



WORKSHOP 6: New collaboration mechanisms

Facilitator: David Camps

Social Innovation. Nacho Sequeira. Fundació Èxit

One of the few positive consequences of the severe economic crisis of the last years has been an increased interest in innovation in general, and in social innovation particularly. The famous sentence by Albert Einstein pops up with strength yet again: “important problems cannot be solved with the same level of thought with which they were created”. Today we see how social problems are becoming more and more complex and we must stand up to them with fewer resources; faced with this scenario, innovating is not an option, it is virtually an imposition to survive.

According to the Spanish National Statistics Bureau, in 2009 in Spain almost 14.5 billion Euros were invested into R&D, who made this investment?

Mainly it was private companies (51%), higher education institutions (27%) and public administrations (20%). Who benefited from this? The two most strategic sectors of Spanish economy: Industry and services. Does this mean the Third Sector doesn't innovate? Food for thought. Some say third sector industries are in the forefront; that they are the first to detect problems and often the first to look for a solution, most of the time with very few resources but with large doses of imagination, commitment and other own values of the sector.

Other more critical voices defend that social organizations, rather than being non-governmental organizations, have become with the years *para-governmental* organizations, given that they are highly dependent on public financing. Far from concentrating on tackling the roots of the problems, they have been struggling to alleviate their consequences; some have been more concerned about how to continue receiving subsidies rather than stopping to question the public administrations about the adequacy of programmes which often come to a standstill. This vision points at the fact that the third sector is far from the race for innovation, a trend which would have come to an end with the rise of social entrepreneurs, figures which are usually unattached to NGO's.

The objective of this presentation isn't to delve into this controversy but rather to try and analyze what the key points are, based on our experiences, to innovate socially. Over recent years, the Èxit Foundation has promoted some initiatives such as the Coach Project, which have been seen as fairly innovative, and have been widely accepted both in social and entrepreneurial spheres. These are some of the key points:



1. **Focus on the root of the problems:** in our case, if we were to combat school drop-out, increasing motivation among the young and trying to introduce them into the labour market, we considered it essential to link the young and their teachers to companies, to try and bring two realities which we consider to be excessively far apart closer. At present we must convince the young of the need to get training. We will not be able to solve their problem if we find them unstable jobs which, after a few months, will take them right back to where they were before.
2. **Getting closer to other sectors without complexes:** in this case, when carrying out the Coach Project, we approached multinationals and large companies and invited them to participate in a social project which would help them to manage their human resources strategically. At present we have around fifty companies participating in this project that are motivated, beyond doubt, by the social side of it, but that are also interested in the opportunity to develop new skills among their workers and improve the work ambience in their organizations. NGO's must stop going to companies and begging; we must value what we have and offer them partnerships.
3. **Alliances and specialization with entities in the same sector:** resources are few, we cannot reinvent the wheel or try to make everyone do everything. Entities must specialize, thinking about where we can have a real incidence and bring an added value and where we should give way to others step in and coordinate our actions. Currently we have young people in the Coach Project who were sent to us from around twenty different social organizations and high-schools. If we hadn't opened up the project to other social organizations we wouldn't have had such a large impact.
4. **Making an effort to pack the methodology so as to facilitate its replication:** one of the former US president Bill Clinton's most famous quotes is: "Practically all problems have been solved by somebody in some part of the world...what is frustrating is that they seem to be unable to replicate these solutions in other territories". It is likely for people, when talking about social innovation, to think about the big new ideas when maybe the challenge isn't so much to reinvent the wheel constantly but rather trying to improve in detecting solutions that have proven to be useful for others and being able to replicate them in our territory. The famous saying: "think globally, act locally" is gradually being inverted: "think locally, act globally". Some of the socially most innovative persons are focusing their efforts precisely on how to replicate their ideas in other territories. They have seen that replication is not automatic, ideas must first be transferred, then adopted and then adapted, where local adaptation (customization) is vital.



5. **Measuring impact:** good ideas cannot only seem to be good, they must be proven to be so using objective indicators that complement testimonials of their success. In this sense there is still room for much improvement, even if some interesting initiatives have appeared in this regard.
6. **Financial self-sustainability of projects:** Everything seems to indicate that public financing will drop and that private financing for social projects in a crisis scenario will probably be framed in a strong competition where it will be necessary to prove the impact of projects, and maybe even their economic returns. A good indicator (even if it is not always applicable) that partners really value a project is their willingness to co-finance it. The difference between an inventor and an innovator is that the first is interested in an idea and the second is interested in it having a market value (in the broadest of meanings). A good piece of advice in this sense is to try to bring your target audience onboard your project from the very first stages of its development; this will be the way to minimize the risk that your innovation may not interest them.

PROPOSALS

1. In order to make progress in social innovation we must take a close look of the DNA of our identities, focusing on our efforts in those areas where we can contribute a greater added value and maybe stepping out of some projects where there are other organizations (both in our sector and in others) that are stronger and where it makes sense to promote alliances with them. A good intra and inter-sectoral alliance policy will be the key to successful innovation.
2. Just as important, or more so, as generating new ideas is to replicate others' ideas which we can apply to our territory. In this sense it is important to facilitate the detection of these best practices and facilitate the packaging and replication process, transferring, adopting and adapting methodologies.