knowledge and learning in the social sector". It has no research function although consultancy research has been undertaken by SVA and to date its research appears to have been \$ and demand driven. Because of its unique positioning as a venture capital nonprofit, it offers a statement about social ventures which are 'driven' by social entrepreneurs.

Combining social vision with entrepreneurial skills of the private sector, social ventures have specific social and economic goals. They are businesses that exist solely to impact positively on society. [They are] characterised by innovation focus on pattern-changing solutions and sustained social development. ...All social ventures supported by SVA are driven by social entrepreneurs. These individuals, or groups, “draw upon the best thinking in both the business and nonprofit worlds in order to advance their social agenda.” (REDF, 2003)

There are strong arguments for characterising SVA as a social business engaged in philanthropy using a social venture business model with its primary work being ‘investment for social returns’. Its published statements provide limited offerings for a better understanding of social enterprise per se.

Finally, one might expect education institutions, especially universities, to be the ones to engage in social enterprise research. Some few universities do conduct research on nonprofits, the umbrella term under which they locate social enterprises. Most of this enquiry is conducted in Business Faculties and by persons from a business culture and background⁶. The reasons why universities, especially Business Faculties offering MBAs have been slow to respond (compared with, for example, US universities) to the social enterprise ‘movement’ are complex. But the matter clearly relates to Higher Education policy contexts, the demand-driven nature of research in universities, the general funding climate for research, structural inefficiencies in universities, and others⁷.

MAKING SENSE AND LOSING MEANINGS OF SOCIAL ENTREPRISE

In defining social enterprise one observes the complexity of the concept in reviewing the above statements provided by experts in the field. But it was never the intention to define/redefine the term in this paper and hence fall into the conundrum about which Charles King warned us about at the beginning of this discussion. However, the principal concepts embedded in descriptive statements/definitions outlined above tell us not just of its complexity but indicate some of the significant attributes of the concept that are being advocated in the past five years.

If these attributes or descriptors are selected in approximate order of appearance in the text, we get the following list:

- Access-equity (disadvantaged groups/low income individuals)
- Entrepreneurial approach/enterprise orientation
- Local context/community
- Local needs into markets
- Social aims/objectives
- Social cause
- Social ownership
- Nonprofit owned/stakeholder ownership
- Earned income/revenue generating/self-financing

⁶ This raises issues about the impact of a discipline (considered as a community of scholars guided by its own culture) and the disciplinary constraints this places on the nature of the research conduct, methodological approaches, questions of ideological dominance – of the discipline, and a host of other considerations.

⁷ See Bartlett, L. (2002) for issues relating to university-community engagement.

- Innovation/creativity
- Social impact and innovation
- New organisational forms
- Mutuality and self-help
- Wealth creation for community benefit
- Investment for social returns

Most analysts of *socioentrepreneurology*⁸ seek to define the meanings of social enterprise by searching for common themes or patterns. Hence, it is noted that most statements embrace/assume the idea that social enterprise is a mix of the social and the commercial/business. Social enterprise is the moment when culture and economy interact⁹. The tensions between attributes such as ‘earned income’ and ‘social aims/goals’ have also been noted¹⁰. Finally, each of the statements about social enterprise is culturally dependent. Hence, for example, the idea of a nonprofit differs in the US from the UK and Europe and from Australia. Each has a different policy context and different historical origin of social enterprise. Having stated these few caveats the discussion looks momentarily at what is not common across descriptive statement/definitions, and then takes a brief view of attributes that reflect significant patterns or themes that indicate contemporary shifts and that are worthy of further analysis and research.

Of the attributes listed above, the three that appear to be most relevant for an Australian context (and not to exclude other international contexts) are “nonprofit owned/stakeholder ownership”, “mutuality”, and “new organisational forms”. The former is represented in one of three attributes outlined by SEL in its highlighting “social ownership” and social participation. It is increasingly being recognised among social entrepreneurs that material ownership is an essential aspect of developing the social glue or social capital that creates the synergy in an enterprise with social aims.

“Mutuality” is also highly significant for an Australian context. The term is not new as the ‘project’ of social enterprise is not ‘new’) and can be traced back to early history of worker and consumer cooperatives, Friendly societies, Credit Unions and mutual business. The historical development of social enterprise and the place of mutuals is well described in research by Conaty (2001). Philosophers such as Ivan Illich and E.P.Thompson have traced the culture of mutual aid and popular enterprise, which has roots extending back many centuries before the industrial revolution. The paper is worth reading to locate social enterprise well being its re-emergence globally in the early 1990s. Conaty (Figure 1) argues for an historical continuum with social enterprise located between charities at the one end of a spectrum and business at the other.

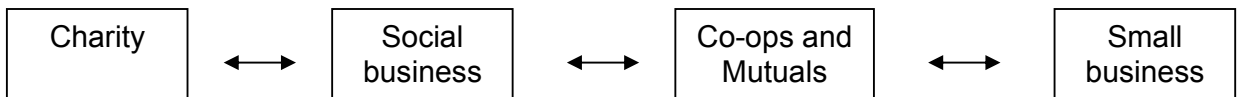


Figure 1 The social enterprise way – the ethical path between charity and commerce: The mutuality bridge

⁸ This is a term created to mean the study (logos) of the nature of social entrepreneurship.

⁹ Bartlett, L. (2005) *The culture-economy debate and social enterprise*. Paper-in-progress.

¹⁰ Bartlett, L. (2004) *op cit*

Mutuality foregrounds the idea of *mutual responsibility* an issue promoted by Noel Pearson and the Cape York Indigenous Project. As Langdon and Burkett (2004) note:

new mutualism links mutual aid, reciprocity and self-help. It also seeks to strengthen the role of mutual aid, not as an alternative to State or Market based approaches, but as a key third path towards addressing poverty and concerns of social justice (p.iv).

This focus in the description of social enterprise raises key policy issues; and it invokes the current need for regulatory reform (Nonprofit Roundtable, 2004) and how this impacts on social enterprises (Grieg, 2005).

Mutuality reflects the need for forms of mutual obligation. At a policy level, mutuality reflects the need for Government participation and support not necessarily through sponsorship this tends to impose or create dependency undermining the self-help fundamental of social enterprise. A recent comment from Grieg (2004) is pertinent:

The need for innovative intermediary support structures is the way to go. Also the need to link social enterprise to small business programs is very important and takes the focus away from grants towards trading¹¹.

Associated with regulatory reform to accommodate the peculiar character of social enterprises, is the emergence of *new forms of social enterprise*; the need to explore which organisational forms apply to specific social, business and environmental contexts; and the compulsion to develop new ones.

In the above list, one is also struck by the underlying repetition of the *core value* base of social enterprise. Values are embedded in most definitions or statements; for example, social justice is inherent in the idea of mutuality. The tension between “mission” (social goals) and “market” (business goals) challenge the entrepreneur to address both simultaneously. This tension should not be expressed as separate entities or a dualism in every decision about his/her enterprise. When mission or market assumes ascendancy there is the danger effective outcome for the enterprise may be jeopardised.

More rigorous analysis of these attributes is required but not the intended focus of this discussion. Rather, the idea of **value** provides the central concept for integration of all the above attributes and the thence perhaps a construction of a typology that assists us to better understand the nature of social enterprise. A second important concept is the idea of **outcomes**. Rather than approach the difficult task of ‘defining’ social enterprise from a process or inputs approach, a focus on outcomes appears useful. The emphasis on ‘double’ and ‘triple bottom line’ approaches is by now well known and reflects this swing to outcomes approaches.

The discussion therefore turns to the work of Jed Emerson who provides a knowledge base for pursuit of *value as an integrating* idea in making meaning of the multitude of forms social enterprise one observes. Emerson’s work is relevant because it places also *outcomes* in a central place within his schema. It is of interest to note that of all the ‘definitions’ and descriptive statements provided above, the one that appears to emphasise “wealth creation” as outcomes is Talbot, Tregilgas and Harrison’s (2002) statement when they assert that it (*social enterprise*) *is a creative*

¹¹ Personal communication.

endeavour that results in social, financial, service, educational, employment, or other community benefits.

What then is the best starting point for access effectively defining social enterprise? That is, given the range of attributes identified in the above descriptive statements defining social enterprise where does one begin to make sense without 'losing' meaning of the term?

THE VALUES UNDERLYING CULTURE AND ECONOMICS

We suggest it is the value-outcomes approach and before we discuss this we introduce the underlying basis for the relationships social (mission) and business (market) goals the two recurring ideas in 'definitions' of social enterprise, culture and economics. The relationship between culture and economy (often represented in the term culture-economy debate) are fundamental to understanding the nature of social enterprise; they reflect the "earned income" versus "social impact and innovation" US debate we noted at the beginning of the discussion. They reflect the tension between "mission" and "market" and so on.

To begin we take the two propositions provided in Throsby's (2001) treatise on culture and economics.

1. 'Value' (dealing with utility, price, markets assigned to commodities ...) is the origin and motivation of all economic behaviour; and
2. Ideas of value (properties of cultural phenomenon specifically a tonal note of music, or generally a work of art ...) permeate the sphere of culture.

Throsby argues that:

Value can be seen....as an expression of worth, not just in a static or passive sense but also in a dynamic and active ways a negotiated or transactional phenomenon. It may therefore be seen that value acts as a starting point in a process of linking the two fields together, as a foundation stone upon which a joint consideration of economic and culture can be built. (p.20)

And:

it is essential that cultural value be admitted alongside economic value in the consideration of the overall value of cultural goods or services" (p.41)

How can or has the idea of values been applied in the area of social enterprise to illuminate the question proposed in the discussion above? To begin to answer this issue the discussion turns to Emerson's concept of 'Blended Value' which also embraces the idea of outcomes as a central organising means for understanding social enterprise.

Now part of the reason for focussing on value relates to the underlying assumption that insistence on placing social value side-by-side with economic value is really a statement for reinvesting in ethics. As Conaty (2001) again points out ethically guided enterprises were first observed in the craft guilds. These were locally-based micro-enterprises. She notes that:

Their concept of socially 'just enterprise' pre-dated the modern 'value free' and amoral nineteenth century understanding of the free market by over eight hundred years (as social economic historians like Karl Polanyi and R H Tawney have shown. We might expect to see this ethic included in Emerson's work.

And this is what Dees referred to in his statement above when he says that social entrepreneurs act as change agents by “adopting a mission to create and sustain social value (not just private value)”.

BLENDED VALUE

The strength of using a concept as a centralising heuristic for defining social enterprise is perhaps one of the more powerful approaches to be proposed in the literature of social enterprise in recent years. The elaboration of the value-base of social enterprise and the Third Sector has been undertaken by Jed Emerson and his team at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. They write about “blended value” to describe how mission, market, and environment can be conceived within a single conceptual framework.

Their argument is that the value created by an organization is fundamentally indivisible. Hence, it is not possible to separate out ideas such as "economic value", "social value" or "environmental value". All constitute one single value outcome for social enterprises, blended value. In this sense blended value renounces the idea of double (social and financial return) or triple bottom line (social, environmental, and financial return).

As Emerson notes:

Value is what gets created when investors invest and organizations act to pursue their mission. Traditionally, we have thought of value as being either economic (and created by for-profit companies) or social (and created by nonprofit or nongovernmental organizations). What the Blended Value Proposition states is that all organizations, whether for-profit or not, create value that consists of economic, social and environmental value components - and that investors (whether market-rate, charitable or some mix of the two) simultaneously generate all three forms of value through providing capital to organizations. The outcome of all this activity is value creation and that value is itself non-divisible and, therefore, a blend of these three elements (www.blendedvalue.org).

And again in a recent interview with Social Edge, Emerson and Bonini (2004) comment:

What the Blended Value Proposition states is that all organizations, whether for-profit or not, create value that consists of economic, social and environmental value components-and that investors (whether market-rate, charitable or some mix of the two) simultaneously generate all three forms of value through providing capital to organizations. (Social Edge: <http://skoll.social.edge.org>)

The concept of Blended Value can be developed further. If it assumes that all social enterprises always produce outcomes that are financial, social and environmental, then it is reasonable to argue that these outcomes are produced in varying degrees. This is not to say that the social entrepreneur does not aim for specific social goals. The nature of the social goal leans the initiative to a specific kind of enterprise outcome while encapsulating and integrating financial, social and environmental values. In addition, the nature of the initial goals will largely allow the entity to be categorised as one of the key areas or “silos” in which investors, organisations, and communities work to maximise their blended value. These areas are: corporate

social responsibility, social enterprise, social investment, strategic/effective philanthropy, and sustainable development.

What are some consequences of taking a value-based conception of defining the tensions in social enterprise, value positions such as the Blended Value Proposition?

At the broadest level of generalisation the approach focuses on:

1. Outcomes in the social, economic and financial domains; and
2. Uses a single concept of “value” as an integrating (“blended”) heuristic (a means of analysing phenomena and the world).

In more specific terms:

- Blended Value is not characterised by separate value propositions (economic/financial/market and cultural/social/mission) for a nonprofit or social enterprise.
- Understanding the value proposition of a social enterprise is essential to the sustainability of the initiative.
- Social enterprises that understand their value proposition will produce a balance of mission, market and environmental outcomes.
- The balance will not constitute dualisms between mission and market but value creation and integrated outcome on with multiple levels – constituting economic value, social value, and environmental value.
- The balance of outcomes (representing the observed ‘structure’ of the social enterprise) will be *contingent* depend upon (and not necessarily congruent with) planned and initial value propositions shaped by processes of implementation.
- The blended value proposition says that our portfolios should not only advance the financial aspect of our lives, but that they can and should advance *every* aspect of our lives.
- The fundamental issue for all investors and business leaders is *what do you value?*¹²
- The principal task is to evaluate and act on ways that ensure effective implementation of blended value¹³.
- The new conceptual framework of blended value and institutions capable of advancing the different parts of this common agenda will require a new infrastructure to support those organizations pursuing blended value.

There are many strategies for advancing the idea of value proposition. One principal idea is that of building networks between separate (“siloes”) institutions (e.g. universities, businesses and NGOs) pursuing similar ends.

Emerson outlines what needs to be pursued next in his report *Blended Value Map (2003)*;

1. *New coordinated and long-term support for existing groups to work together to build the Global Commons (rather than the creation of a new organization to pursue goals).*

¹² Stanford Business School Interview, 2004. See, for example, the interview of Emerson at: www.gsb.stanford.edu/news/bmag/sbsm0305/ideas_emerson_social_innovation.shtml

¹³ See article by John Gertner in *Money Magazine* New York October 2002

2. Create a *new international knowledge development* and management strategy.
3. Discuss how to best offer *new ways for individuals to connect* with each other.
4. *Move beyond the current capital chasm*. New investment instruments are required, new syndication opportunities need be advanced, and an evolved, integrated capital market must be brought into reality—a market that pursues economic performance with social and environmental impacts.
5. Support and help to *create new market intermediaries* capable of providing both capital and capacity building support for fully networked blended value ventures around the world.
6. Create a *new dynamic strategy for leadership development* at all levels.
7. More readily *understand and embrace the public policy implications of the work of social enterprises and nonprofits*.

Finally, the idea of Blended Value has the potential to change the way we think about social enterprise by shifting its primary purpose to *the creation of value*, and not just or only the creation of social (and financial) wealth.

VALUE CREATION AND A TYPOLOGY OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

While it may be argued that the development of a social enterprise typology based on too little research is premature, never-the-less Alter (2004) has attempted this task with some degree of authority and effectiveness. Her specific aim is to break down the barriers between nonprofits and the private sector; and her detailed typology is based on experience and research the outcomes of which may apply to all social enterprises globally. Her typology provides a set of frameworks and definitions that

- Allows comparison across “silos” including social enterprise initiatives¹⁴;
- Assist social entrepreneurs to understand how individual social enterprises relate to each other;
- Indicate how these various parts are interwoven into a singular whole;
- Demonstrates how a social entrepreneur’s approach to enterprise can be consistently defined.

Alter (2004) highlights *mission as social change* benefiting from innovative entrepreneurial solutions, and sustainability that requires *market as diverse funding sources* including earned -income. Mission and market are redefined as social impact and financial viability both forces leading to sustainability. This is reflected in the summary diagram in Figure 2. What this kind of diagram does not tell the reader is *how* the sustainability equilibrium is formed and itself sustained.

Alter almost meticulously defines multiple models of “social enterprise” based on her observations of largely South and North American social enterprises. Hence there are *mission-centric* initiatives that are invariably *embedded social enterprises* (the social program and business are one and the same). A *mission-related* initiative is referred to as an *integrated social enterprise* (See Figure 3). typologies and systems of classification always tend to compartmentalise ideas and may hinder the development of relational conceptual knowledge across disciplines.

¹⁴ Here one needs to be aware of the distinctions in language use. Emerson refers to the term social enterprise as one of five “silos”. Alter appears to use the term “social enterprise” in a more generic and overarching sense to include the five “silos” in the term. The latter use is more common in the literature and Emerson’s distinction and language use begins to separate the different organisational forms of social enterprise.

The following scatter diagram shows the relationship between the type of organization and its motives.

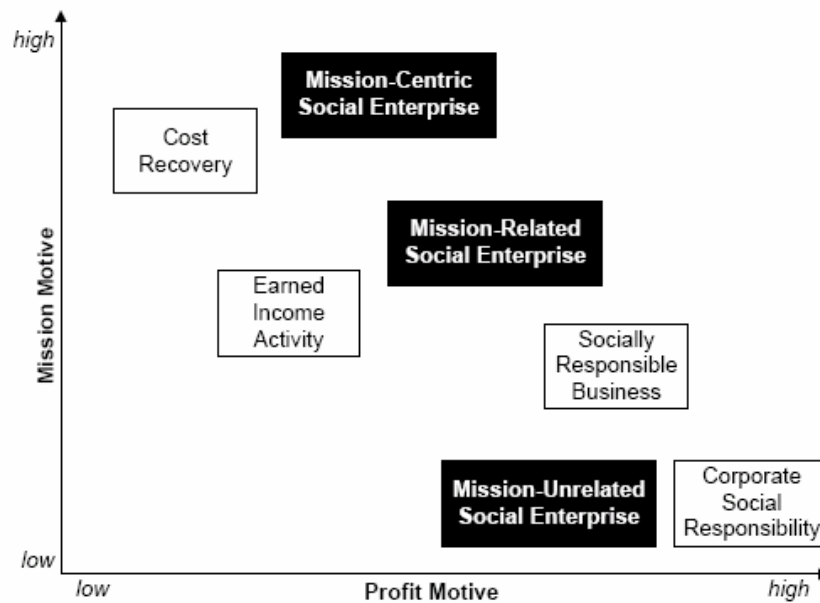


Figure 3: Relationships between types of organisations and motive.

mission would/needs to be integrated with market in some sense. Finally, one is still left with little understanding about the processes that are operating in the integration of mission and market *in practice*. It has to be queried whether the typology produces a greater sense of the whole – an integrated mission-market understanding of our social enterprise. Our sense is that it can and will will further research based on empirical observation.

For-profit/Non-profit organization spectrum

	Financial focus			Social impact focus		
	Traditional for-profit corporation	Org that practices CSR	Social Business	Social Enterprise		Traditional Non-profit
			With earned income	W/out earned income		
Goal hierarchy	1) Shareholder value, defined as profit	1) Profit 2) Positive social impact*	1) Profit 2) Positive social impact*	1) Positive social impact 2) Profit	1) Positive social impact 2) Innovation	1) Positive social impact
Synonyms	• Socially responsible business		• Social venture	• Non-profit enterprise		
Sub-segments	• Corporate philanthropy			• Social-purpose enterprise		
Earned income?	• Yes	• Yes	• Yes	• Yes	• No	• Sometimes
Corporate Structure	• For-profit	• For-profit	• For-profit	• Non-profit	• Non-profit	• Non-profit
Size and ownership	• Small or large, public or private	• Usually larger and/or publicly traded	• Usually smaller and/or privately held	• Small or large	• Small or large	• Small or large

Figure 4: For-profit and Nonprofit Organisation Spectrum Source: Alter (2004) *Social Enterprise Typology* (p.8)

While Alter appears to fail to move away from measuring multiple bottom lines to a focus on a single value, a blended value, or "total value" creation (and it needs to be recognized that this may not have been her intention), her contribution may be a useful scaffolding and heuristic for future. As Emerson again notes, the typology structure may also have the benefit of pressing the social entrepreneur to focus not on social enterprise or CSR or any specific 'silo' itself, but rather upon the larger whole of which each of these is a part.

DISCUSSION

At the beginning of this discussion we suggested the need to constantly review our understandings of the term 'social enterprise'. We outlined (or more correctly hinted at) reasons for engaging in an exploration of the contemporary meanings of social enterprise. From the previous overview it now seems necessary to review the issue again in the form of the question: *Why do we need a shared meaning of the term social enterprise?*

There are of course many reasons for contesting the term social enterprise and constantly reviewing our own positions on the meanings we ascribe to the term. One of the most important reasons for pursuing a shared understanding is the need to establish an *identity* for social enterprise. This seems rather basic but given the multifarious nature of social enterprise organisations that exist, and others that declare or represent themselves as social enterprises, there is a need to achieve some mutual or shared agreement about the meaning of the term. Contestation and at least partial agreement among social entrepreneurs about the meaning of the term and its key attributes ensures that those who deliver services under the auspices of social enterprise retain or enhance its credibility.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, an exploration of the meanings of the term 'social enterprise' allows us to identify its principal elements or semantic attributes that best contribute to understandings and their capture in definitions of the term. By attributes we mean those inherent attributes or qualities such as 'social ownership', 'an enterprise orientation', 'earned income' and so on. Once accomplished this allows us to assess how this emerging and rapidly changing 'social movement' and field of endeavour is changing; how to judge which attributes/qualities are distinctive or best 'explain' social enterprise in different contexts; and how the practising social entrepreneur can make meaning without losing sense of the term in her/his local context, that is, how s(he) can continually evaluate the socially enterprising character of her/his project.

Third, it seems necessary to make the meanings of the term more public and explicit to highlight the difficulties faced by governments and their capacity to absorb its meaning, implications and consequences especially in policy formation and implementation contexts. Shared understanding facilitates the possibility of good relationships with Government (and corporate business) where access to such relationships is not well understood by all parties. Fourth, it is necessary for the private for-profit or business sector to understand and/or acknowledge the place of social enterprise in the social and commercial economy of a nation¹⁵. Fifth, larger corporate organisations that have tended to redefine themselves as social

¹⁵ In interview with a relevant State Government Development Department in 2004, the policy advisors and bureaucrats had little knowledge of the term, had a very scant and limited knowledge of facts such as the contribution of nonprofits to the economy, were unaware of any data-bases, did not know how to access research, and could only refer the author to the university sector for knowledge of social enterprise – probably the least knowledgeable at this time.

businesses (where business comes first and only then social goals are considered) need to be challenged and this can only occur when social entrepreneurs know their position and identity. Sixth, and a corollary to the above, refined understanding of concepts allows better communication and the construction of useful categories or typologies as a means for analysing the complex range of social enterprises. We include an example of a recently developed typology in the latter section of this paper.

Seventh, shared understanding and representation prevents grant bodies from choosing anyone they want to support irrespective of the quality of the social enterprise organisation or project; a feature that may well have been observed already in Australian social enterprise. Eighth, in Australia at the present time the particular issue of voluntarism is being recognised and partially, albeit poorly, supported by the Federal Government. Volunteer organisations that are non-trading do not qualify as social enterprises although some may claim that status where the grant \$ is involved. Finally, a shared understanding of the meanings of social enterprise creates a distinctive niche for it within the nonprofit sector – a status that it does not currently enjoy in Australia.

So what is the current situation in relation to the emergence of social enterprise in Australia and how does this affect our understanding of the term? It might be noted immediately that the question needs to assume that there are many 'frames' that govern and constrain our understanding and 'definitions' of the term. Having stated this caveat, it is possible to claim that at best social enterprises are acknowledged by Governments as part of the Third Sector; at worst they are not acknowledged at all¹⁶. The current implicit if not explicit positioning is that social enterprise comes under the category of nonprofits; that social enterprises are seen as organisations that "do something for you", or as it has been argued cogently, what "we" (the social enterprise organisation) are going to do to/for "them" (the disadvantaged community). Social enterprise is seen to be part of the Third Sector which, as it has been already observed, relies on the structural forms of incorporated associations and companies limited by guarantee that tend to take an outsider view (with a tendency to *control*) "what we are going to do to them", rather than the insider view (with a tendency to *understanding*) "what we are going to do for ourselves"¹⁷.

Australian social entrepreneurs tend not to define themselves and their social enterprises as part of the Third Sector which "is constituted by *all those organisations that are not-for-profit and non-government*, together with the activities of volunteering and giving which sustain them (ANZTSR)¹⁸." This latter definition is broad and does not easily fit with the emerging structural forms of social enterprise in this country. The uneasy "fit" may also explain the claim that there is a need for a "For-Benefits" or Fourth Sector where inclusion in the sector is determined by the "for-benefits"

¹⁶ In recent conversations with a number of Queensland Smart State Government Department bureaucrats, the idea of social enterprise was barely known or understood. The location of social enterprise activity was unknown and the contribution of these initiatives to the financial and social economy was unknown – all this despite great activity within the state.

¹⁷ I am indebted to Alan Grieg of Social Enterprise Technologies for this important observation (25-3-04).

¹⁸ ANZTSR describes the **third sector** as all those organisations that are not-for-profit and non-government, together with the activities of volunteering and giving which sustain them.. The ANZTSR characterisation is broad and inclusive. Third sector include **non-profit, non government, community, voluntary, club, society, association, co-operative, friendly society, church, union, foundation and charity**. Another emerging characterisation of these organisations is to define them as the **Fourth Sector** or **For-Benefit Sector**. Fourth Sector organisations are claimed to be "a new class of organization". They are driven by a social purpose, they are economically self-sustaining, and they seek to be socially, ethically, and environmentally responsible (<http://fourthsector.net>)

character of organisations. The Fourth Sector recognises that over the past few decades, the boundaries between the public (government), private (business), and social (non-profit/non-governmental) sectors have been blurring. It also makes the claim that organizations under this umbrella term are a new class of organization. They are driven by a social purpose, they are economically self-sustaining, and they seek to be socially, ethically, and environmentally responsible.

Like *non-profits*, “For-Benefits” organisations are organized in such a way to pursue a wide range of social missions; like *for-profits* they generate a broad range of beneficial products and services that improve quality of life for consumers, create jobs, and contribute to the economy. “For-Benefits” seek to maximize benefit to **all** stakeholders. Finally, they have been transforming themselves and adopting new models and approaches that challenge the traditional sectoral boundaries. They claim to represent a new paradigm in organizational design and eschew any false dichotomies in between mission and market and between private interest and public benefit.

It is also of interest to note that the former social enterprise support organisation in Australia, the Social Entrepreneurs Network (SEN) which modelled itself on the Community Action Network (CAN) in the UK, perhaps failed to address the issue of understanding vs control. It seems to have failed to understand the relationships between enquiry/research and learning provision, the implementation of new “self-help” models of social enterprise and social ownership, and the need to reinvent what this means for an Australian environment. SEN, arguably not only the first but perhaps the organisation with the best opportunity to support social enterprise in this country, met its demise for several reasons not least was its implicit if not explicit positioning of doing something *on and about* Australian social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, rather than doing something *through and for* these social by providing support services. As a support organisation it failed to operate on the very principles it espoused or should have espoused, and to recognise the salience of considering together the three ingredients of all successful social enterprise, namely, the identification and development of enterprise opportunities, an appropriate skill-base, and access to capital. Together these three elements form an integrated whole and the necessary ingredients for effective support and implementation of a social enterprise or social enterprise organisation.

It does not seem possible to theorise validly on many of the above issues unless one researches social enterprise initiatives in situ or context and through a detailed analysis of cases¹⁹. The production of bureaucratic and quasi-positivist methodologies in case studies of Australian social enterprises (of the kind that have been funded and produced to date) are inadequate for advancing our understanding and explanation of the meanings of social enterprise. Hence, there is a need for multi-site case studies of carefully selected social enterprises; case studies that are explanatory, holistic, field-work based, adopt rigorous methodology, and provide rich description and alternative possibilities for practitioner understanding and policy development. The *case study research* of individual social enterprises may be undertaken for their intrinsic worth or as instrumental case studies that allow survey across cases to generate knowledge about other cases and the sector as a whole.

¹⁹ I refer to cases here as ‘instances-in-action’ and as ‘bounded systems’. They are characterised by the features of exegesis, field-work based, “truth-testing”/iterative, holism and political-reactive. See for example, Bartlett, V.L and Kemmis, S. (1981) *Readings in Case Study Method*. Deakin University Press, Geelong. Also Stake, R. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*, Sage Publications, London.

And in the project to understand small-to-medium and micro social enterprises in particular there is the need to address all three elements of *enterprise opportunity*, learning and the development of a *skill-knowledge base*, and *access to capital* (earned income strategies, seed grants, human resources...). And this research work should be conducted by individual social entrepreneurs and organisations that work and research for and through the development of their social enterprise initiatives while at the same time addressing the inextricable relationships among *enterprise opportunity, skills and capital*²⁰.

Another pressing area that demands attention is the mapping of social enterprise. There are few *census surveys*²¹ of Australian social enterprises that map their number and nature (the same claim may be made of nonprofits generally although this is beginning to be redressed²²). There are surveys of nonprofits available but these tend not to acknowledge difference between the nature of social enterprise organisations and nonprofits. What is needed in the area of social enterprise mapping perhaps are carefully designed studies based on good exemplars such as the mapping of social enterprises by ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited (2003) and Lloyd (2003) in the UK.

At the end of the day, the overarching reason for engaging in this endeavour to understand the contemporary meanings of social enterprise, whether it be by research or by intellectual analysis of experience, is the promise that it will bring:

..meaningful, full, and integrated value for investors, managers, (social) entrepreneurs, and the future children of our world (Jed Emerson).

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²⁰ I am in debt to the *New Mutualism Group* (a group of small group of social entrepreneurs with their social enterprise initiatives in SE Queensland) for being able to make this observation.

²¹ The goal of **census surveys** (which generally tends to use 'secondary' data) is to differentiate phenomena and then allot them to different categories (type of nonprofit, sex of participant etc). It differs from **survey analysis** which is a second level procedure and which attempts to establish numerical relationships (usually supported by more sophisticated statistical techniques and formulae) among census categories.

²² Wickremarachchi, J. and Passey, A. (2004) *State of the Sector: New South Wales Co-operatives, 1990-2000*, ACCORD Report, University of Technology, Sydney.

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