Introduction
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Research, to abuse a popular saying, was not meant to be easy. Undertaking research is a complex task requiring skills and proficiency in data collection, management, analysis and reporting, not to mention the associated and supporting research fundraising and dissemination. Research projects can be further complicated by the complex nature of the phenomenon and activities studied, with messy and unorganised data requiring a kind of 'rummaging' process to complement these 'organising' processes mentioned above.

In the case of social entrepreneurship research, these compounding factors are significant. Furthermore, in practice the term 'social entrepreneurship' is being inconsistently (though increasingly) used. For example: the President of the United States of America (USA), Barack Obama, used the term to express how he hoped to support small non-profit organisations. The Director of Social Enterprise at the Centre for Social Impact, Cheryl Kernot, used the term to describe a recent acquisition of government-funded childcare centres by a syndicate of Australian charities. The leader of the (then) opposition British Conservative Party, David Cameron, used the term in a call to mainstream business to focus on quality and community. The recent announcement of the Australian of the Year highlights the morphing concepts:

> 2011 Australian of the Year, Simon McKeon. Described as a social entrepreneur and philanthropist, he has made a name for himself in helping community causes. The previous recipients of Australian of the Year have been philanthropists, sports champions, business figures and activists. The 2011 Australian of the Year has all of these traits rolled into one. (666 ABC Canberra, 26 January 2011)

The general confusion associated with the terms is shared by academics who debate the meanings of 'social' as well as 'entrepreneurship', with concepts such as creativity, innovation, passion and value further complicating and confusing their debates. Part II of this *Handbook* will attempt to resolve these confusions.

0.1   SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS RISING STAR

Despite these confusions and contradictions, the profile and popularity of social entrepreneurship are rapidly rising. This may be due to a number of

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factors, including: (1) the recent and seemingly rolling crises in the world economy; (2) the concern that capitalism lacks a moral heart; and (3) recognition that management education has lacked a framework or purpose that is 'good'. Perhaps because of these factors, but also in spite of these factors, we are witnessing the rise of social entrepreneurship.

Turning first to the recent crises in the world economy: these crises include the dot-com bubble, the housing crisis, the credit and financial crises, high-profile bank bailouts and bonuses, corporate greenwashing and high unemployment – particularly in the 'free-wheeling' USA and United Kingdom (UK) – prompting commentators to highlight the flaws in the capitalist system. As noted by Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 62):

> The capitalist system is under siege. In recent years business increasingly has been viewed as a major cause of social, environmental, and economic problems. Companies are widely perceived to be prospering at the expense of the broader community. Even worse, the more business has begun to embrace corporate responsibility, the more it has been blamed for society's failures. The legitimacy of business has fallen to levels not seen in recent history . . . A big part of the problem lies with companies themselves, which remain trapped in an outdated approach to value creation that has emerged over the past few decades. They continue to view value narrowly.

To address these behaviours, there have been many attempts to create philosophies and frameworks that will allow such a 'better place' to be created. These frameworks have included the triple-bottom-line concepts pushed by practitioners of corporate social responsibility and sustainable investment. The highest-profile recent work is the above-mentioned Michael Porter and Mark Kramer (2011) 'Creating shared value: how to reinvent capitalism and unleash a wave of innovation and growth', promisingly published in the *Harvard Business Review*. In this paper they note:

> The concept of shared value can be defined as policies and operating practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates. Shared value creation focuses on identifying and expanding the connections between societal and economic progress. (p. 66)

With an equally fluid attempt at definition – 'The concept of shared value blurs the line between for-profit and nonprofit organizations' (p. 68) – Porter and Kramer propose:

> not all profit is equal – an idea that has been lost in the narrow, short-term focus of financial markets and in much management thinking. Profits involving a social purpose represent a higher form of capitalism – one that will enable society to advance more rapidly while allowing companies to grow even more. (p. 75)

It may be that social entrepreneurship offers insight into the opportunities for 'mission-based' business activity, and indeed Porter and Kramer recognise that social entrepreneurs are not locked into traditional business thinking and are pioneering the creation of shared value. Nevertheless, outside the field of social entrepreneurship, it is difficult to imagine how these 'higher' forms of capitalism will arise in what is most frequently a short-term race to the bottom.

Finally, in the context of management education, there has been criticism that there is a lack of a 'good' in the frameworks utilised by students, researchers and practitioners. For example, frameworks typically used to understand an industry, such as Porter's Five Forces (Porter, 1998), review bargaining power, threats of entrants, intensity of rivalry and so on. Such perspectives are not unusual, with the overarching aim of strategy to 'outperform'. Proponents of such competitiveness will argue that this is the basis of capitalism, and will typically return to Adam Smith's (1776/1976) 'invisible hand' for shelter from the above criticisms. We should note, however, that Smith himself was not as 'conservative' as some modern-day leaders would like to believe, with other works equally as significant (see for example *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith, 1759/2000). Without resolving these questions, elements of society have long questioned the 'purity' of commercial profit (perhaps these elements now also include MBA students):

> Two-thirds of people believe companies should do more than just make profits. According to a recent poll, the public in 20 countries believes companies should contribute to broader social goals, including good labour practices, business ethics and environmental standards. But research by the Aspen Institute in the US suggests this view is shared by only 40 per cent of those enrolling on MBA programmes – and by only 30 per cent of graduates. (Duncan McLaren, *Telegraph*, 21 February 2003)

These three superficial examples of crises, concerns and recognitions highlight the need for alternative business practice, but also the anticipation of alternative practices by business leaders and academic researchers.

To temper the above enthusiasm, it should be noted that social entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship research, though rising stars, are not magic cures for the above-mentioned malaise. Indeed, just as there is a 'dark side' to commercial entrepreneurship (Kets de Vries, 1985), so we can expect the same of social entrepreneurship. Criticisms of the former include: (1) commercial entrepreneurship encourages a 'transactional model of social relationships' such that entrepreneurship is about the creation and betrayal of trust (Collins et al., 1964); complicated by the fact that (2) most dishonesty by entrepreneurs is not found out, and if it is the

entrepreneur is typically sufficiently powerful for it not to matter (Bhide and Stevenson, 1990); encouraged (perhaps) by (3) a society which emphasises achievement without a corresponding emphasis on the means to that achievement tends to produce high levels of innovation in the form of deviance (Merton, 1949); resulting in a kind of (4) tactical empathy (which has been argued to be crucial to the career of Sir Richard Branson and his retaining control of *Student* magazine and Virgin Music, which had little to do with creating those enterprises, but rather gaining or retaining control of them) (Armstrong, 2005).

It would be unusual if there is not also some mistaken and mismanaged activity by social entrepreneurs, especially given that they are 'active' in the challenging space traditionally occupied by not-for-profit organisations, government agencies and non-governmental organisations. Indeed, the recent criticisms of micro-credit and the organisations driving its growth may be the tip of the iceberg in the field. It is important, therefore, that researchers and practitioners alike do not actively (or passively) hide ignoble activities behind noble missions.

0.2   SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP RESEARCH IS INCREASINGLY VISIBLE AND SIGNIFICANT

Social entrepreneurship research is growing in profile and impact (for a review refer to the excellent Chapter 10 in this *Handbook* by Aaron McKenny, Jeremy Short and Tyge Payne). Its profile is rising in response to the discussions presented above, but also because of its peripheral and cross-disciplinary nature. As introduced by Dacin et al. (2010, p. 37):

> Social entrepreneurship continues to be a field of interest that crosses academic disciplines and challenges traditional assumptions of economic and business development . . . Some even suggest that the phenomenon transcends the individual domains of entrepreneurial studies, social movements, and nonprofit management.

The periphery has long been recognised as significant (see, for example, Day and Schoemaker, 2005; Cunha and Chia, 2007), and social entrepreneurship research promises insights into the periphery as well as the 'mainstream'. The stretch for researchers is to ensure that we are not blind to these alternative realities, or blinkered by our research methods developed in the context of a for-profit world of business.

This is not to imply that social entrepreneurship requires new theory, new methodologies or new methods. I agree with Dacin et al. (2010): social entrepreneurship should not be delineated as a theoretical domain

in its own right. Instead, social entrepreneurship should be recognised as a setting for research that provides rich opportunity for researchers (whether we be primarily commercially or socially focussed) to advance our understandings of business activity (whether commercial or social).

0.3   THE FOCUS FOR THE *HANDBOOK*

With the above considerations and caveats noted, I turn to the focus for the *Handbook*: research methods that will have particular relevance for the context and phenomena of social entrepreneurship. It is written with early-career researchers in mind, with clear approaches to research documented by experienced and novice researchers alike. Unlike most handbooks focussed on research methods, this edited volume has organised itself around broad themes of research: curiosity, posture, gathering and voice (Figure 0.1). These themes develop the interactive model of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Within each of these themes, chapters of this *Handbook* address specific approaches and methods. Note how the figure emphasises that the various themes are all interrelated and interactive.

0.3.1   Curiosity

All research begins (and perhaps also ends) with curiosity. That curiosity can be sparked from practical engagement with social enterprise, or inspired from theoretical pondering. Part I of the *Handbook* aims to spark and harness curiosity by reviewing both the social entrepreneurship phenomenon as well as the philosophies of science impacting upon its study.
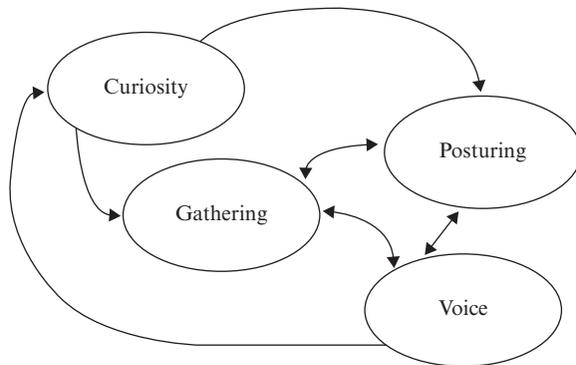

Figure 0.1   Themes of research activity: interactive model

To turn these sparks into a fire, attentive and fervent additional research is required.

0.3.2   Posture

The posture taken by a researcher will have an impact on the research project undertaken. By posture, I mean the research strategy or position that will determine the associated research methods. For example, how the researcher positions their research with regards to the sources of data (narratives and stories), participation or involvement in the project (action research) or how that research is bounded (multiple or single case studies). Part II also highlights how postures will impact upon the data gathered and the resulting insights.

0.3.3   Gathering

Gathering data and insight are the 'active' episodes of research, having a focus on the methods associated with research activity. Part III of the *Handbook* includes social network analysis, discourse analysis, and the quantitative methods associated with large data sets. These three key methods are each complemented by appropriate examples set in the context of social entrepreneurship.

0.3.4   Voice

The final (and perhaps greatest) challenge for a researcher is to find his or her voice. This voice is required to write up the research project and findings, as well as to find the audience that will appreciate that research. Part IV of the *Handbook* includes an overview of the challenge for researchers in the setting of social entrepreneurship.

0.4   AS INTRODUCTION

I would advise reading broadly within this *Handbook*; for example there are excellent insights for qualitative researchers in the quantitative chapters (and vice versa). As will be seen, social entrepreneurship research calls for some adventurous approaches to methods as well as requiring fundamental and core research skills. Finding the right balance between experience and enthusiasm is a challenge for us all, and it is hoped that the following chapters will support an adventurous engagement with social entrepreneurship research. The *Handbook* is not

intended to be read in isolation: read widely and thoroughly within as well as outside it.

Finally, by way of introduction, a word about the writers of this *Handbook*. The contributors to this edited volume are all experienced researchers, some in the early stages of their career, some in an early phase of their research in the context of social entrepreneurship, and some are recognised leaders in the field. My thanks go to them for their efforts and for these chapters. What they share here is a passion for the context of social entrepreneurship, as well as their expertise in the practice of research. I hope that reading and developing their shared wisdom proves enjoyable, and that they will collectively inspire research activity. I remain grateful for their kind engagement with me as we developed this *Handbook*. I hope also that this short introduction to the *Handbook* has piqued the reader's curiosity; the real insights come from the following chapters, and of course from the reader's own research undertakings.

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