

Analyzing the Mission Drift of Social Business: Case Study of Restaurant Providing Professional Training to At-Risk Youth

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Abstract : Social businesses are based on the idea that an enterprise can be established for the sake of profit and, at the same time, with the aim of fulfilling social goals. Yet, the question of how these goals can be integrated in practice to derive parallel benefit in both realms still needs to be examined. Particularly notable in this context is the 'governance challenge' of social businesses, meaning the danger of the mission drifts from the social goal in the pursuit of good business. This study is based on an evaluation study of a social business that operates as a restaurant providing professional training to at-risk youth. The evaluation was based on the collection of a variety of data through interviews with stakeholders in the enterprise (directors and managers, business partners, social partners, and position holders in the restaurant and the social enterprise), a focus group consisting of the youth receiving the professional training, observations of the restaurant's operation, and analysis of the social enterprise's primary documents. The evaluation highlighted significant strengths of the social enterprise, including reaching relatively fast business sustainability, effective management of the restaurant, stable employment of the restaurant staff, and effective management of the social project. The social enterprise and business management have both enjoyed positive evaluations from a variety of stakeholders. Clearly, the restaurant was deemed by all a promising young business. However, the social project suffered from a 90% dropout rate among the youth entering its ranks, extreme monthly fluctuation in the number of youths participating, and a distinct minority of the youth who have succeeded in completing their training period. Possible explanations of the high dropout rate included the small number of cooks, which impeded the effectiveness of the training process and the provision of advanced cooking skills; lack of clarity regarding the essence and the elements of training; and lack of a meaningful peer group for the youth engaged in the program. Paradoxically, despite the stakeholders' great appreciation for the social enterprise, the challenge of governability was also formidable, revealing a tangible risk of mission drift in the reduction of the social enterprise's target population and a breach of the commitment made to the youth with regard to practical training. The risk of mission drifts emerged as a hidden and evasive issue for the stakeholders, who revealed a deep appreciation for the management and the outcomes of the social enterprise. The challenge of integration, therefore, requires an in-depth examination of how to maintain a successful business without hindering the achievement of the social goal. The study concludes that clear conceptualization of the training process and its aims, increased cooks' participation in the social project, and novel conceptions with regard to the evaluation of success could serve to benefit the youth and impede mission drift.

Keywords : evaluation study, management, mission drift, social business

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