A Braided Approach to Social Innovation

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Introduction

Braided Approach to Innovation:

- Broad toolbox of innovation strategies
- Continuous (incremental) & Discontinuous (disruptive)
- Ambidextrous organizations & leaders
- Employ exploitation & exploration strategies
Social Work’s dominant mode is continuous, employing exploitation
  – Evidence-Based Practice
  – Continuous Quality Improvement

• Social Work is largely absent from Social Entrepreneurship
• Risk to Social Work profession & organizations
  – Seen as irrelevant
  – Potential displacement by entrepreneurial start-up world
  – Social Work innovators also need exploitation skills
  – Social Work graduates likely need both strategies
Agenda

• Explain exploitation, exploration & ambidexterity
• Define role in innovation
• Argue Social Work should incorporate Social Entrepreneurship
• Suggest curricular considerations
Exploitation & Exploration

• Dual strategies for adaptation
  • Exploration
    – Discontinuous change
    – Search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation
  • Exploitation
    – Continuous change
    – Refinement, choice, efficiency, implementation
• Both may lead to social innovations
• Self-reinforcing
• Organizations show propensity for one

Social Work & Innovation

• Evidence-Based Practice as signature method of innovation
  – Slow, incremental change
  – Complex, linear, costly process
  – 17 years from research to practice
  – Require further adaptation

• Risks from growth of Social Entrepreneurship

Social Entrepreneurship

- New organizations, programs, organizational relationships & structures
- Adoption of business techniques
- Growing eco-system
- Critiques:
  - Romanticize the entrepreneur
  - Duplicative, poorly resourced startups, lacking evidence
  - Weak management, governance, transparency

## Process of Innovation

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Social Work & Social Entrepreneurship

- Social Work slow to adopt Social Entrepreneurship
- Limited training / missed opportunities
- Adopt Braided Approach to complement reliance on EBP
- Broader toolbox of continuous & discontinuous strategies
- Consistent with Social Work values & emphasis on macro practice

Ambidexterity

• Balance exploration & exploitation
• Empirically supported
• Challenges to implement
  – Compete for resources
  – Require different skills
  – Exploitation may lead to path-dependency & “success trap”
  – Disrupt existing “value network”
  – Over-reliance on exploration may lead to a “failure trap”
  – Pressures against diverting resources & risk of failure

Braiding Strategies

- Alternate periods of time
- Assign exploitation & exploration to separate operating units
- Create organizational context that encourages ambidexterity
- Use inter-organizational alliances
- Managers develop skills to negotiate trade-offs
- New tools:
  - Design Thinking, Lean Start Up, AGILE, rapid iteration cycles, minimally viable products

Braided Approach to Substance Abuse Treatment

David Patterson-Silver Wolf

– Director, Community-Academic Partnership on Addiction
  • Research, dissemination, training
– Chief Research Office for participating clinic
  • Evidence-based practice
– Founder of Takoda, management & digital tools
  • Piloted at clinic
Curricular Innovation at Brown

- 12 credit Management Specialization
- 12 credit Social Entrepreneurship Specialization
- MSW-MBA Joint Degree
- MSW students complete 3 credits management & leadership
- All students complete Leadership at Brown program
- 17 courses – 3 & 1 credit
- Endowed Professor of Practice in Innovation & Entrepreneurship
- Host Social Entrepreneurship & Innovation Competition
- 2020 – Social Impact Leadership Concentration
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