

The Training of Social Entrepreneurs A Quasi-Experimental Study with College Students in A City of Central Mexico

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Abstract

Social entrepreneurs are people who have the vision to transform their environment out of a creative idea. The objective of this study was to demonstrate how some creative methods of education based on example demonstrations and achievements of social entrepreneurs could have a significant influence on college students' intention to become an entrepreneur. A quasi-experimental study was conducted on 105 computer management students in a public university located in central Mexico. In general, all the participant students (control and experimental group participants) knew their capabilities and assumed the risks that they may encounter in any economic venture. However, only the individuals who underwent the experimental treatment showed a higher social motivation to become entrepreneurs for the good of others. This suggests that the development of creative educational tools that raise awareness about the environment (as well as ideas about what to do about it) is an effective way to encourage students to become social entrepreneurs.

Keywords: social entrepreneurs, quasi-experimental research, college students, creative education.

1. Introduction

In the latest world conferences on Higher Education, sponsored by UNESCO, a special emphasis has been placed on the role that higher education institutions have in directing efforts towards training entrepreneurs that meet and anticipate social needs. Such training should encompass the vision to create opportunities (UNESCO, 2009), and create jobs (UNESCO, 1998). In this context, it is clear that universities should support and encourage the training of social entrepreneurs.

Social entrepreneurs are individuals with the motivation to start businesses out of their comprehensive and innovative vision. They have a great ability to organize people and resources (Kantis, 2008), and possess a talent to take advantage of their, sometimes limited, financial resources (Reis & Clohesy, 2001). Social entrepreneurs constantly create and nurture relationships that turn into an intangible capital. They also build relationships of trust and commit themselves to their present and future environment (Ostrom, Ahn, & Olivares, 2003). Notoriously, social entrepreneurs have been studied in various subject areas because they are agents of change that are formed when they detect a social need (Burt, 2008). Such detection originates in understanding and reflection, in intellectual exercises, and as an outcome of occupational training (Terjesen, Lepoutre, Fair, & Bosma, 2012).

The university has a leading role in the formation of social entrepreneurs. Higher education promotes cultural exchange and institutional strengthening that give raise to individuals committed to sustainable community welfare (Fornoni & Foutel, 2004). In this regard, Melián et al (2011) explain that the social entrepreneur is the result of a collective and shared project, which can occur in universities (White, Coke, Loreda, & Wall, 2004). In addition, Guzman and Cáceres (2007) explain that the university can influence the student in a variety of ways.

Among these: theoretical training, the acquiring of practical experience from professionals and the environment in which s/he operates by creating awareness about the social and economic context in which they receive professional education. In Mexico, some actions have been created (and been strongly supported) in order to promote social entrepreneurship. The generation of contests, the organization of forums and seminars in order to get students and teachers to know, and be more involved with, proposals to settle themselves as social entrepreneurs are among such actions. This scenario is especially prevalent among institutions belonging to the Latin American Network of Universities for Social Entrepreneurship (REDUNES, 2015).

However, there are still few affiliated universities, considering the total number of public and private universities in the country. Consequently, in Mexico there is still little knowledge on the subject. In addition, the traditional ways of training higher education students are not a significant support for them to be aware of the important work they can do as agents of social change.

2. Theoretical Review

2.1. Social Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been extensively studied in recent years. However, social entrepreneurship begins to be studied as a phenomenon that can support communities to create value through innovations that arise from the use of financial resources for social, economic, and community development (Clohesy & Reis, 2001).

Business entrepreneurs aim to maximize profits (Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2013). In contrast, social entrepreneurs pretend to develop useful enterprises for society. That is, their priority is to combat a social problem by means of a creative project, which in turn increases social wealth (Boisot & MacMillan, 2004). It is worth noting, however, that business and social entrepreneurs are not two different types of entrepreneurs, rather it can be said that the social kind is a species within the genus of entrepreneurs (Dees, Emerson, & Economy, 2002: 3)

Social entrepreneurs are change agents that help to curb the effects of unemployment and social inequality (Melian et al., 2011). They seek the creation and sustainability of social value (Dees et al., 2002). They are leaders who identify a static and negative situation that causes social exclusion, marginalization or suffering of a segment of society (Burt, 2008), and they seek to create a new balance that ensures permanent benefits to the community in which they interact (Backes-Gellner & Moog, 2013).

According to Estrin, Mickiewicz and Stephan (2013), institutional quality is a factor that facilitates the emergence of social entrepreneurs. That is, less bureaucracy in carrying out procedures, and more formal education, facilitate the emergence of such people. Social entrepreneurs are the result of entrepreneurship experiences and vocational insights (Baron & Markman, 2003). In a propitious environment, like the university, these antecedents will facilitate the conversion of intentions into actions (White et al., 2004). Kantis, Ishida, and Komori, from the Inter-American Development Bank (2002), found that there is an initial "motor" in the entrepreneurial process. The social assessment of managerial variable activity, associated with the culture and environment, was found in more than half of respondents in Mexico and Argentina, recognizing that their business vocation arose from their desire to contribute to society. This means that in such countries, entrepreneurs have a strong propensity to be social. However, few are those who manage to continue their entrepreneurial spirit (OECD, 2012), so it is necessary that universities support more strongly the efforts that promote the emergence of social entrepreneurs.

2.2. The role of the University in the development of social entrepreneurs

According Fornoni and Foutel (2004), as a basis for social capital¹, educational institutions are facilitators for the emergence of social entrepreneurs. They identify a negative social situation (Burt, 2008), carry out innovations and take advantage of resources for social development (Dees et al., 2002; Melián et al, 2011; Clohesy & Reis, 2001). Universities foment the building of lasting, collaborative, and trusting relationships that give individuals access to resources (Venkataraman & Van de Ven, 1998), and enable them to utilize such resources for social good (Payne, Moore, Griffis, & Autry, 2011).

¹Set of current or potential resources arising from the possession of a durable network of relationships more or less institutionalized of knowledge and mutual understanding and recognition that generate benefits to some aspect of social structures (Coleman & Coleman, 1994) to facilitate the action of certain actors (including social entrepreneurs), generating reliability, unwritten rules and collaborative networks (Etkin, 2007).

Entrepreneurship Global Studies Monitor (Terjesen et al., 2012), in Latin America, shows that people with a strong tendency to entrepreneurship have a high level of education, specifically in management and engineering. Entrepreneurship Global Studies Monitor emphasizes a fact pointed out by a study undertaken by the Inter-American Development Bank (Kantis, et. al, 2002). That is, in Mexico, an important amount of people say that they had followed the example of a businessman who they admired.

Then, the university has a leading role in the formation of social entrepreneurs, because higher education is the door that students have to understand, reflect and argue about issues that help them understand the context in which they interact, through the knowing, being, and doing (Delors, 2013). It is in the university area where students have the opportunity to generate projects and ideas that sometimes they put into practice in their professional lives. On this, there are different positions: from scholars who say that college is a determining entrepreneurial training to those who prove that the universities do not have a significant influence on the intentions of students to be entrepreneurs. Sanchez (2000) is one of the authors who favor the first stream: he explains that the university itself is the context in which the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is generated, that is, the university is primarily responsible for motivating students to be entrepreneurs.

At the other extreme there are studies like Oosterbeek (2010), who found that students who study on entrepreneurship, have no great entrepreneurial intention. An intermediate position is from White (2004), who explains that the student already possesses certain personal characteristics that can be potentiated from institutional actions (such as teaching and research approaches) to help them recognize the social and economic context. If this is driven by entrepreneurial experiences, students can be a fertile ground to sow the entrepreneur seed. Benavides and Sanchez (2000) support this position, explaining that the student has certain psychological and sociocultural factors that through a process of learning and acquiring knowledge and skills can encourage him or her to be an entrepreneur. Guzman and Caceres (2007) explain that the university can influence the student from theoretical training, acquiring practical experience of professionals and the environment in which he or she operates, by creating awareness of the social and economic context in which they develop their professional studies.

On these models the actions that have been generated in Mexico in recent years rely on social entrepreneurship. The Latin American Network of Universities for Social Entrepreneurship (REDUNES, 2015), develops competitions, organizes forums and seminars for students and teachers so that they can be aware of and more involved with the proposals that can be developed to settle as social entrepreneurs. However, there are still few affiliated universities (if you consider the total number of public and private universities in the country), consequently, there is still little knowledge and training on the subject.

2.3. Training of social entrepreneurs through creative education.

The knowledge society, in which we now live, requires the training of professionals able to transform information into valuable knowledge that allows discern and act. The education in universities should play a leading role, integrating fundamental changes in their models of training, learning and innovation (Didriksson, Medina, Rojas Mix, Bizzozero & Hermo, 2008). In addition, the teaching should be consistent with the characteristics of the new generations, which require new and creative ways to learn, by making students to participate in social activities that promote social skills, that includes to realize about other's situation and being empathetic (Tejada, 2013), complementing their comprehensive education.

Moreover, teachers should consider that new generations require new learning environments, developing examples and case studies that allow them to truly build their own knowledge, accompanied by a collaborative learning while motivating them for the sake of learning (Ferreiro, 2010), because for this new generation is not enough the fact of transmitting information since it is even more clever to get it by itself. Education is the result of a series of processes including the accumulation of theoretical and technical knowledge adapted to the demanding knowledge society, as the basis for developing a clear vision of the profile intended to be achieved. For this, the individual must be able to update, deepen and enrich this knowledge to adapt to the rapid changes that we live day to day (Delors, 2013). Under this wording, the enterprising education (and especially focused on developing social entrepreneurs) must be generated through creative exercises with the student in order to understand implications and satisfactions that can experience as an entrepreneur (Solomon, Yar Hamidi, Wennberg, & Berglund, 2008).

Another way is to focus on entrepreneurship from the graduation profile of the future professional, considering across the curriculum the slogan of forming an entrepreneurial education (Rasmussen & Sorheim, 2006). To train entrepreneurs, it is also necessary, to create mechanisms for regulatory action (Gielnik et al., 2015), to monitor and control that the goal is being met. In particular, to achieve social entrepreneurship education, students need to be aware of what happens around them, using common sense and creativity to create innovative strategies (Pache & Chowdhury, 2012), but this should be a gradual process. In which several educational tools and processes are involved. Based on the literature reviewed, it was raised how to carry out this research. The following section details the methodology followed.

3. Research Method

In recent years, social entrepreneurs have been studied in great depth. As said previously, because they contribute proactively to solve social problems with greater emphasis on vulnerable groups. They, also, help to create an environment of greater hope. Therefore, public and private universities in Mexico have done some efforts to develop change agents with creative ideas that can help by solving a problem that afflicts society. This work was intended to demonstrate some creative methods of education based on the demonstration of examples and achievements of social entrepreneurs, which have a significant influence on college students about their intention to become one of them. For this, an experiment was conducted on 105 students of the degree in computer management of a public university located in central Mexico, considering a control group that was applied an experimental treatment (post test intact groups).

Campbell, Stanley and Kitaigorodski (1973) have named this type of research "design control group posttest only". This design does not use a test before the experiment, because it is considered that the randomness in the formation of the control group is sufficient to ensure equal groups. To Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch and Cook (1965) this experimental design is a bivariate type, because it intends to test the relationship between two variables, in this case, the influence of creative methods of education and students intending to become social entrepreneurs. Based on the studies reviewed, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H1: There is a significant difference between groups (the one without implementation and the control group) concerning the motives that they have to be social entrepreneurs.

The groups that participated in the experiment were quite similar. All students were enrolled in the last semester of the Bachelors degree in computer management. Their ages ranged between 20 and 24 years. It was determined to analyze students of that degree, as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor survey suggests that management and engineering students have high propensity to be social entrepreneurs. The degree in computer computer combines knowledge from these two areas.

All students who participated in the experiment were divided at random into two groups, in order to reduce the problems of internal validity. The first group was asked to remain in the classroom and the second was asked to leave for a few minutes the classroom, without mentioning the purpose of these actions. The experimental treatment was applied to the experimental group that remained in the classroom and a video about social entrepreneurs was showed to this group (Kliksberg, 2011), specifically showing the case of Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Prize in economics for his innovative company "The Grameen Bank "(Yunus, 2007).

Then it was asked the second group to be integrated into the classroom, so that together, all participating students will answer a survey on entrepreneurship and motivations. This survey was formed, as shown below in Table 1. The data collection instrument was developed based on the concepts of operational definitions of entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. All questions were measured with a standard ten-point Likert scale, where ten is the highest rating that students perceived in each answer.

The instrument was validated by a panel of three experts. To verify the internal validity of the instrument it was applied in a pilot test to 20 people. From the reliability analysis of Cronbach's alpha, some questions were removed and others re-structured. With this, the final instrument was composed of 25 questions. A quantitative research was conducted using statistical analysis. The research is correlational and applied: from research on the topic, it was hypothesized and statistical calculations were carried out to form the basis for discussion of the results.

Table 1: Dimensions, definitions and questions of social entrepreneurship

Social Entrepreneur	Dimensions	Variables	Questions
Who discovers, evaluates and explores with creativity and feel able to change a negative social situation, considering and assuming the risks involved with the motivation to curb the effects of social inequality	Entrepreneur	Handler	P1 Adaptable P2 Self-Reliance P8 Teamwork P10 Negotiator
		Planner	P5 Notes P11 Plan P12 Vision P13 Compliant P14 Achieving the proposed
		Capacity	P3 Communication P7 Delegate P15 Able
		Creative	P4 Creative P9 Ideas P24 Creative solution
		Assumes risk	P6 Risk P16 Sacrifice P25 Disposition
	Motivation	Non-social motivation	P17 Economic motivation P19 Political power motivation P20 Power motivation P22 Recognition motivation
		Social motivation	P18 Social help community motivation P21 Creating jobs motivation P23 Change environment motivation

Source: self prepared with analyzed studies

A cross-sectional quasi-experimental design was used to observe the results of an intervention on the control group, for further description and analysis of the findings (Kerlinger, Lee, Pineda, & Mora Magaña, 2002). From the results found with SPSS 20.0 software support, the descriptive were calculated and the T-test was analyzed to determine meaningful differences between the groups that participated in the experiment.

4. Results

Creative methods of education in higher education have been highly publicized in recent years. However, little has been done to prove their effectiveness. In this sense, the results of this investigation are shown. In order to test for the normal distribution of response data, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test for all dependent and independent variables was conducted. All of the items were confirmed to be normally distributed. Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the measures. The Cronbach's alpha results for this study ranged between 0.698 and 0.883 (table 2).

Table 2: Cronbach's alpha results

Element	Items	Cronbach's alpha
Handler	4	0.723
Planner	5	0.725
Capacity	3	0.698
Creative	3	0.732
Assumes risks	3	0.703
Non-social motivation	4	0.812
Social motivation	3	0.883

Source: self prepared with SPSS 20.0 calculations

From these results, compound variables were calculated on handler, planner, capacity, creative, assumes risks, non-social motivation and social motivation. With them, the descriptive were calculated for the group that did not watch the video (without application group) and the control group as shown in Table 3.

The descriptive variables show that in all the variables, the control group has a higher mean than the group without application. The same applies to the standard deviations, except for the "creative" variable. The above table also shows that there are differences between the means of non-social motivation and social motivation among the group without application and the control group. At first glance it shows that these differences are significant. For the analysis of other significant differences between groups, the Levene test was calculated to equal variance and T-test for equality of means, as shown in table 4.

Table 3: Descriptives

		Descriptive		
		N	Mean	Deviation
Handler	Group without application	52	8.1058	1.04945
	Control group	53	8.7075	1.02579
	Total	105	8.4095	1.07592
Planner	Group without application	52	7.6615	1.40226
	Control group	53	8.3547	.98187
	Total	105	8.0114	1.25202
Capacities	Group without application	52	8.3846	1.26867
	Control group	53	8.5157	1.10664
	Total	105	8.4508	1.18572
Assumes risks	Group without application	52	8.0385	1.54617
	Control group	53	8.8868	1.29586
	Total	105	8.4667	1.48108
Creative	Group without application	52	7.6154	1.85930
	Control group	53	7.7736	1.90789
	Total	105	7.6952	1.87660
Non-social motivation	Group without application	52	5.1490	1.87688
	Control group	53		
	Total	105	6.2833	2.08505
Social motivation	Group without application	52	6.3910	2.21573
	Control group	53		
	Total	105	7.6984	2.13514

Source: self prepared with SPSS 20.0 calculations

Table 4: Levene test and T test

	Levene test for equality of variances (sig.)		T test for equality of means (sig. Bilateral)	
Handler	.295	Equal variances are assumed	.000	With a probability <0.05, it is assumed that there is a difference between the means of both groups
Planner	.023	Equal variances are not assumed	.004	With a probability <0.05, it is assumed that there is a difference between the means of both groups
Capacity	.268	Equal variances are assumed	.574	With a probability <0.05, it is assumed that there is not a difference between the means of both groups
Creative	.904	Equal variances are assumed	.668	With a probability <0.05, it is assumed that there is not a difference between the means of both groups
Assumes risk	.623	Equal variances are assumed	.003	With a probability <0.05, it is assumed that there is a difference between the means of both groups
Non-social motivation	.346	Equal variances are assumed	.000	With a probability <0.05, it is assumed that there is a difference between the means of both groups
Social motivation	.000	Equal variances are not assumed	.000	With a probability <0.05, it is assumed that there is a difference between the means of both groups

Source: self prepared with SPSS 20.0 calculations

The results showed that there are significant differences between the means of both groups on the variables: handler, planner, creative, non-social motivation and social motivation. For the variables capacities and assumes risks, there is no difference between the means of both groups. With these results the research hypothesis is accepted, as it has demonstrated a significant difference between the group without application and the control group on the motivations that they have to be social entrepreneurs. Although it was expected that the control group showed greater inclination for social motivation and less for economic motivation, recognition and power, as the results show it.

5. Discussion

Social entrepreneurship has been envisioned as a possible answer to the needs that exist in some communities and that governments have not been able to address effectively. Therefore, in recent years, some Latin American universities have tried to influence their students to become social entrepreneurs. In this regard, several studies show that the tools of creative education can indeed influence and encourage college students to become entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, a few studies have addressed the ways in which creative education can influence college students to become social entrepreneurs in Latin America.

The study of Pache and Chowdhury (2012) suggests that several educational tools can be adapted to contribute to the goal of forming social entrepreneurs. One of the first stages should be the awareness about social problems in the immediate community (Starr & Fondas, 1992). It is also important to make individuals aware about the things that they may be able to achieve when they intend to help others with a creative idea.

In this regard, this study generated evidence on the effectiveness of creative education tools to promote social entrepreneurship. In the early stages, creative education tools might raise awareness of what students can achieve, and this might be done by showing real examples of people with a creative idea that have changed substantially the lives of many human beings.

Overall, the results of this research support the findings of Kantis, Ishida and Komori (2002). That is, while the Mexican entrepreneur has economic motives to undertake a new venture, s/he has strong social motivations to help others by means of their actions. Moreover, it seems that students incline to take the risk of a new venture when they are exposed to some audiovisual stimuli that raises their awareness about the substantial changes that are achieved with the implementation of a socially motivated a creative idea. Students also perceive that they have greater management and planning capacity, as they have a strong motivation to support their community. From the findings presented, we now know that college students in Mexico could be highly influenced to become social entrepreneurs by means of creative tools used in higher education.

6. Conclusions

In the knowledge society we now live in, higher education demands the formation of individuals with a high awareness of social needs. Therefore, innovation in education must be present. Undergraduate students appear to have very specific characteristics that force instructors to experiment with new and innovative teaching methods that include real examples and case studies. Students have a significant learning when they connect what they have learned in the classroom with the environment that they perceive to dwell in. That is, when students assimilate and internalize knowledge, they are aware of the use that can be given it to it.

In social entrepreneurship, it is convenient to take advantage of the profile that college students have about the social significance of their profession. Through creative methods of education, young individuals can be influenced to become social entrepreneurs. Universities can do this with the aim to support their students' knowledge with creative ideas that can change the landscape for the most vulnerable communities. In the end, university teachers must develop new and better tools for education. The creativity put into it will be a determining factor for the education of future professionals that can take on the challenge of being an agent of change in the knowledge society.

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