

# **TACKLING HEROPRENEURSHIP**

**An “apprenticing with a problem”  
approach to move us from the  
social entrepreneur to social impact**

*Daniela Papi-Thornton*



**Funded by**



**Supported by**





**Once upon a time**, in a university near you, the desires of students started to shift. A new form of superhero had entered the scene, at first very slowly, and now in full-force. These superheroes were very different from the old regime of people who studied business or joined MBA programmes in the past. You see, in the old days, students lined up for interviews with investment banks, tripping over each other to fight for the next coveted slot in a bank so they could prove their hero status to those around them by the size of their bonus. But the world started to change. The lines for the banking jobs started to shrink and the new cult of the hero was focused around a term as elusive as corporate tax paying: the social entrepreneur. As the term spread, people stopped wanting to “do” something important to improve the world and instead started wanting to “be” social entrepreneurs.

This is where we find ourselves today, in the era of *heropreneurship*, a time where the desire to “be” a social entrepreneur is driving demand the way only bonus checks once could. This fittingly correlates with economic downturn or stagnation: if there are no jobs to apply for, then people need to go out and create them. Increasingly though, the entrepreneurial energy in many universities is no longer focused on creating jobs at home. Through my experience working with graduate students and the reflections of many educators I interviewed, I see a trend of students and hopeful entrepreneurs focusing their efforts on solving problems in other people’s backyards, backyards that once might have been called “developing countries.” When considering their options in northern countries, it’s understandable that many students would rather move to an emerging high-growth market to start something new. Plus, as students I have spoken with have pointed out, Africa is where all of the accolades, awards, and funding appear to be flowing – so who wouldn’t want to start up a start-up in Nairobi?

The tricky thing about starting up a social business in someone else’s backyard is that, if it wasn’t your backyard too, then you probably haven’t lived the same problems. Before you jump in to *solve* them, you’ll need to *apprentice* with those problems to ensure you understand them. Creating effective solutions, especially those that shift a broken system, requires a deep knowledge about the problem to be solved, and this is where the entrepreneurial-heroism is concerning. Unfortunately, our education programmes and funding opportunities are designed for solutions, not apprenticeships. Working to *solve* the problem is usually prioritised over working to *understand* the problem, resulting in wasted efforts.

If everyone thinks the best way to improve the world is to start a new social venture, then we miss out on getting talented individuals into the full spectrum of roles needed to create positive social change. And if educational institutions and funders continue to focus on helping students try to “solve” problems they never lived in parts of the world they don’t yet understand, we’ll continue to fuel very shallow solutions to deep and complex problems.

We don’t need more people wanting to “be” social entrepreneurs. We need leaders, at the top of an organisation and throughout, with a social conscience, the skills to fuel collective impact, and a strong understanding of the problems they are looking to solve, upon which to base strategic decisions. To get there, educators and funders need a more holistic view of the types of skills, tools, techniques, and questions required to help people understand complex problems and contribute to positive social change.



## Heropreneur

\ 'hir-ō,p(r)ə-'nər\

noun

: a founder who is greatly admired, as if a hero, and viewed as the main actor in social progress.

: a person who starts an organisation and who overemphasises their role as founder, overshadowing teams, collective impact, and building upon the ideas of others.

### Derived Forms: Heropreneurship

noun

: the promotion and hero-worshipping of entrepreneurship as the ultimate sign of success, leading us towards a world with a proliferation of repeated and disjointed efforts and too few people looking to join and grow the best organisations, leading us to a world where no one wants to be #2.





## An overview

This report and accompanying website are conversation starters with a call to action, asking us to rethink how we fund, educate for, and fuel social change, and how we might remove the current barriers to collective impact. The research was principally interview-based, and this report is written in a light-hearted style in order to hopefully be accessible to a wide audience. It looks at our current state of heropreneurship and how we might tackle the inherent problems to come, with an approach built upon the idea of *apprenticing with a problem*. It explores the roles educators, funders, and individuals seeking positive-impact careers might play in maximising our collective impact, and unpicks some current myths about the role of the entrepreneur.

To keep things colourful, and to take us full circle back to the tales of individual “heroes”, this report includes illustrated personal journeys highlighting people’s careers and the lessons they have learned on their paths to impact. These stories are not meant to further the obsession with *heropreneurs* but instead to highlight some of the lessons that are often overlooked in social impact narratives. They focus on people who have *apprenticed with the problem*, suffered under the heropreneurship spotlight, proven that they are married to the problem, built upon *the value of the lived experience*, or who exemplify any number of other illustrative terms used in this report to help us reconsider our personal and collective paths towards positive social change.

This work is a result of Daniela Papi-Thornton’s Clore Social Fellowship and was generously funded by the Clore Social Leadership Programme. The insights, stories, and opinions were curated come from over 40 interviews and countless other discussions with funders, entrepreneurs, educators, and a range of professionals who have focused their careers on social impact. A key area of agreement across the interviews was that one of the qualities that make high-impact entrepreneurs, *intrapreneurs*, and funders successful is that they have lived or apprenticed with the problems they seek to tackle. The insights also build on Daniela’s own experience working in education, in social impact organisations, and as an entrepreneur: one who wished she had learned about apprenticing with a problem before starting her own venture. This work has also been greatly influenced

by Daniela’s work as the Deputy Director of the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at Oxford’s Saïd Business School, where she has learned many of these lessons and has been able to test out some of the ideas for solutions set out in this report.

## The tale is broken into these chapters:

- **The current status of heropreneurship:** A look at what is currently happening in the education and financing of wanna-be social entrepreneurs, where these trends are leading us, and the disconnect between how social change happens and how it is taught. Sections include:
  - *An obsession with being an entrepreneur*
  - *Solution-focused education*
  - *Skewed views of how social change happens and “scales”*
- **Where do we go from here?** Ideas for how we might shift our educational and funding offerings to help people apprentice with a problem, tools for creating new conversations about social change, and tips for questions that might better align our actions with improved collective impact. Sections include:
  - *Valuing the Lived Experience*
  - *The Impact Sweet Spot & Apprenticing with a Problem*
  - *The Impact Gaps Canvas*
  - *Rethinking Business Plan Competitions*
  - *Shifting Funding & The Collective Impact Question*
- **Life maps:** Illustrated stories of the lives and career paths of nine people, some who apprenticed with a problem, some who wished they had, and some who built upon their lived experience to add value in intrapreneurial ways.

Hopefully this report will provide useful food for thought for those pursuing careers focused on social or environmental change, and help us all reconsider some of the current educational, funding, and leadership practices which are fuelling heropreneurship. This is only one piece of the conversation, which needs to be continued through more conversations, research, trial and error, and willingness to shift gears; so please, hop on in!





## The current status of heropreneurship

**Times have changed.** When I studied in an economics undergraduate programme, most social accolades and career competition were focused on investment banking. Very few of my friends were considering entrepreneurial careers and far fewer had heard of or were considering a career in “social entrepreneurship.”

Now, we seem to be in an era of heropreneurship, with countless accolades and celebrations painting entrepreneurs, especially social entrepreneurs, as the ultimate sign of success. Prizes and contests honouring entrepreneurial heroes, and newspaper articles sharing tales of social entrepreneurs “lifting people out of poverty”, are making it seem like starting a social business is the best way to create social change (or at least the best way to create social status!). This shift has led to countless university essays written by hopeful students stating goals of “being” a social entrepreneur. It has led Type A students, who once clamoured to apply for investment banking interviews, to now squish themselves into the front row of #socent lectures. This has left many universities scrambling to shift their version of a “Centre for Non-Profit Management” over to a “Centre for Social Entrepreneurship”. Governments are building departments aimed at increasing the number of social entrepreneurs in their country, as if in a competition to out-entrepreneur their neighbours. It’s like we’ve doubled down and put all of our chips on the heropreneur, leaving the rest of us to wait and watch the global roulette wheel to see if they can indeed save our planet and our economy.

There are a few problems with all of this, starting with the fact that no one “lifts” anyone else out of poverty, unless maybe they are a fire-fighter or Superman, in which case they probably put them back down into poverty as well. People climb, tooth and nail, out of poverty, and sure, we can help fix a broken ladder, we can work in governments and help remove the barriers to social progress, we can provide training, access to funding, and access to applicable technologies, but we can’t lift. That image of the heropreneur lifting people out of poverty is part of the problem with our image of how change happens, and it has led to an overemphasis of entrepreneurship and the role of the heropreneur as the key to social progress, driving many students away from other roles which could also benefit from their time, skills, and passion.

Is this race towards being an entrepreneur moving us away from the real race we need to be on, the one moving towards *positive social impact*? How can we channel all of this individualised good intention into collective impact? And what are we going to do with all of these rusty “Centre for Non-Profit Management” signs that are now sitting in the dump?



Cognitively, we get what is needed: social change efforts are best led by people who understand the problems they are trying to fix, and many of these problems are so interconnected that solving them will require more than the efforts of any one person or organisation. Research and decades of development efforts back up what common sense already tells us, yet this doesn’t align with the ways we commonly fund and educate for social change. In recent years, we’ve seen:





- increased fascination with the idea of the heroic social entrepreneur as the main actor in social change, overshadowing the many other paths to impact
- growth in entrepreneurship education and funding programmes focused on helping people test solutions rather than understand problems
- on-going obsession with organisational scale, which often dwarfs movement towards collective impact.

## Let's explore each of these areas.

### *An obsession with being an entrepreneur*

Entrepreneurs have long been celebrated, making names like Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, and Henry Ford as well known as the names of many celebrities and heads of state. While interest in the people who bring new jobs, new ideas, and new ways of working to the world has remained constant, what is new is the current focus on social entrepreneurs, and the way we now try to educate and fund their development.

The solutions we need for our future will require leadership from people who have lived or apprenticed with the problems they seek to address, yet often the people who sign up to programmes offering social entrepreneurship training don't have this kind of first hand experience. What makes *social* entrepreneurs unique is their commitment to using their organisations and efforts to solve a social or environmental challenge, and doing so takes more than simple business skill – it also requires dedication, persistence, focus, and drive. The problem with the way we are training for social change is that building these qualities and becoming passionate about an issue is not something that you discover in a workshop. The discontent with the current system needed to fuel someone to take action – perhaps involving significant personal and professional risk – isn't usually an academic activity. It can of course be sparked by a course, a documentary, or simply reading the paper, but a lot of work must then be done to translate that spark of interest into the thorough understanding of a problem that is needed to create a successful intervention.

Entrepreneurship of any kind is very hard: it requires grit and determination to get through the start-up phase,

and an ability to galvanize support through a clear articulation of the value of your services. Couple the general difficulty of entrepreneurship with the desire to solve an endemic or complex problem, and social entrepreneurship becomes an extremely challenging path to impact. We certainly want people to take on these challenges and not shy away from complex problems, but we need to set them up for success by encouraging them to have the tools and experience they need before they start.

Unfortunately, the idea of being a social entrepreneur is being sold right now as if it is a path you can excel in simply by understanding business tools. What's missing from the training and conversation are the tools and incentives to understand a problem. This is crucial, as that is what gives successful social change leaders the perspective and motivation they need to really solve entrenched global challenges. In the life maps of people included in this report, you will note that many of their most successful career decisions did not come from the skills they learned in hack-a-thons and business courses, but instead were fuelled by the unique insights they were able to draw from their understanding of the problems they cared about and the lessons they learned from the landscape of solutions already being tried.

Many students state that they want to be social entrepreneurs, but they don't yet have a cause they believe in. Jane Leu, the Founder of Smarter Good, described a situation I too have frequently encountered: "I often talk to students who say to me 'I want to be a social entrepreneur, I just don't know the issue I want to focus on yet.' They don't seem to get that this is about solving problems that you know!" In other words,

**if you want to find something that you care enough about to commit years of your life to solving, you better get out there and start understanding problems!**

The business model canvas trainings, customer insight worksheets, and start-up weekends are only going to translate into successful social entrepreneurs in the long term if the participants are committed to solving a problem they care about and accurately understand.



This isn't just a problem of students wanting to "be" social entrepreneurs - it is also a problem of others wanting to count them. With the rise of interest in social entrepreneurship, many governments are instituting initiatives aimed at increasing the number of social entrepreneurs in their area. However, measuring these numbers is a case of counting the means when we should be focusing on the ends. The number of social entrepreneurs on its own is of no value if those entrepreneurs are not achieving positive social change. It's an easier to count proxy for a more important and more elusive goal, but measuring it might not get us where we want to be.

**Social entrepreneurs are like toothbrushes. We don't want more toothbrushes, we want more clean teeth.**

There would be no point having a whole bunch of toothbrushes hanging on a wall so we can count them if they aren't actually out there doing their job of teeth cleaning.







Being a social entrepreneur is one career path that can move us towards positive social change, but there are a lot of other roles that are needed as well. We need people to join them and do the stuff most entrepreneurs find boring, like accounting, creating replicable processes and models, and measuring impact. We need entrepreneurial minds in governments and large international organisations. And we need traditional businesses and multi-national corporations to take leadership in positive social change as well. If we view social enterprise start-ups as the main tool for social progress, then we miss out on the many other pathways that might be a better fit for some future social impact leaders' skills, and we miss out on opportunities to reshape the entrenched systems that are currently holding us back.

In fact, there is a problem with the term "social business" overall. If it is meant to demarcate a subset of all businesses, what do you call the rest? Are they anti-social-businesses? Businesses that are not as social as social businesses? You see the problem. Each business has some form of impact on society, be it positive or negative; in fact, in pretty much all cases it is mixed. When we start to demarcate one set of businesses as "social," we then move all of the burden of responsibility for social change onto the minority subset, when in reality, "ALL businesses need to take responsibility for their social, environmental, and governance impacts," which is our mantra at the Skoll Centre.

While there is still value in distinguishing businesses that were established for the sole purpose of creating social or environmental change, that doesn't mean all other businesses should be excluded from the social change ecosystem. In fact, an environmentalist might have greater environmental impact by joining a large manufacturing company and slightly shifting their water resource usage than by starting a tiny social enterprise. As such, we need to shift how we think about, talk about, staff, and consider all of the "traditional" enterprises out there, because it is the shifts in those organisations that will help to fulfil the promise of the social enterprise movement.

*Solution-focused education: asking students to "solve" problems they didn't live and don't understand*

In my work with students, I have seen that they are increasingly being asked to come up with solutions to problems they didn't live. Whether it is a hack-a-thon weekend, a classroom case study, or a business plan contest, they are often in a position of being handed some information, say a three-page paper on the global food crisis, and then given a few hours to go out and work on *solving* it. While I appreciate the use of case studies and competitions as intellectual candy, fodder for practicing newly learned frameworks, or tactics that help students engage more interactively with global issues, I am more concerned when these intellectual activities seep out into the real world with misaligned incentives.

Let's take my typical example when talking about this issue: a group of students have come up with an idea for an app to help African farmers. The problem is, they have never farmed, nor been to Africa. (Insert dramatic pause.) If you are rolling your eyes because you think this example isn't true, then you certainly haven't been spending much time in the business plan competitions of the world's elite educational institutions. If you are sighing with a sympathetic understanding because you know this example all too well, then you might feel the same way I do: really excited about this positive energy and really worried about where it might end up and whose time it will take up along the way.

As educators, we have to point the finger of blame back at ourselves for creating this disconnect. It's the focus on *failing fast* and the unintended outcomes of many start-up accelerator programmes that now give me a nails-on-a-chalkboard reaction to the word *pivot*. We've created the expectation that things are going to fail, you are going to have to pivot, so the way to learn is to get on out there and start failing, and you will be well on your way to success! The problem is, if you are working on a problem in someone else's backyard, you essentially have to go out and interrupt other people's lives in order to test out your ideas. This isn't a big problem if you're creating a new smart payment app that you and your friends can use in San Francisco, but if you're taking your ideas to potentially highly vulnerable communities with scarce resources, doing more harm than good is very easy. Also, if you're unfamiliar with the context in which these problems are most acutely felt, and in addition, don't fully understand the problem you're working on, your ideas are unlikely to be grounded in reality to begin with, making you even more likely than usual to fail along the way.





As Maya Winkelstein of Open Road Foundation pointed out in our interview “If you want to go into finance and you haven’t worked in the sector yet you wouldn’t ever say ‘Oh, I want to start a bank!’ You’d know you needed to learn first!” Christy Remy Chin of Draper Richards Foundation noted, “People who don’t understand the problem they are trying to solve also don’t have the relationships they need to get the work done. Their actions can end up being paternalistic at worst and at best will end up wasting funds or fuelling duplication.”



Ideally, as educators, we would have given you the time, tools, incentives, and tactics to understand the problem before we sent you out in the world to “solve” it. Instead, what often happens is that the students with ideas coming from these academic solution-focused contests and assignments are then given a grant to go out and test out their business idea. If the project doesn’t work out, their trip to Malawi was largely paid for and they had a nice learning experience along the way. But

**who is paying the people in Malawi whose time was invested in their interviews and trials, and who now have nothing more than a failed app to repay them for the lending of *their* expertise in teaching the visiting students that their app wasn’t going to work in the first place?**

Worse still, there is a potential to upset delicate market dynamics for people with the least resilience to economic shocks by wasting their time and scarce resources.

The people who created design-thinking concepts and start-up methodologies that promote *failing fast* mind-sets certainly weren’t expecting so many apps for

Africa. In fact, their methodologies were intended to help save people from wasting time and energy, encouraging prototyping and quick ways to test out ideas without the need to fully invest in the design of a business model before realising it was flawed.

**However, what we are facing now is not just a glut of solutions that are unfit to solve problems, but *solvers* who are unfit to define problems.**

We need to create new educational programmes and offerings that give people the tools that come *before* creating solutions. If they didn’t live the problem they are trying to solve, we need to give them the tools and support to apprentice with those problems and identify a range of possible ways to contribute.

*Skewed views of how social change happens and “scales”*

One of the measurements many social impact accelerator programmes state as a selection criteria is the *scalability* of the organisation.



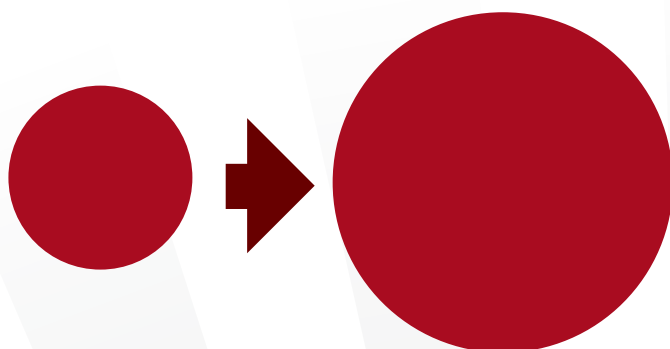
Ah, scale, you innocent sounding but oh so distracting and elusive thing - you always sneak your way into these impact conversations.

The dream of many wanna-preneurs is to win a business plan competition, pivot (nails on chalk board!), and then scale to the size of the problem, saving the day while bringing in tons of cash. (Cue Superman.) The reality, as we all know, is that that rarely happens.



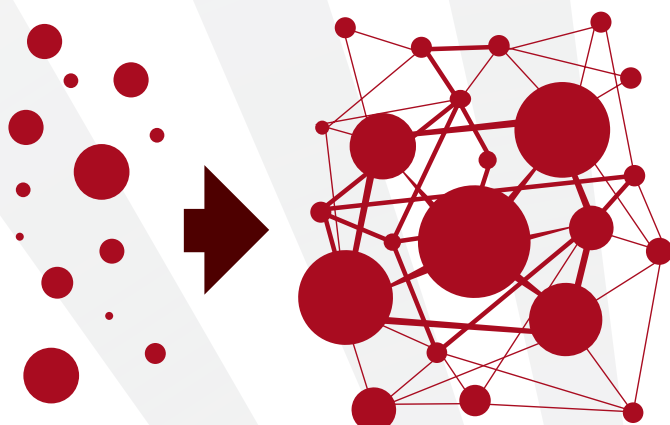
The main reason is this: social change does not “scale” the way an organisation does.

Most people think scale looks like this:



In this model, businesses compete with each other for customers and scarce resources, grow their organisation and outputs, and “scale”, making their circle of impact and income bigger.

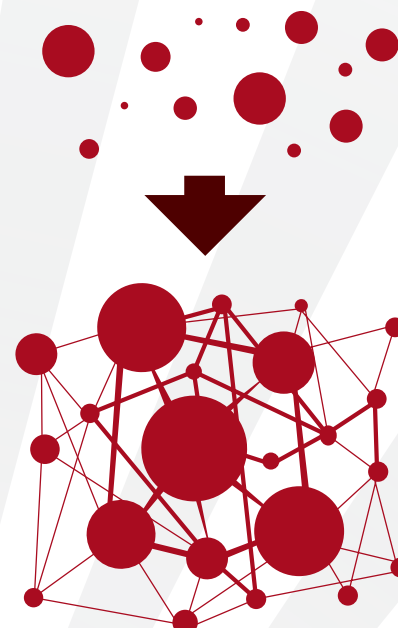
But scaling social change looks more like this:



Scaling impact really looks like individuals, governments, businesses, and impact organisations collaborating, sometimes unintentionally, and collectively creating change. As Jon Huggett, Chair of the Social Innovation Exchange, rightly pointed out in our interview, real social change is usually headless. In our discussion, he asked, “Do you know the entrepreneur who scaled to the size of the problem, say, making gay marriage legal in the US? Can you put a face on the person who made smoking indoors illegal in so many countries? No, because social change does not happen because one organisation scaled.”

A result of this heropreneurship movement is a belief that each wanna-be social-entrepreneur needs to pitch

a “new” and “innovative” idea, that they need to “prove”, through some elaborate spreadsheet, that they are going to be able to scale to the size of the problem (or to reach a billion people, whichever sounds sexier in their pitch!). They overlook the fact that they are blindly repeating the work of others, without learning from and building upon prior efforts, because otherwise they’d never be able to claim “they” solved the problem. (When I worked in international development, I used to call the phenomenon NGegO.) Of course, not all egos in social impact are this big, but sadly some of them are. We are never going to be able to shift all of the ego out the door, but what concerns me are the social impact training courses which are taking humble and impact-driven students and giving them a prescriptive model for social change, one that asks them to pitch like they were heropreneurs. Instead, what we need is training that inspires collective impact and fuels hopeful changemakers to view their role as the connectors, conductors, and engines that move us from here:



to here:

Many of the problems we are facing were caused by society – by broken systems, poor governance, misguided incentives, and greed. We can’t just put tiny band-aids on these things and think a bunch of start-ups are going to change these broken systems. Those systems themselves need to change. Social entrepreneurs can catalyse those changes across public, private, and community networks, but they aren’t lone heroes who go out and do these things alone. They need teams behind them, and we need “intrapreneurs” and entrepreneurial thinkers in all roles across society. We need people to go into governments, more traditional businesses, and non-profits and shift those incumbent organisations towards more positive social change. The paths to impact are endless.



As Pamela Hartigan, Director of the Skoll Centre, explains, “Social entrepreneurship is the practice of combining innovation, opportunity and resourcefulness to address some of our most pressing challenges. The organisations these entrepreneurs set up may be for-profit or non-profit, but their main purpose is to transform pernicious systems and practices that are affecting one or more population groups that neither markets nor government are interested or able to serve.” That doesn’t mean just starting and growing a business. It means catalysing system-wide change, which requires different skills than those taught in most start-up accelerators.

When you come across someone who is focused on changing a system that they know intimately, it certainly is impressive. I have watched with awe from afar as Baljeet Sandhu, founder of The Migrant and Refugee Children’s Legal Unit (MiCLU), and her colleagues have worked to protect the rights of young migrants and refugees. You have probably never heard her name nor that of her organisation, but if you care about the rights of children or have been following the shifts in the UK’s laws on migration and the EU response to the current refugee situation, you too would be very proud of their work. Reflecting on the need for organisations to work together, rather than pursuing acclaim and funding by focusing on individual impact, Baljeet noted, “We recognise that recent events have fuelled the response of larger brand name organisations and institutions to work on these issues right now, which is greatly welcomed because they have much needed resources, but we are also witnessing many competing for recognition so that they can report their success to their donors and build their fundraising campaigns. Equally, we are seeing governments and donors entering the space in an unprecedented way. In order for MiCLU to succeed in our mission, we need to impart practical and technical information, educate on complex issues to ensure the collective work is effective at truly benefiting children and those who support them, connect all of the players, and get them working together. In order to achieve this our work needs to remain discreet. We educate and influence from behind the scenes as it’s the only way to cajole this disparate group of people and organisations into collective action. At the same time, we continue to act on the ground, working directly with separated children whilst providing vital support to lawyers, foster carers, teachers and other frontline practitioners nationally

grappling to understand the complex needs and rights of children – ensuring that the voice of children is heard throughout our and others’ social impact work.”

Kresse Wesling – featured in a life map in this report – has a similar approach. The thread tying her career together is her passion for keeping useful material out of landfills and protecting our environment, but to fight for that change she has worked in a VC firm, started a number of businesses, and acted as an intrapreneur. I run a programme called Leading for Impact at Saïd Business School, and we host an off-site residential training weekend at the Elvis & Kresse workshop/home. While we’re there, Kresse even takes on another role: making us sandwiches. When I asked her how she and her partner, Elvis, have time to spend a weekend with our students, sharing their knowledge and their food, she noted that educating about their work is an important part of what she does. She recognises that she and Elvis alone are not going to be able to solve the world’s waste problem, and her own personal theory of change includes giving talks and meeting with countless numbers of students to inspire them to follow suit.

I’d love to see more training programmes spitting out Baljeets & Kresses: people who take a 30,000 foot view of the problem they are trying to solve and combine advocacy, traditional entrepreneurship, non-profit work, training, and whatever else they need to add into the mix in order to move us towards positive social change. That for me, and many others, is what a social entrepreneur looks like. Social entrepreneurs are not just people who start and grow a business that makes money and has a social mission but are people who change a system by fuelling whatever part of the solution landscape most needs fuelling. Yet somehow so many of our social impact training programmes seem to be teaching the former rather than the latter.

Social entrepreneurship is an approach built upon an understanding of and a desire to change a specific problem. And doing that requires collaboration skills; something Lily Lapenna-Huda, who is also featured in a life map in this report, has learnt through experience: “When I first started MyBnk, I knew there were other people doing similar work, but I was so focused on growing our own organisation, that I didn’t bother reaching out and connecting with them. It was a few years before I finally made the time to get all of us connected and





find ways to start working together, and I wish I had done that sooner. We are collectively able to achieve so much more by learning from each other and working together. It should be required from the start – if we are working towards the same goals, why are we not communicating and working together?” Our global social entrepreneurship training programmes should provide a reminder to do just that. Providing people who want to grow organisations like Lily’s with the skills to lead laterally and create networked change should be pieces of the social change skillset we recognise and teach.

If our goal is really social progress, we need to start fuelling all parts of the ecosystem, not just the people who want to be entrepreneurs. For those who do go on to start ventures, we need to make sure our training programmes support them to gain the lateral leadership skills needed to collaborate and work towards collective, not just individual, impact.

### Where do we go from here?

Most of the students I meet with are humble, thoughtful, and sincerely committed to creating positive impact through their careers, and I feel so grateful that I get to meet with students like that all over the world. But from time to time I have conversations that remind me that heropreneurship is alive and well.

For example, I recently had a conversation with a student who was interested in creating an organisation focused on training, but who didn’t yet know much about the problem he was hoping to solve. He also didn’t appear to have done any significant research into the lessons that could be learned from others already working on similar solutions. I offered to connect him to a student in a prior class who had a similar idea and with whom he might want to partner or learn. I also suggested some existing organisations that he might want to connect with to see if they might incorporate his ideas into their already established networks. His response was essentially “Nah, I don’t want to partner with any existing groups. If I build on someone else’s network I won’t get the credit for starting it, you know?” Unfortunately, I do know, because I have had countless conversations before with wanna-be founders countless times before.

When these (frustrating!) conversations happen, I wish I could stop time, take the person I am speaking to and

fly around the world looking at social impact efforts that are already being tried which might be learnt from or built upon.



When we land, the wanna-be entrepreneur I am speaking to will have realised that ALL innovations are built on the shoulders of dozens of other people’s learning. Then they would then turn to me and say:

*“You know what, Daniela, since I have very little experience in the area, and I really don’t know anything about my target beneficiaries, I think my best next step would be to go out and work with a related organisation for a few years. I’ll spend time understanding what is working and what is not, seek to really understand the problems, and see if the challenges are really what I think they are. If I am still really motivated by this challenge, I am sure I will find a way to add value. It might mean I work as an intrapreneur for a while, helping to grow and shape an organisation from the inside. Intrapreneurship might not be as sexy as entrepreneurship, but it is also really needed, and we’d be in trouble if everyone just wanted to be an entrepreneur! That said, if I do end up pursuing an entrepreneurial idea, it will be after I have really understood the problems and existing initiatives, and have built up a network through which I can contribute to collective solutions. I’m going to start by learning a lot more about this issue and the current efforts out there! Thanks so much for the chat!”*

**And then I high-five Superman.**





Unfortunately, these conversations don't always turn out that way, and my time-freezing and flying skills still need work... hence the impetus for this report. Humph.

Reconfiguring the current heropreneurship system will require some pivoting from all of us. Thankfully, none of it is very complex. It will require us to adjust our accolades and incentives, our trainings, our definitions of success, and our concepts of scaling. In other words, we're going to have to stop only counting the entrepreneurs in our midst and start spreading the social impact love out to all of the places it belongs, incentivising our alumni to shift how businesses, banks, non-profits, and governments work. "It means we even need 'social bureaucrats!'" noted Indonesian Government Minister, Heru Prasetyo in a conversation I had with him about this topic. Yes, we even need social bureaucrats. No matter what role you find yourself in, you can contribute to social change.

**We certainly are in trouble if all of the young people who are interested in social change think the hierarchy of impact roles have entrepreneurship at the top as then everyone will be trying to start something new and not fixing what is broken.**

To achieve the changes we want to see in the world at the scale of the problems we face, we are unquestionably going to have to work collectively. This might mean cross training from one organisation to the next, and developing new ways to look at impact measurement. It means that instead of focusing on finding the panacea of the winning organisation, we take a more strategic approach to social transformation; one that acknowledges that, if we don't achieve our global goals, we all fail. Collective impact requires holding each other accountable. And to start, it requires us to really know these economic, environmental, and social problems intimately to understand if and what needs to change.

Fortunately, there are some ideas out there already that we can build upon and learn from.

We'll explore each of these topics:

- *The Impact Sweet Spot & Apprenticing with a Problem* – And other key learning areas to maximise our social impact, including helping those who didn't live a problem to understand it
- *The Impact Gaps Canvas* – Making "building upon" cool
- *Rethinking Business Plan Competitions* – Creating new metrics of success that reward the understanding of a problem
- *Shifting Funding & The Collective Impact Question* – Asking new questions to get collaborative results and shifting how we fund social change.

### Valuing the lived experience

This phrase comes from Baljeet Sandhu, whose viewpoint has significantly shaped my own. She points out that, "In the social sector, we are failing to pay for the expertise we are gaining from those who have lived the problems we are trying to solve." In order to understand problems, organisational professionals, like consultants and entrepreneurs, set up focus groups, conduct interviews, and test prototypes with local people, relying on the expertise of those who have lived or experienced a problem to tell them what works and what doesn't.

"Consider all of the well-paid consultants and institutions out there, parachuting in to write reports for governments and development agencies," Baljeet adds. "In my work, we often receive calls from consultants, institutions, larger charities, NGOs, and increasingly social entrepreneurs, asking if for our young service users would be willing to spare our time to inform and/or share experiences. This has happened extensively recently with the response to the refugee crises in Europe. They want to know young people's experiences and needs within the care system and other public services or are asking for the best solutions to whatever legal and policy issue they are dealing with. And then what happens? They interpret what they hear, write up their report and get paid - sometimes pursuing or receiving further funding to take the work forward or simply parachuting right back out again. But what about the service user's insight and time or the idea they have shared? Or the 'experts' they needed to call who are doing the work that drives the very insights these consultants are charging for? It's time we started to truly value the lived experience

- *Valuing the Lived Experience* – Realising the "beneficiary" is the "expert"



for what it is – THE insights we need to effectively create change. User involvement is more than just a ‘story’ or a ‘case study’ – it’s a hidden and unpaid expertise we have long relied upon, and it’s time we started to pay...”

Bravo, Baljeet. I hope her message gets heard far and wide, as this perspective is one that is often missing from the social impact discourse, largely because people with the lived experience of the problems being discussed in the ivory towers of education are often absent from the conversation.

My personal goals collide with my own values when it comes to tackling global challenges, and I can see I am not alone in dealing with this dichotomy. I believe that development work, be that in the form of non-profits, social ventures, or government policy shifts, will be more successful if it is designed and led by the people whose lives it is meant to impact. In other words, I believe in local leadership for local change projects. On the other hand, I am from a wealthy suburb of New York City, and while I believe the best social change leaders have lived the problems they are trying to solve,

**I don't want to be doomed to having to work solely on middle-class suburbia problems for the rest of my life.**

So how do we balance this?

I am not the only one struggling with the desire to have a positive influence on problems I didn't live. Why could this be? I posit a few reasons that students are drawn to creating social ventures to tackle problems they didn't live:

- **Students view “emerging markets” as exactly what it says in the name:** they are “emerging” and therefore poised for growth. Amazon hasn't yet mastered its delivery systems in those areas, Uber hasn't reached the rural towns, and the opportunities are still noticeable enough to compel action. Juxtapose that with the term “developed countries”: these countries have done their growing and have now already achieved the title “developed.” Where would YOU rather

work if you were starting your career: a place that is poised to grow or one that did that in the past?

- **The Dunning-Kruger effect.** This lovely little cognitive bias makes us think that the things we know nothing about are easy. I love Wikipedia's current definition describing it as the cognitive bias that makes “relatively unskilled persons suffer illusory superiority, mistakenly assessing their ability to be much higher than it really is.” Illusory superiority is certainly a problem driving heropreneurship. It has been proven that when someone knows nothing about a specific skill, they are more likely to rate themselves highly in that area than once they start to learn a bit about the topic, only then realising it was harder than they thought. Anyone who has worked in international development has probably come across this: something looked really easy, or seemed like a great plan on paper, but the reality of enacting that plan on the ground was a lot harder than we would have thought. We understand more about the problems in our own backyard and the complexity of the things that would need to change to solve those problems, and are therefore less likely to believe we have the answers for change. Plus, we all probably know people who are more informed than we are about a local issue, so we wouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that we would be the best person to identify the best solution to the problem. When it comes to issues abroad, those around us probably know as little as we do, so our ideas get more airtime. Plus, the problems seem easier to solve as we know significantly less about their complexity.
- **If we focus on problems we have lived or that are closer to home, we might have to admit our failures to address them.** Perhaps we will need to confront the ways that our own actions have been implicit in fuelling some of these problems. It is also often true that we are implicit in the problems we see abroad, and if we dug deeply into those problems we might see that if we shifted how we lived, how we voted, or how our countries gave “aid” we might be able to resolve many of these issues. That said, once again, we don't always see that complexity while sitting on the other side of the world. Working to solve problems at “home” makes our failures more visible and sets us up to be embarrassed if we do not achieve what we set out to do. By going abroad or working on someone else's problems, we can then always use that excuse, “Well, I knew nothing about it before! So at least I learned a lot!”





- **The media celebrates the WHO of social impact work but not the HOW.** The rise of heropreneurship is due in large part to how we speak about and celebrate social change, including how the media celebrates the heropreneur. Kjerstin Erickson, who is profiled in the life maps section, noted that, "When I started FORGE, so much of the media was focused around me and my story, overlooking the reality of the work we were doing and the rest of the team that were doing that work. By focusing on the 'social entrepreneur' and not the impact or collective efforts we miss out on the reality of how change happens. These might be great hero stories, but they don't portray the reality of the complex team sport that social change really is."
- **Some emerging market problems are very popular right now,** so there is a glut of money going into those areas. Even if you didn't live these problems, you might have more chance of getting funding to work on them than on problems at home. Plus, funders suffer from Dunning-Kruger effect too: they might give money to ideas that sound like great solutions to problems they don't really understand, whereas they can more easily poke holes in proposals related to issues with which they are more familiar. Another funder bias is that some of them are more likely to fund people they feel connected to: people who look like them, speak their language, and who pitch an idea in a way they are used to, thereby giving the people most like themselves an advantage, even when those people might not be the most suited for the role.
- **It's cheaper and easier** to set up an organisation in a country where the cost of living is very low and/or where corporate laws are more relaxed. It can be tempting to use the money you saved over a summer internship to test out your business idea in a foreign country when that same amount of money wouldn't even get you office space for a week at home. People want to maximise their influence. Their impression of the scale and needs of the problems in foreign countries combined with the Dunning-Kruger effect and cost of living differential make it seem more compelling to work on a problem where your perceived influence and potential impact is much higher.

Setting up an organisation to try to solve a problem abroad when you don't yet understand the problem yourself is certainly problematic. This doesn't mean going

abroad to work on these issues should be dismissed, but such trips should be approached, first and foremost, as an opportunity to listen and learn. We certainly need people to go abroad and see the world, as it will give them a better perspective on how their own lives are intertwined with endemic social and environmental issues around the world, and hopefully provide the motivation they need to shift their future actions. Someone from North America might go abroad thinking they are going to "teach" people in China about environmental protection only to find cities full of electronic waste material sent over from their own country, thereby realising that the environmental lessons and shifts also need to be prioritised in their home country. Some might go abroad and work with an organisation, and then gain an understanding of a problem which they can later use to drive their future social impact work, like Anushka Ratnayake did (as you'll see in her life map). Others will find that they do not need to go abroad to find an issue they want to learn about. Avani Patel, also featured in the upcoming life maps, only needed to travel to East Palo Alto, the town next to where she grew up, to find an issue she wanted to apprentice with and later work towards solving. Unfortunately, our current ways of celebrating and training future social change leaders seem to be incentivising action before learning, with many people wanting to take problems into their own hands when they haven't yet understood them.

I certainly understand the drive to take problems into my own hands. I started an educational non-profit organisation and an educational travel company in Cambodia. Like so many people who work in international development, my six years living in Cambodia were a rollercoaster ride of learning and emotion. I thought I was coming to Cambodia to help, realised I might have been actually causing harm or, at minimum, was certainly often wasting time and money, and oscillated between thinking our work was fantastic and abhorrent on a regular basis. My friend and co-author on a book we are calling *Learning Service*, Claire Bennett, calls that undulating development worker struggle "Development Syndrome" - I certainly had it, and still do. What gave me the right to move to Cambodia and start an education organisation in a country where I couldn't speak the language, and certainly didn't know anything about the education system? Once I finally realised I probably didn't have the right to impose my service on others, my next struggle was to ask myself "Should I leave?" Having



realised I probably should not have been there doing that work in the first place, was it better to walk away, or was I going to cause more harm by not transitioning our work? This led to a constant stream of realisations, regrets, and reality mixed with soul-searching and self-doubt: development disaster soup.

My current self would have pointed out to my old self that the first steps should have been to better understand the problem, examine the solutions already being tried, go apprentice with one of the organisations already trying to address educational change, and *then* see if there was a Daniela-shaped gap in the landscape of the solution that I should try to fill. I would also have told myself that local leadership is what drives successful change, and that I should take a back seat to a Cambodian person driving change in their education system.

But my old self would probably have crossed her arms and huffed, thinking “So... you’re saying I can only take leadership roles on problems I lived? No thank you! I want to work on the things that matter more!” And, I get that (both the old and the new me gets that). I’m stuck in a development puzzle – do I work on problems I have lived, some of which I am less passionate about, or do I work on problems I didn’t live, and be doomed to colonialist aid work, fuelled by a false belief that we have the right to bestow our benevolence on others, whose needs we don’t really understand?

There has to be a middle ground. How do we harness the energy and interest of people like ‘Old Me’, who are striving to do good in the world yet haven’t lived the problems they want to try to solve? If people who have lived the problems are the best leaders, does Old Me still have to live the problem to add value? As Gabriel Brodbar, Executive Director of the New York University Reynolds Program in Social Entrepreneurship, noted in our interview, “You don’t have to walk through fire to help someone who has. There is certainly a credibility gap if someone tries to lead on a problem they don’t understand, but if they are not taking a leading role, they might still be able to fill a skills gap.” Someone who hasn’t apprenticed with a problem can add value to an organisation under a leader who does know the problem well enough to set the strategy. In other words, the accountant at the Centre for the Homeless doesn’t need to be an expert on homelessness. On the other hand,

taking that job as the accountant might give that person the opportunity to apprentice with the homelessness problem if they commit to learning outside the limits of their role.

But what about people who want to lead? Those who feel drawn to running organisations or taking on strategy related roles, but who don’t have the lived experience of the problem they care about? What might apprenticing with the problem look like? Can such a concept help ‘Old Me’ learn how she might add value to in a complex problem and solution ecosystem she doesn’t yet understand? I think so...

It’s (hopefully) clear that having people work on problems they don’t understand is a recipe for disaster – without giving people the tools to understand problems they didn’t live, we’ll end up with ineffective solutions. On the other hand, like me and my fear of needing to focus on privileged white-girl problems for the rest of my life, we equally cannot tell people that they can’t work on the problems they care about if they didn’t suffer from them themselves.

While the first steps in solving any problem should involve giving the baton to those with the lived experience, we also need to create the tools and incentives for the rest of us who want to learn about, contribute to, and support their efforts. It’s got to be about partnerships: between different organisations as well as between people who have lived a problem and those who want to apprentice with that problem long enough to understand how to add value. The work of Baljeet and others provides ideas on how to bring more people who have the lived experience of specific problems into leadership roles in social change, so I won’t focus on that area of concern. Instead, as I am someone who wants to spend some of my energy working to solve problems I didn’t live, and since I work with many students who feel the same way, I’ve focused the bulk of this report on how to educate and support people to learn about problems outside of their lived experience and to find ways to valuably contribute to solutions. This is where we go next.





## The Impact Sweet Spot & Apprenticing with a Problem

### Apprenticing with a Problem

A first-hand experience, enabling those who did not live a problem to learn about it and develop a deep understanding of its complexity

A long-term direct learning opportunity which gives someone an intimate understanding of a social or environmental issue

The only way to fill the skill/experience gap for those seeking a leadership role in solving a problem of which they don't have the lived experience

#### Examples:

Spending a number of years working for an organization that is directly addressing a social or environmental issue, and using that time to get to understand the problem and to know those who have experienced it directly

Substantial first-person research with a community marginalised by the problem or with one or more organisations working to address the problem

The number of organisations that offer social entrepreneurship training courses could probably line every street of Gotham City. Universities, accelerators, and social entrepreneurship training courses tend to offer the “skills” piece of the puzzle but fail to cover the other two areas: the tools and opportunities to apprentice with a problem, and the support to enhance self-reflection and self-knowledge.

In order to move us away from training stuck in a heropreneurship mind-set we need to support people interested in social change no matter where they are on the spectrum of skills and experience, and give them the tools they need to identify passions, understand themselves and their strengths, and build and contribute their skills.

Many of us are seeking to make a positive difference in the world through our careers and how we live our lives. The students I meet with are often looking for a career that will fulfil their desire to “make a difference”, but most don't have a clear idea of what that might look like. Some come into their degree programme knowing what compels them but hoping to gain the skills to add value, and others are still trying to wade through a sea of interests to identify something that might inspire them into long-term action.

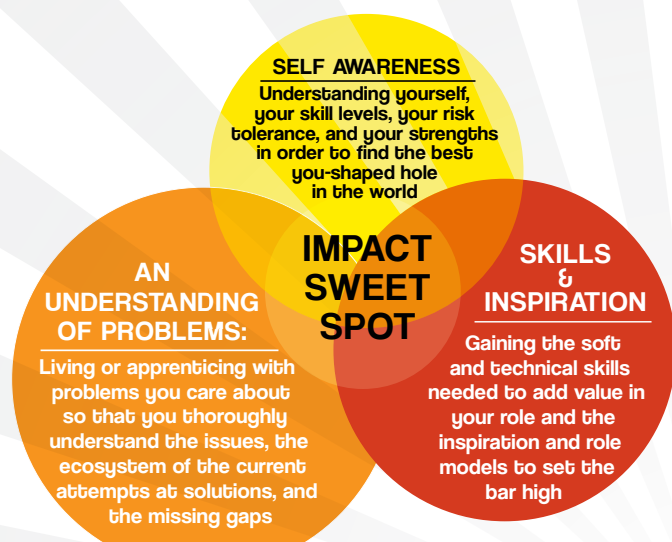
In my conversations with students about their next career moves, I often draw three circles to represent the three things I think we all need to know in order to best be able to best contribute to positive social change. Most students are strong in one or two areas, and by mapping this out, together we can usually identify a next step that will help them build up the third piece of the pie.

## SKILLS & INSPIRATION



Most social impact related offerings focus on skills & inspiration: bringing in entrepreneurs as role models to share their success stories and offering business-oriented skills training in how to replicate their efforts.

However, if we want to improve the impact of this generation's growing interest in social change, then we need to provide educational programming supporting the full suite of social change careers, not just courses suited for those who want to be entrepreneurs. This means focusing more programmes on helping people recognise their core skills and strengths, and identify how they might use or build those skills to fuel social progress through joining and growing existing organisations, from start-ups to governments, and social investment firms to main-stream banks.





If we are only providing social change training for founder-entrepreneurs and not employees number two to twenty thousand, then we won't be able to change the businesses and systems that are currently holding us back. This means bringing a social impact lens into all general business courses while also shifting the content and requirements of social impact focused courses. Training programmes for people interested in social change often require applicants to apply with a business idea in mind. These courses then jump straight into action-oriented skills like lean start-up methodologies, business planning workshops, and pitch training, all focused around the applicants' initial idea of a "solution". These courses often overlook the need to apprentice with a problem, as well as training on soft skills, tools and frameworks focused on system change and collaboration. They are also often marrying people to "their solution" rather than marrying them to the problem, a topic we'll explore as we examine business plan competitions.

The dominance of entrepreneurship-focused courses also means that many potential social-change leaders are left out: those who are less interested in being an entrepreneur but are more interested in getting a job with a start-up, or working in other roles in the social sector, or being an "intrapreneur" in a larger business. While some courses are targeting this demographic, more are needed. Inspiration and accolades commending people for taking less seemingly "heroic" roles in the sector also need to be set up. If the awards, honorary degrees, and speeches are all bestowed on the founders and heropreneurs, the real heroes who are making those businesses work on a day-to-day basis will be overlooked, and we'll continue to cheerlead students into entrepreneurship who might be better off in roles focused on scale-up rather than start-up.

Sometimes there are skills you have or can learn that can significantly add value to social change, but which might not be the most obvious place to focus. Andrew Hunt, co-founder of Aduna, who is featured in an upcoming life map, said, "I learned branding and marketing skills in my first post-university job in advertising. At the time, I was working to sell products I didn't believe in and had no idea that I would later be able to channel those skills into helping promote some great enterprises in Africa, and then to drive our impact with Aduna." Many others I have spoken with recognise that the skill sets they built with their earlier jobs are what later allowed them to have increased influence in their new roles. "My work at

McKinsey shaped my ability to later add value at African Health Partners," noted Andrea Warriner, Developing Talent Programme Manager at the Skoll Centre. "The tools and skills I learned in that first job, which built my critical thinking and strategy skills, allowed me to contribute in much more substantial ways in my future social impact roles than if I had gone straight out of my undergraduate programme into those positions."

### How can I grow in this area?

If you are looking to align your career with positive social change, you may have already worked on understanding problems and understanding yourself. If you haven't, you might want to start with those other two first. Once you come across a problem you really care about and have an understanding of your strengths, you will have more clarity about the skills you will need to develop to add value. Keep in mind that skill-building doesn't require taking a course: you can learn as much if not more through a job or internship. Take a supporting role and learn! Or, like Andrew and Andrea noted when reflecting on their career paths, don't overlook the opportunities to learn valuable skills in more traditional roles. It's important to consider the usefulness of training and on-the-job learning opportunities if you are looking to build a valuable skill set through which to contribute to the world. As long as the job you are taking does not conflict with your values and you feel that you can both positively contribute and learn, it might be worth taking a few years in a more traditional organisation to then be able to transition those skills in the future. Plus, given the right opportunities to be an *intrapreneur*, you might even be able to shift the business towards higher impact through taking a more traditional business role.

"My first job in a VC firm gave me such an important and valuable understanding of finance," noted Kresse Wesling, founder of Elvis & Kresse. "My subsequent entrepreneurial efforts have benefited from the skills I learned in that first job. Plus, I was able to influence the VC firm to invest in a number of green technologies, so my overall social impact in my first few years out of undergrad might have been higher in that VC firm than if I had gone to work in an environmental non-profit organisation." You can find opportunities for impact in many of the less obvious places, and if you align your skill-building with those opportunities, everyone wins!





## Where are the educational gaps?

This piece of the “impact sweet spot” triumvirate is where the most educational opportunities are focused. There are new courses on offer every day intended to help people improve their social business related skills, but they are often very narrowly focused. Educational institutions need to advertise and open these courses up to a wider audience, not just hopeful entrepreneurs, and cover a broader range of skills, especially those relating to collaboration, system thinking, and collective impact. The biggest leap we could make in providing more comprehensive social change education is in building training programmes that combine a focus on all three circles, not just business start-up skills. Additionally, as academic institutions, we can do a better job of encouraging those who want to start a business but aren't yet ready, to first focus on gaining skills and experience that might help shed light on their best paths to impact. We can do that by providing opportunities for learning internships and social impact career placements, and encouraging people to ensure they have a solid skill base from which to add value in the social sector.

In addition, we need to increase education on systems thinking skills. The types of entrepreneurs we need are those who take a birds eye view of the ecosystem of a problem and work to help a diverse range of actors coordinate action towards positive change. The skills that help someone coordinate from the sidelines are broader than just those that help people grow their own businesses. Leadership without power, the kind that galvanises collective action, is what is needed to create system-wide change, and most of our training programmes are currently focused only on helping people build and grow a single business.

Additionally, we need to train-up the non-founders, the ones who will come into an organisation and help it grow, collaborate, and thrive well beyond the start-up phase. “It is exciting to see that in the UK, the number of people taking the plunge and starting up new ventures has continued to grow with 2014 and 2015 being record years for start-ups,” noted Alex Mitchell, Founder of Causarma. “There seems to be a real cultural shift in the UK with people wanting to start their own ventures. However, I strongly feel the challenge for the UK is in the scale-up phase, which is shown by the fact that Britain

recently dropped from fourth in the world to ninth on the Global Entrepreneurship Index. Ninth is still good, but the report said the UK has “aspirational deficits”, and poor risk capital frameworks. In other terms, it seems that businesses aren't reaching their potential.” When I asked him if he thought there was a correlation between the increased support for the start-up phase of businesses with the results we are seeing in the scale-up phase, he added, “This increase in the start-up phase is indeed probably due in part to the increased accolades, funding, and support that the UK government, universities, and a range of organisations have provided for the start-up phase of businesses. It means we are funnelling top talent into the early stages of business development, but there is clearly a dearth of talent moving in to focus on helping successful start-ups scale.”

As Alex pointed out, the skills, awards, and educational pathways to bring in more talent at the growth stages of businesses will be needed if we want to shift from a start-up mentality to long-term impact mentality, and ensure businesses not only start, but go on to succeed and become the wealth, job, impact, and skill creators of tomorrow.

## SELF-AWARENESS

The celebration of the social entrepreneur has drawn many students to the idea of “being” a social entrepreneur, oftentimes overlooking the self-reflection necessary to decide what next career step might be the best personal fit. Students I meet often state wanting to be social entrepreneurs and note that they are still seeking out what they are passionate about, yet few express a desire to improve their self-understanding in order to identify roles for which they would be best suited. The latter is where I think we can use more work.

You need both, the passions and the self-understanding, to really find a you-shaped hole in the world to fill. Finding a cause that will incite you to commit yourself completely to addressing it requires you to go into the world and bump into problems, which unfortunately lurk around every corner. As you expand your horizons and learn, you will eventually get angry, get interested, and get involved in something you care about. Getting intensely committed to an issue can start with some research, but it usually takes more than reading – it



takes going out into the world, being moved by a need, and finding an opportunity to be of value. In fact, you might find that your “passion” is not one specific problem (like urban water scarcity) but instead is the application of a specific skillset to a wide range of problems (like using your talents in outcome and impact measurements to help organisations define and understand how well they are moving toward their goals). As such, identifying your “passions” as well as a useful place to put your energy not only requires looking outside, but looking in.

While trends point to the fact that the idea of packing up and moving to a foreign emerging market to “help” is becoming less scary for many graduates, who are making that choice in droves, the idea of being vulnerable and looking at their own strengths, weaknesses, competencies, and emotional and cultural intelligence is still terrifying for many. In some ways, it seems less intimidating to try to try to understand or improve the world we don’t know, while understanding and improving ourselves is a much more daunting task: we realise it’s hard. What if we fail? What might we find? And what if we don’t want to change? Wouldn’t it be better to fly to some other country and try to fix someone else’s life? At least we could leave if it didn’t work, whereas if we start to work on ourselves or the problems closest to us that we know best, we might be stuck dealing with the fall-out of our failed attempts. On the other hand,

**what gives us the right to try to “fix” other people’s lives when we haven’t even reflected on our own?**

### How can I grow in this area?

If you take the time to understand yourself (your risk preferences, your leadership style, the position you like to take on a team, what types of decisions you find difficult), your skills (where your natural strengths and preferences lay), and your passions (the things you’d want to work on or learn about even in your spare time outside of work), you will be more likely to find a you-size hole in the world. Ask for feedback: sometimes it’s hard to be your own mirror. Seek out opportunities to gain 360 feedback, to take a leadership course, or to build a cohort of honest and self-reflecting peers who are committed to giving you what Kim Scott calls “radical candor” (go watch the TED talk if you haven’t already!). The first step in getting to know yourself and your strengths better is to want those things... then you need to go out and ask for help. (If all of that seems like it

might make you feel too vulnerable, then put this report down and start by reading Brené Brown’s book *The Gifts of Imperfection*.)

### Where are the educational gaps?

Unfortunately, there are not yet enough programmes designed to help change-makers self-reflect and to expose them to options other than to the herd-following path of wanting to start a new venture. To find their next step in the world, people sometimes need to look inside and understand what their gut is telling them. Once that connection to self, and a real humble grounding in their own reality, is established, it’s easier to explore the opportunities and find a fit. By providing the opportunity for students to self-reflect and gather feedback, they will have a better chance of finding a way to use their unique skills and perspective to contribute to positive social change. Through my work at the Skoll Centre, I have been able to design a leadership development programme for students interested in social impact careers. While I think the opportunities we are offering them are of high importance, we can still do more work to help students understand the value of “knowing thyself”, as the students who might benefit from this work the most rarely apply. It’s our job as educators to make it clear that it’s not just understanding finance or impact measurement skills that are needed to support a social impact career – personal development and leadership skills are equally non-negotiable in high-impact work.







## AN UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMS

Students seem so concerned with finding solutions, but as Oxford academic, Fred Hersch, pointed out in our interview, “It’s really about problem finding not solution finding. Once you understand the problem you can understand the opportunity. Actually understanding what the problem is is the generative nugget, and that can create lots of different solutions. Insight about the problem is where true innovation comes from.”

We have so many tools and frameworks to help social change hopefuls gain the skills to take action, but we are lacking in the training and tools to help them really understand global problems. To adjust that gap, I believe the first people who need to change are the educators themselves: they need to celebrate, incentivise, and require the learning as part of their courses as much as they do the solving. This means creating assignments, offering tools, and bringing in role models that align with really understanding or apprenticing with a problem before trying to solve it.

Understanding the ecosystem of an entrenched social or environmental problem requires:

- **Learning about the problem itself:** Who or what is affected? What is holding the current broken system in place and who stands to benefit from or lose out if the problem is solved? What are the related and interconnected issues that are causing or impacted by this problem? What are the historical and future trends of the problem?
- **Learning about current and prior solution efforts:** What has already been tried? What has worked and what hasn’t? How are these solution efforts connected?
- **Identifying the gaps and lessons learned:** Where are the gaps in the landscape of the solutions? What is missing? What parts of each model are working, and which are not? What would be needed to create a better collective outcome from all of these solution efforts? What lessons can be learned and built upon?

The successful people that have been able to achieve high-quality results that I have spoken with have focused on really understanding the ecosystem of the problem and

the solution landscape before designing their positive intervention. Avani Patel apprenticed with the problem of educational opportunities in East Palo Alto by working as a teacher, administrator, and now a philanthropist in her efforts to improve the problems she has learned about. “I could have tried to start a social enterprise to address the needs I was motivated to support, but once I really understood the situation, I could see that there were some great efforts happening where I could add value and probably have a bigger impact than striking out on my own.”

Xavier Helgeson, founder of Off Grid Electric who is also featured in the life maps, acknowledged that learning first was a key to his business’s success: “We spent the first months, before we even decided on a business model, gaining an understanding of the business frameworks being applied by all of the other solar companies: what they were doing, what products they were using, what was working, and what was not. We then came up with an idea that might have solved some of gaps we had found, but we hadn’t fully understood the core of the missed opportunity. It wasn’t until we spent a lot more time in Tanzania speaking with potential customers that we understood how we needed to align our business with people’s expressed need in order to maximise our impact. It happens, in the case of our business model, aligning our business to maximise impact has also meant maximising our income, so our extra efforts to really understand the problem and other solution efforts means we now have a growing business and impact model.”

### How can I grow in this area?

To learn about a problem at first, you might want to start with some desk research and learning from wherever you find yourself. You might consider using the Impact Gaps Canvas introduced later in this report. Eventually though, you will likely want an experiential learning opportunity to help you build your expertise and understanding and really apprentice with the problem first hand. That might look like taking a job or internship in the target area of your interest or working with an organisation serving a similar demographic or issue. It might be doing a research project and gaining an understanding of a range of organisations across a sector. “It was my Fulbright research about Fair Trade that really sparked my interest in the garment industry,” noted Rachel Faller, founder of Tonlé, who is featured in a life map in this report. “My time researching, learning the Cambodian language, and meeting with dozens of organisations



gave me insight into what was working and what wasn't in terms of using fashion and product design to improve livelihoods. I originally thought starting a business would be easy, but I'm so glad I started my time in Cambodia as a research project instead of jumping straight into building a company. In fact, I might have benefited from even further 'apprenticing' as that might have prevented me from some of my initial business mistakes."

Following from Rachel's example, before starting a business, you too might want to take a job in the sector, or do research to learn who is doing things well and how they are doing it. Jessamyn Shams-Lau of the Peery Foundation's advice is, "Get a job in a broken school system or within another complex system you care about. Get hands-on, deep research into all of the things that can and do go wrong. Understand the landscape, who has the power, who has the money; what is working and what isn't. You will then see what no one has tried and where there are glaring gaps." She also added, "Many Ashoka award winners are people who lived the problem they sought to solve, spending their whole lives apprenticing with the problem. On the other hand, many of the new wave of social entrepreneurs haven't lived the problems they want to tackle. They are often well-educated, privileged students, who want their careers to support themselves and their families while also having a positive impact on the world. That's important and powerful energy brought to the sector, but there needs to be a substitute for the lived experience, and a clear career progression that demonstrates depth of experience and understanding. That might mean starting out working with someone who is already a proven social entrepreneur much further down their apprenticeship path than you are. Train yourself by learning what the true complexity and context of the problem is so that you can bring as much value as possible."

By apprenticing with a problem, you might find that the best you-shaped hole in the world isn't starting something new, but instead it might be working with and furthering the efforts already being made. And if you do later decide that starting something is the best way forward, you will have gained a much stronger understanding of the problem from which to build your intervention, and better networks for support and collaboration.

## Where are the educational gaps?

In my opinion, many social entrepreneurship education efforts have left two major gaps. These gaps are causing students to overlook the apprenticeship with a problem component of social change.

**With so much focus on social entrepreneurship as "the" path to social change, our accolades and training offerings are making it seem like there is a hierarchy of social action with entrepreneurship at the top, and that is certainly not the case.**

I have watched many talented individuals move straight out of university programmes into entrepreneurial roles, struggle for a year or two as they tried to "prove" they could do it, and eventually close their business down to take a job where they are able to contribute further. Of course most people learn a tremendous amount by starting a business, no matter if it fails or if it succeeds, but in a number of these cases I think they might have been more successful in their ventures had they taken jobs in their target sectors first, learnt more about the issues they cared about, and then built their future businesses on better developed insights.

David Damberger, a Skoll Scholar who graduated from Oxford's Saïd Business School, shared these thoughts in our discussion, "I thought I wanted to graduate from the MBA programme and jump straight into being a founder of a new organisation. I pictured myself in the room making the big decisions, so at first it was a shot in the ego to take a supporting role. In hindsight, taking a job with M-KOPA was the best choice for me because I didn't have a solid idea worth pursuing on my own when I graduated, plus I'm learning so much more in the role I'm in now as M-KOPA is such a fast-growing business. I'm likely having more impact and growing more from this role than I would have if I had struck out on my own after graduation."

Studies in international development or masters degree programmes in specific topics, like a Masters in Water Science, Policy, & Management, often begin with a thorough look at the problem, while courses on social business often start with asking students to come up



with solutions. If we don't want our students to come into their studies with an idea for a solution and then retrofit their understanding of the problem around their preconceived notions of how it should be solved, we need to change how we teach and reconsider the tools we use to teach. I agree with a phrase Pamela Hartigan often uses: "Social entrepreneurship is an 'approach' rather than a subject in which someone should get a degree."

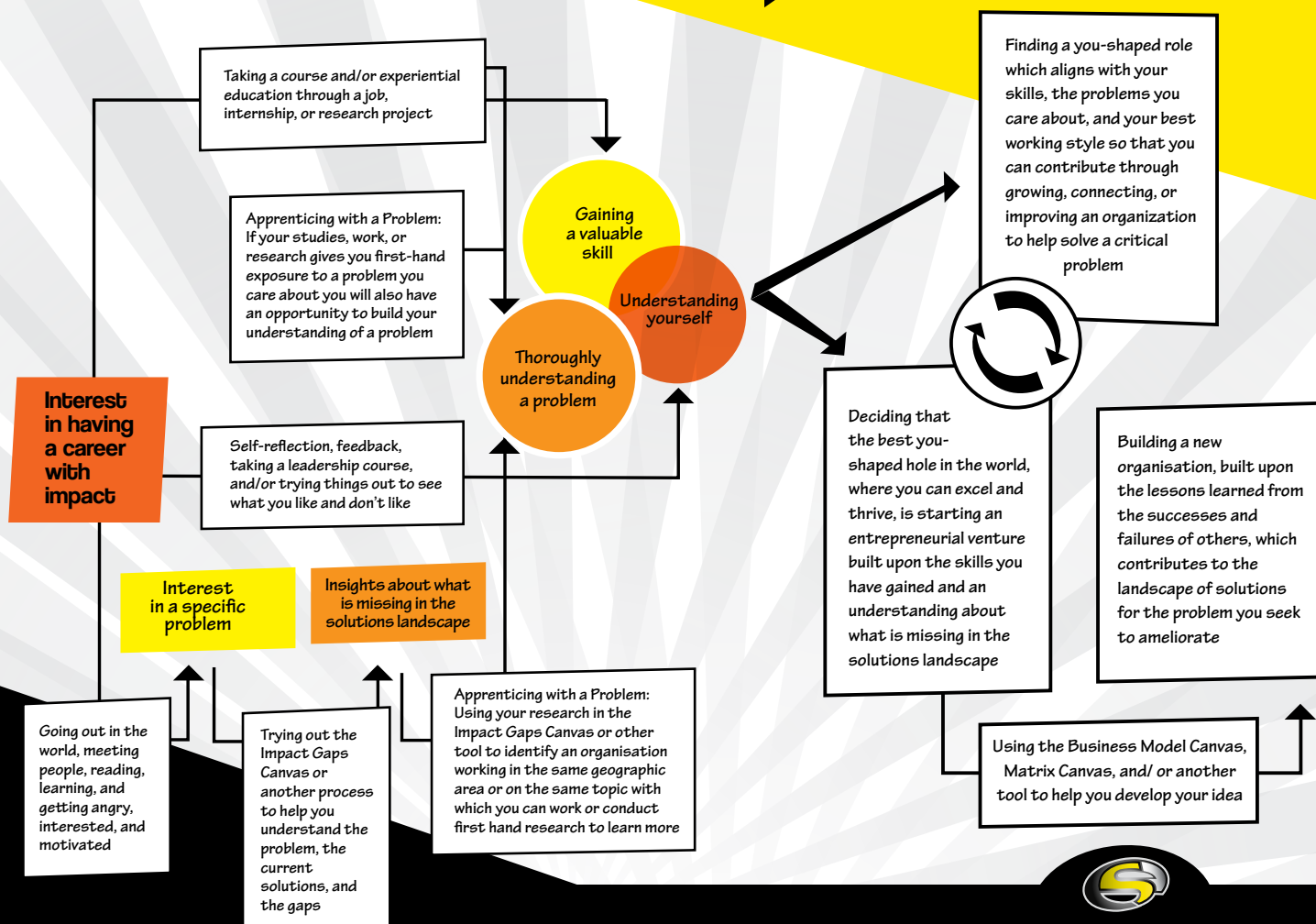
## THE IMPACT SWEET SPOT

Finding the best you-shaped hole in the world from which you can have the most impact while still honouring who you are and your own preferred ways of working requires both internal and external work. In my work with an organisation I helped found called Learning Service, we

write a lot about the balance between personal and global development. Too often, people think improving the world requires going out and "fixing" other people's problems and lives. The reality is, in order for us to have the most positive impact on the world, we need to improve ourselves just as much as we need to align our actions to improving the world. That is why working to understand yourself (what you are good at, what you love, how your skills best contribute to a team, etc.) is just as important as your work in understanding the problems facing our world. By balancing those things with the building of your skills, experience, and knowledge through which to add value towards collectively addressing a problem you care about, you'll be able to find the best next step in your impact-focused career.

Here is a look at a possible impact careers flow chart:

## Possible Impact Careers Flow Chart







As we each go through our chosen paths in life, gaining new skills, ways of being and depths of self-understanding, and coming up against new problems that make us angry and interested, we'll adjust our career decisions accordingly. If we remember that there is no hierarchy of impact careers and that being a social entrepreneur is not a "better" career step than working inside a big business or government to shift its impact, we'll each be able to find roles which have positive influence in the world and uniquely fit our lives and needs. This means being open to the opportunities that come our way and remembering that we will have a portfolio of roles in our lives, so we can be patient as we build the skills and experience needed to maximize our positive impact potential.

Anushka Ratnayake, whose life map is featured in this report, ended up founding myAgro in Mali. myAgro uses a mobile platform to provide savings-based financing to help farmers invest in fertiliser, seeds and training in order to increase yields and income. Anushka never intended to start an organisation: "My plan when I shifted from my post-undergrad job into my first social impact role was not to use that experience to start an organisation like myAgro. I just wanted to do work I was interested and believed in to make a difference in the fight against poverty. Through my work with Kiva and One Acre Fund, I was able to gain a perspective about what was working and what was missing in financing for small-holder farmers, and I gained a useful skill-set and network. It wasn't until I saw an opportunity to put that skill-set and experience to use that I considered taking the step of starting a social enterprise."

For those who REALLY want to start a social business: be patient. If all the pieces do not feel like they are in place, rather than forcing yourself to start a business now, go out into the world and take other roles, continue to learn, and apprentice with problems you care about. You might find that the jobs you take along the way are just as, if not more, valuable than the impact you had imagined you would have had as an entrepreneur. Or, at some point when you have gained a unique insight into a way to add value, or have come across a co-founder who fills in the gaps in your own knowledge and skills, you will then be better prepared to start a business.

The Clore Social Leadership Programme framework is built around a lovely mantra: "Know yourself. Be yourself. Look after yourself." Before doing the Clore Social Fellowship,

many of the other members of my Clore cohort and I had a very different view of social impact leadership. Some of us were modelling lives focused on trying to "fix" problems in the world, but often burning ourselves out along the way. The Clore programme reminded each of us that "knowing yourself" is the first step in finding the best way to add value. "Being yourself" means then using that knowledge of your strengths and preferred working styles and building a career path that is unique to the value you can add. And like putting your own oxygen mask on before trying to help others, "looking after yourself" is essential in building your social impact career.

I have always loved this quote, because I believe it really exemplifies the idea that there are a million ways to add value to the world, and you are only going to do so exceptionally well if you pursue the things that fit with your skills and interests:

**"Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."**

- Dr. Howard Thurman, quoted in a reference by Gil Bailie in *Violence Unveiled*, p. xv

If you are committed to having a positive impact through your career, then I believe that heeding that advice and pursuing the opportunities that "make you come alive" will indeed lead you towards making a positive impact while living a life you believe in and enjoy.

### **The Impact Gaps Canvas**

Many of the tools designed to help those who are considering an entrepreneurial path require the person to start with a business idea. If we start by giving people solution-focused tools, like the Business Model Canvas, before giving them tools to understand the problem, we can end up locking people into thinking about one solution to a problem – "their" solution – when that idea might not be the best fit. When someone comes to me with an initial plan for a business or organisation they want to start, I often find myself trying to help them take a step away from their initial idea to make sure they have first really explored the problem in depth and also understood the landscape of the other organisations who are trying to solve the same or similar problems.



## CHALLENGE MAPPING

The scope & effects of the problem, its causes, and how this problem has changed over time.

# IMPACT GAPS CANVAS

A tool to help you understand a social or environmental challenge, the current solutions, and the impact gaps

Challenge title &  
geographic focus: \_\_\_\_\_

## SOLUTIONS MAPPING

A map of the current solution efforts, their different models, and future opportunities & threats.

## IMPACT GAPS

Gaps in the landscape of the current solutions, and opportunities for increased positive impact.

# CHALLENGE MAPPING

## IMPACT GAPS CANVAS

A tool to help you understand a social or environmental challenge, the current solutions, and the impact gaps

Challenge title &  
geographic focus: \_\_\_\_\_

# SOLUTIONS MAPPING

### CHALLENGE LANDSCAPE

How would you describe the challenge? Who or what is effected? How is it related to other issues?

### OBSTACLES TO CHANGE

What are the causes of this challenge and what is keeping it from changing? Who or what benefits from the current status quo?

### HISTORY & FUTURE OF THE CHALLENGE

How has this problem or opportunity changed over time? What is the projected scope of the challenge in the future?

### CHALLENGE LEARNING LOG & OPPORTUNITIES

What resources have you used to understand the challenge? Who have you spoken with to verify your understanding of the challenge? Who else do you need to speak with to learn more?

### LANDSCAPE GAPS

Who or what is not being served in the gap between the problem and the current solutions? What is missing that would further the collective impact of these efforts?

### UNADDRESSED OBSTACLES

What is missing or not working in each of these models for change? What are the unintended negative consequences of these efforts? What obstacles to change are still being overlooked?

### IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

What are the specific key opportunities (market-based, regulation, research, education, partnership, etc) which can unlock future impact?

### KEY INSIGHTS

What are the key lessons you learned about that are important to for those who want to improve the landscape and impact of the solutions to your chosen challenge?

### SOLUTION LANDSCAPE

What solutions are already being tried  
Create a map of the current "solution efforts by businesses, governments, finance providers, aid organizations, academia media, local community groups, etc.

### MODELS FOR CHANGE

What different impact models are being tried? How are each of these models different and what parts of the problem do each of these models address?

### FUTURE IMPACT SCOPE & SCENARIOS

What new resources, opportunities, legislation, or changing demands are on the horizon which might impact the collective and individual solutions? What are possible future scenarios and how might these impact future efforts?

### SOLUTIONS LEARNING LOG & OPPORTUNITIES

What resources have you used to understand current solutions which have been or are being tried? Who have you spoken with to verify and add to your understanding of the solutions landscape? Who do you need to speak with to learn more?



I have had multiple students come to me, disappointed to find that “someone else is already doing our idea!” I remind them that Facebook was not the first social networking site, that problems like “lighting Africa” have room for many billion dollar companies, and that their “idea” for a solution is not worth as much as the structures and work that go into the day-to-day operations of making that idea into a reality. I also try to remind them that the best ideas are built upon learning from the successes and failures of others: why go out and try to create a similar company to one that already exists without first understanding what is working and not working?

People sometimes get confused between invention and innovation. Innovation does not have to be in the WHAT of an idea – it is often in the HOW of the execution. As you can explore in Xavier Helegesen’s career map, the biggest innovations at Off Grid Electric are not in the design of the solar system itself – many other companies are making solar systems. Their key innovations are in their distribution model, in how they charge for their services, and in how they set up their sales and repair systems. Andrew Hunt founded a company called Aduna, which is not the first nor the only company to market products made from baobab. Their innovation is in how they market their products and perhaps also in how they partner with the communities who benefit from the company’s growth.

Some people I meet with are so worried about someone stealing their idea or are so convinced that their idea has value that they want to start talking about negotiating equity before they have even started to implement their business. From my own experience and speaking with dozens of entrepreneurs who have put years of their lives into just getting their first products or services out the door, I continue to remind people in the early stages of their business development that the WHAT of their idea isn’t going to make them succeed, it’s the HOW. Getting the HOW right requires really understanding the problem they are trying to solve and the gaps in current solutions.

That doesn’t mean you can’t work on a business idea for fun, or even just to go through the academic process of conceptualising one without needing to align your actions to social change goals. I’ve certainly spent lots of time on silly but fun business ideas: a productivity app (the distraction of which made me less productive), an idea

for “internships” (virtual internships to build skills and credibility: we funded a cool website and video but never got the idea out the door), an educational hotel chain (why not?!) and so much more. Playing with ideas can be a lot of fun and is certainly a way to test out your interest in a specific area. But once you are actually getting your idea out into the world, taking people’s time, and using or asking for real money with which to do it, you then need to align your business to the social or environmental change you claim to be working towards. Too many people are seeking out free or discounted capital with claims of social impact business models when in reality they are more married to their idea than the problem they are trying to solve. Notice and heed the distinction.

In engaging with this discussion, Pamela Hartigan added a caveat: “We need to be careful about the focus on the word ‘impact’ as I am very sceptical about the overuse of this term, as it is virtually impossible to prove causation as a result of one organisation. An organization on its own can influence outcomes, but in most cases, proving impact is aspirational as social transformation comes from collective efforts. If we try to make each organisation prove their own impact, it fosters the illusion that we individually can create systems change or that an organisation can have impact in and of itself without drawing on a host of diverse sources of support and alliances with other stakeholders along the way. Perhaps we need to focus more on outcomes to start this conversation.”

As we’ve already explored, if you focused on your outcomes over your model and are married to solving a problem, rather than married to your idea for a solution, you might also find that your best fit is another path outside of entrepreneurial options. My suggestion to people who are interested in finding the best way they can contribute to a specific social or environmental problem or social change goal is to first understand the problem and the solutions landscape so to do that, I’ve made something called the Impact Gaps Canvas.

Like everything (and like each of us!), this is a work in progress. Feel free to try this out, build upon it, send me feedback, and tailor it to your needs. The goal for the canvas is very straightforward. The left side of the map is designed to help you ask yourself questions that will help you understand the problem you are researching. To begin to understand the problem, you might ask





yourself questions like: What or who is affected? What is the history of the problem, what is predicted for the future, and under what circumstances might those future scenarios occur? How is this problem intertwined with other problems and how are the causes and effects linked? What is holding the current status quo in place and who will stand to lose if the problem is solved? What are the sources of the information you are gathering? Are they reliable sources, and if not, where do you need to go to get more information?

In their new book *Getting Beyond Better: How Social Entrepreneurship Works*, Sally Osberg and Roger Martin talk about how successful social entrepreneurs really understand the status quo of the problems they are seeking to tackle, and how only by balancing that respect for and understanding of the incumbent situation with an abhorrence of the injustices created by the current status quo can they begin to tackle the problem. In our conversation about her work, Sally noted that “successful social entrepreneurship is built on an understanding of how an equilibrium creates and sustains problematic conditions for large segments of a society.”

While the left side of the canvas helps people understand the current status quo of the problem, the other side of the map focuses on what solution efforts are already happening. It is a reminder to users that they are not the first person in the world to care about this problem, and that hundreds of people may have already tried to solve that same problem. Rather than repeating their mistakes, we can begin to understand how to add value by focusing on the right side of the map: the solutions landscape. This side of the canvas provides prompts to help you understand what has already been tried and what the landscape of all of those efforts looks like. This includes asking questions like: What other organisations, businesses, government initiatives, or research projects are already being undertaken on this or related topics? What approaches did those groups take? How are all of these efforts linked up and where are they disjointed? What is working, and what isn't? What future efforts or new technologies are coming in that might impact this landscape of solutions? And finally, what is missing from my current understanding of the solutions, and how can I find more information?

Between the problem and the solutions lie the gaps. We can explore these gaps from a high level approach (What is missing from the whole landscape of solutions? What efforts would better link up these solutions and unlock untapped positive impact?), and from the gaps in individual models of change (What is missing from this organisation's model? What groups of people or areas are they failing to serve, and how could a different model be created that builds on these learnings but has a wider or deeper positive impact?). By drawing out these lessons, you can then uncover insights into what is missing and what lessons future efforts can be built upon.

When reviewing and testing out the Impact Gaps Canvas, Andy Middleton, Founding Director of the TYF Group, shared this feedback, “What I like most about this approach is that it makes it ok to not know the answer. In the way that people approach project funding for early stage enterprise, we have created a situation where everyone thinks they have to know the answer at all times. This type of approach lets people know it's OK to not know, and then encourages them to look around and learn before trying to invent an answer to how or why something should be done.”

There are a range of positive next steps which could come out of the Impact Gaps Canvas. Someone could use this line of questioning to better understand the current players in the solutions landscape of their chosen issue and then find an organisation they want to work with and learn through. In this way, that person will be able to really apprentice with the problem first hand and continue to gain a more thorough expertise in their chosen field.

Another outcome might be that someone who had previously come up with a business model they wanted to try uses this canvas to understand a problem and current solutions, and is able to draw out insights that help identify flaws in their model before they start. In this way, they can either decide to shelve their idea or refine it based on their learnings.

I have been lucky to be able to share this beta version of the map with a few hundred students, many of whom have started to give me feedback on the lessons they are learning from trying out this solutions mapping technique. Hopefully you or others will give it a try, too. Feel free to take this and build on it, and together we



can come up with more tools and tactics to help people understand the problems they care about to better align and connect their actions.

## Rethinking Business Plan Competitions

Social business plan competitions sound great in theory, but the way they are often executed can lead to problems. When people try to prove their business solution will work without first making sure they understand the problem, their ideas are less likely to be grounded in reality. And, with competitions' entrants focusing on an array of global issues, unless the judges themselves are well versed in the specific global challenges, the result is often that the most interesting sounding idea wins, not the one that is best aligned with a real possible solution.

As Kevin Starr, Managing Director of the Mulago Foundation noted in one of our interviews, "We - the social sector - don't have a market for impact. We need to shift the way we fund organisations so that increased impact draws increasing amounts of capital. Founders and funders need to be accountable for and hungry for impact. If we treat impact like we do profit, it will create the same efficiencies we see in capital markets."

Unfortunately, business plan competitions are not creating a successful market for positive impact. Forcing people to spend time defending their ideas and then giving them pitch training to make those ideas sound really compelling can lead to confirmation bias. I have seen students who weren't so sure about their idea before entering a competition then defend their idea so compellingly, they convince themselves that they are onto something. Once someone is married to their idea, and especially if they receive funding to then go out and try it, they are a lot less likely to then go back and test their fundamental assumptions about the problem upon which they have built their successful pitch.

Business plan competitions that provide funding to winners, like any funding relationship, can create misaligned incentives. I loved the depiction of this situation by Jane Leu of Smarter Good: "Imagine you are 22 years old and you win £10,000 in your school's

business plan competition with an idea to start an enterprise abroad. We're basically saying to you, 'Here is not enough money to start something you don't have the slightest idea how to start.' A few months in, you are stressed about this and not excited about this any more, your parents certainly aren't excited about this, why are we excited about this? I've spoken to enough students in this situation to know that these contests are often setting everyone up for disappointment."

Fortunately, there are things we can do to realign these incentives...

It was my conversation with Jane that really got me thinking about how we could redesign business plan competitions so that they are better aligned with learning and outcome goals. Our conversation inspired me to pitch an "un-business-plan competition" idea to my team, though we have now given it a less awkward name. The idea is to create new ways to fund and celebrate people who want to effect positive social change by incentivising them to learn about a problem and the landscape of solutions before trying to solve it.

The concept we are trying out is an "ecosystem mapping competition." People will win, not by pitching the best solution idea, but by showing that they have the best understanding of the problem, the landscape of current solutions, and the gaps. In *Cultivate Your Ecosystem*, a Stanford Social Innovation Review article by Paul N. Bloom & the late J. Gregory Dees, the authors note, "Because ecosystems are large and complex, constructing an ecosystem map runs the risk of becoming a tedious bureaucratic exercise. This would defeat the purpose of this process. Mapping ecosystems should be a dynamic process that results in strategic insights." Hopefully our design of this contest will heed this warning, keeping the process flexible while allowing students to gain valuable insights to fill in missing holes around their understanding of the problems they care about.

Though we are currently running this as a stand-alone competition, you can incorporate these ideas into your already existing business plan competitions or funding applications. If you run a social business plan competition of some sort, instead of just asking applicants to pitch their business, you can ask them to first pitch their





understanding of the ecosystem of the problem and the landscape of current solutions, and make it a condition of entry that people first need to prove they understand that ecosystem before pitching their social business idea.

If we only provide funding to start-up teams that have either lived the problem they are trying to solve or can prove they have apprenticed with the problem enough to really understand it, we'll be spending our money on solutions which are more likely to succeed. But what about the rest of the funding applicants to the gajillion start-up contests, business plan completion, accelerator-athons starting up around the world? Slam the door in their face and send them home with a message that they are not worthy to work on the issues they care about? Seems rather harsh...

Instead, you might consider offering Apprenticing with a Problem funding, a new stream of funding we started offering to our students as an outcome of this research. We have also built it into the Ecosystem Mapping Competition, as we wanted to align the prize money with the spirit of the competition. In addition to small prizes for the winners, we are allowing the ten finalist individuals and teams to apply for Apprenticing with a Problem funding, which can then be used to travel to gain first hand work or research experience about the problems they care about.

We realised that students are learning a lot of tools in their academic studies, and can do desk research on specific issues of interest, but eventually those who want to take action will still need the opportunity to go out into the world to really understand problems first-hand. We recognise that complex social and environmental issues are not going to be solved by simple solutions, and that oftentimes the ideas that make the most sense in a classroom make a lot less sense on the ground. Most funding given to students interested in social impact is tied to their business model, providing funds to go test out their venture idea, but we don't want to marry our students to their business model idea. If we feel that they have not yet understood enough about the problem or have not had a chance to see first hand what is happening in other organisations working to solve similar issues, we will provide more flexible funding which allows them to travel to learn before deciding if or how to

take action. As long as they make their learning public, which is a requirement of the funds we disburse, even if they decide not to take any further action, their learning journey will have been useful for others interested in a similar challenge. Plus, we'll prevent them from setting up false expectations by starting to launch a venture before they have understood a problem. In the end, we hope this will fuel more intrapreneurs and more bright students deciding to join existing ventures to help them grow and scale, adding more options than just being a founding entrepreneur to their goal list.

Apprenticing with a Problem funds can be used in a range of ways. We ask that they use the funds to support a first-hand learning experience over at least three months. They might apply for funds to do a research project with a few of the organisations they identified in their mapping, to fund the costs of an unpaid internship at a related organisation where they are trying to work their way in the door, or any number of other learning opportunities. In this way, they can learn about the issues they care about and hopefully find a way to contribute to a solution.

Providing opportunities to travel and work abroad in a learning capacity rather than a solving capacity is a shift from the traditional university model where students are sent out to work on consulting projects for social ventures. In our interview, a founder of a mission-focused organisation who wanted to remain anonymous noted, "I'd like to get rid of students consulting for entrepreneurs. Don't bring me your undergrads to consult on our strategy! Why aren't these schools paying us? The money is flowing in the wrong direction. You want me to train your MBAs on how to run a social enterprise, yet you want to describe it as a consulting assignment? It will certainly work better if we create apprenticeships." In discussing the reframing of business plan competitions to be about helping students learn about, rather than immediately propose solutions for problems, she noted, "I think it would really set these students up for success. I would love to hire someone who understands a system and a specific systemic problem, and who is also great at presenting it."

Right now, there is a plethora of funding opportunities that students can apply to if they want to try to "solve" a problem, but what we need is funding that first allows them to "understand" those problems. To make this shift





in how we promote the use of students' time, we need to recognise that it is not just taking action but also (or more importantly) learning that is worthy of funds and of praise. In my work at PEPY Tours and in our Learning Service writing we often focus on the interconnected loop between personal and global development. Most of the accolades, free vacation time, and funding goes to those who take action around global development, whether through an international volunteer trip or starting a social venture abroad. Traveling or working abroad to learn about a problem isn't regarded as sexy or as worthy of congratulations as going abroad to start up a venture, but we need to shift the false belief that jumping in to take action is morally superior to taking time to learn. It's a balance between learning and action, and neither is superior. In our upcoming book on Learning Service, we use this phrase to describe the dichotomy: "Action without learning is ignorance. Learning without action is selfishness." If someone does not have the skills and experience needed to go out and start a social venture the day they graduate, we need to help make it more socially acceptable and celebrated for them to choose a learning and support role rather than the "heroic" founder path.

If we provide funding for that learning or apprenticeship phase we can then shift the definition of "success" in terms of that funding use. Instead of defining success as the launch of the business plan they pitched in their class, success becomes intimately understanding the problem they care about and finding a way to add value, no matter what path they choose.

Inspired by this research, and building on our past experimentation with start-up funding, we decided to test out some of these ideas at the Skoll Centre. Here is a summary of some of the shifts we have made in our student programme to help fuel more apprenticeship with a problem:

- *Providing "Apprenticeship with a Problem" funding:* As described, these funds can be used to explore the ecosystem of a challenge, either as a research project, an internship or job placement, or another form of learning journey.
- *Launching the Oxford Global Challenge:* In this ecosystem mapping contest, students will not be judged on how innovative their solution is, but rather, on how well they understand the problem, the current solution

landscape, and the gaps in the current change efforts. This challenge is a natural follow-on from the Saïd Business School MBA Programmes' required GOTO course (Global Opportunities and Threats: Oxford) where students participate in tutorials designed to help them explore a pressing global opportunity or threat and more deeply understand a specific force shaping our future. The Oxford Global Challenge and the GOTO course both now use the framing behind the Impact Gap Canvas as a way to help students understand the ecosystem of their chosen problem.

- *Requiring a lived or apprenticed understanding of a problem if you want to apply for start-up funding:* Teams are no longer eligible to apply for start-up funding if they have not either lived the problem they are looking to tackle or can prove that they have apprenticed with the problem.
- *Requiring an understanding of the solutions landscape and the gaps if you want to apply for start-up funding:* All applicants must prove that they understand the landscape of current solutions and have built upon the lessons of others in the design of their business model.
- *Allowing a longer learning timeline:* In the past, our start-up funding was limited to graduating students, but we now accept applications from alumni. In this way, we are no longer forcing students to be ready to pitch a complete business model when they graduate and they can instead go out into the world, apprentice with the problems they care about, learn more, and later, when they have a more thorough understanding of the ecosystem of the problem as well as a wealth of tools to contribute, they can apply for funding if or when that is the right fit for them.
- *Shifting our success metrics:* We measure success not in the number of social businesses our students start, but instead in the number of students who are able to find ways to contribute to solutions to global challenges. We encourage students to map out the landscape of solutions and find a way to add value, which might include joining an existing venture, and we help connect them to opportunities whenever we can. We try to offer just as much support and accolades for those who work as intrapreneurs, work in government policy change, or join an existing start-up as those who start new ventures, as we believe that fixing incumbent systems is often just as important



as starting new ventures to address complex global challenges. To this end, we are looking to launch an Alumni Award to celebrate the full spectrum of social impact careers, not just the entrepreneurs who are often in the spotlight. To provide a wider breadth of impact career options to students, we launched a social impact careers conference, focusing on a broad range of career options.

As someone who learns by doing, working on this report and research has been most fulfilling in the times when I have been able to translate the insights from these interviews and my own experience into action, and I'm delighted that the opportunity to try out this new take on student learning offerings has come out of this work. If you are an educator who wants to take some of these ideas into your university as well, or tweak them to fit your needs, please feel free to reach out; I'd love to share our learning. All social change efforts need collective action, and tackling heropreneurship is no different: we can all work on this shift together, and hopefully rethinking business plan competitions and the way we fund students contributes to some part of that.

### Shifting Funding & The Collective Impact Question

It seems obvious, but the first step we can take in ensuring that more self-declared social-impact start-ups are built upon a real understanding of the problems they seek to tackle is to only fund the ones that are! Simple.

If we all change how we fund and award social impact efforts, we can help shift the attention away from heropreneurship and channel more of this good intention into advancing social impact efforts. A key shift that needs to happen is for more people to recognise the importance and value of building their ideas upon the successes, failures, and learnings of the similar efforts that have gone before them. Unfortunately, funders seem to ask questions that incentivise the opposite type of thinking. Questions like "Who are your competitors?" and "How is your business uniquely positioned to scale?" disregard the fact that social change will most likely happen from a landscape of solutions, not one social business out-shining the rest. With so many funding questions focused on how "innovative" the business model is, applicants are not incentivised to build their

ideas upon the work of others. We need to shift that. We need to make "building upon" cool, and stop pretending that positive social outcomes derive from innovating in a vacuum.

What if we shifted just one question? If EVERY business plan competition, social investment or philanthropic funding application, and accelerator programme asked just this one question, we might find our funding starts going to organisations with higher impact potential. Instead of asking questions about who you are competing with and how your business idea is better than theirs, what if we asked:

**What  $\pm 5$  organisations have you spoken with that are working in the same sector, within the same geography, or with the same demographic and how have you built upon the lessons you learned from their successes and failures?**

I believe that those types of questions are what we should be asking if we want to fuel more successful social change efforts. If I am going to give you free or subsidised capital to go out and improve the world, and you are claiming that you are committed to having a positive social impact, then I hope you are building your solution upon the learning of the many people who have tried to do the same thing before you. If not, I'll put my capital somewhere else. If we would all just ask this one question as a required part of the evaluation in all of our social impact funding and support programmes, we'd be able to shift the status quo of entrepreneurial activity towards an understanding that all impact -motivated initiatives need to stand on the shoulders of those who have learned before them.

In the course of this research, many of those I spoke with had ideas for how funders can help to shift the trend away from heropreneurship and towards collective impact, based on learning and an intimate understanding of the problem and the solution landscape. For example, in our conversation, Kevin Starr noted, "At Mulago, we have a very specific methodology for this. We ascertain the mission - exactly what they've set out to accomplish, what specific outcomes that implies, and what behaviour





change needs to happen to drive those outcomes. We have them map out those behaviours so we can map the dots all the way to impact. We ask them what they will do to assure that all those behaviours happen. Then we look at what they do so we can decide if we buy that or not. Here, the critical question 'Have they done their homework?' comes into play. We ask them if they are doing something brand new or based on what has gone before them. If they think they are brand new, we ask them if they are SURE this is really new. If someone hasn't done exactly what they're trying before, there is usually something analogous to what they are proposing that will provide some clues to whether what they are doing is likely to succeed or not."

If you are involved in selecting organisations with impact potential to support through funding or training, here are some other questions you might consider asking:

- *How will the world look different if you are successful?* Allowing those organisations to set their own North Star is necessary. How do THEY define success? Let them tell you, and then if you don't believe in that North Star, then you should choose not to fund that programme.
- *What is your theory of change?* This theory of how they plan to create change needs to align the North Star and the activities the organisation intends to execute. Sometimes they do not align. For example, if the North Star is "Creating world-class educational opportunities for all students in X area" there would be a misalignment if their main activity was only "constructing school buildings" as, in most places, the building is not what is missing in order to create "world-class education." If their theory of change is flawed, or not built on the research and learnings of others who have gone before them, then consider giving that feedback and not funding that project.
- *What is your theory of income?* Their theory of change needs to include both a "theory of impact", as in how they think their inputs and actions will line up to create a shift in whatever problem they are trying to ameliorate or whatever social/environmental goal they are trying to achieve. However, it also needs to include a "theory of income." This is the theory about

why people would pay for their services or products, and assumptions about associated costs. As Izzy Horrocks shares in her life map, her and her team's "theory of income" was based on flawed assumptions about the way farmers like to trade vegetables, so although their impact model might have worked, their income theories were flawed and they would have continued to lose money had they stuck with their plan.

- *Is there learning you need to do before solidifying your business model?* By funding learning first, before business plans and specific business key performance indicators are solidified, we can help entrepreneurs avoid some of their natural confirmation bias. If they know their funding is tied to executing a specific business plan that they "sold" to investors, then their goal will be to build and test their business model. Instead of tying funding to testing a business model, it can be tied to a learning deliverable that maps out the problem and the flaws in the current solutions, with the more open ended expectation that this could result in valuable learning with a wider impact, and/or a new business model based on insights gathered through this process.
- *What have you learned this week?* Izzy Horrocks now works with a social finance organisation based in London. She noted that one of her favourite due diligence questions is "What have you learned recently?" She added, "If people can't tell me that they are constantly learning, then there is something wrong." If we all demand learning cultures from those we work with and fund, we will be more likely to support businesses that are quickly able to adjust due to those learnings and continue to align themselves with creating more viable solutions to the problems they set out to solve.
- *How can we support you to succeed?* In the philanthropic sector, while some foundations describe their grantees as "partners", most grantees I spoke with don't feel like they are in a partnership. The most enlightened funders are the ones who realise that a standard package of funding alone might not be all that is needed to help their grantees achieve their mission. These enlightened funders do all they can





to reduce the negative impact they have on their grantees by taking excessive amounts of their time. Some, like the Peery Foundation, recognise that the balance of power is hugely skewed towards the foundations, and are working hard to redistribute that power by seeking feedback. As noted in Avani Patel's life map, the Peery Foundation sends a note to anyone their team has met with asking for anonymous feedback on the interaction. In this way, their grantees can constantly give feedback on their relationship with the Peery Foundation and the Peery Foundation team can adjust their actions to better meet the needs of their grantees. It's just one example of them striving to embody what they call "grantee-centric" philanthropy. Other organisations find ways to connect their grantees or investees so they can learn from each other. In my conversation with Ash Rogers who works at the Segal Family Foundation she noted that, in the year prior, they had a gathering of some of their 180 grantees where they realised that they had funded 15 different feminine hygiene solutions for Africa. "We hadn't realised that we had funded fifteen different sanitary pad products being made in different ways from different local materials, but once we noted that, we decided to help them set up monthly calls for the group." Aligning how we fund and support organisations with what they need so as to create greater impact means we need to avoid what Maya Winkelstein calls the "FEEL good vs DO good trap."

- *How can we help you share your learning?* Many organisations create monitoring and evaluation or M&E reports about their work simply for funders. This is a huge waste, both for that organisation and for the world. The organisation should be doing M&E work for their own learning, as the metrics and qualitative findings they gather should inform their own actions to further improve the impact of their model. In addition, when M&E reports only get sent to a funder and end up just sitting on a shelf, the world misses out on learning from those efforts. When I asked one of the funders I interviewed what happens to the many reports grantees send in, she noted that, "They get outsourced to someone who summarises them for us and then they get filed." When I asked if she ever goes back to look at a file, she said "I haven't gone back to look at one in the years since I've been working here." When I asked Jane Leu of Smarter Good, "If you were Superwoman for a day, and you could change the way

the funding world works, what would you do?" she said, "It would be required by law that foundations would have to do their own application process. They would have to sit there, for hours, and do the whole the application and all the follow up meetings, and then all the reports - the whole process. They currently have absolutely ZERO idea how much time they taking away from these organisations for sometimes a very small amount of money. Plus, many funders would struggle to answer some of the questions about their own organisations and their organisational plans that they expect nonprofits to answer!" What if funders instead helped organisations share their learnings so that other could build on them? Not their "stories" (the WHAT and WHO of the organisation, which always gets shared in fundraising efforts) but the HOW -what we tried, how we did it, and what did or didn't work. If that became common practice through funders allocating a piece of their grant money for the sharing of lessons learned, the M&E process would at least have the potential to have a wider impact!

- *Do we have the diversity we need to maximise the impact of our decisions?* This is a question you might want to ask of investees or grantees, especially if you feel that the ownership structure does not include any people who fit into the stated beneficiary group, or that the leadership team is mono-cultural and of a different culture or experience set than their target clients. However, the main people funders will want to ask this to is themselves. Look around your foundation or social investing team: does everyone look like you? Does everyone come from similar cultural and economic backgrounds? Is the diversity of your investment portfolio reflected in the diversity of your team? We would advise any start-up to make sure that their team represents a diversity of skills and experience including people with the lived experience of their target social issue, those who have apprenticed with a given problem, and those who bring additional necessary skillsets and perspectives, and we should do the same with funders. Make sure you have the diversity you need among your decision makers to ensure you maximise the impact of your funding!

I had so many insightful conversations with funders who shared enough interesting stories to fill a whole other report. I loved learning from Kevin Starr of the Mulago Foundation and Amy Herskovitz from Pershing Square



Foundation about why a number of foundations had teamed up to form “Big Bang”, an effort to join up their due diligence and learning efforts and to collectively bring in more funding for great projects, while reducing the reporting burden on their grantees/investees. I learned from Maya Winkelstein and Laurie Michaels about their commitment at Open Road Alliance to “funding the gaps”: providing funds mid-project when things go wrong and more support is needed. I learned from Clara Miller at Heron Foundation about their commitment to not only give their funds responsibly but invest their endowment responsibly as well (another common sense factor that is often overlooked!). She shared an idea with me that sums up how we should think about funding: “We do not use the word grant anymore. It’s an expense or an investment as we are either buying something or helping to build an organisation. Money is a tool not a bundle of love that is given from time to time.”

Let’s head Clara’s words and use our tools worthily and wisely.

## Summary

When I was explaining this paper to my mother-in-law, Inga Stewart, she said, “Isn’t this just common sense? Wouldn’t everyone want to understand a problem before trying to solve it and find the right role for themselves in that process?” Perhaps the Spanish phrase is true, “common sense is the least common of the senses.” As Andy Middleton noted in our discussion, “This is about closing the gap between common sense and common practice.” It is common sense that a foundation that cares about solving a social or environmental challenge would partner with the organisations it funds, in an effort to support them in achieving their collective goals. However, in practice, grantees feel like they are subservient to foundations and need to take excessive time away from their mission in order to fulfil their reporting requirements, only for the foundation to then stick that report on a shelf. It’s common sense that someone who was starting a social business and claiming that it exists to solve a global challenge would first do research to understand the problem and find out what other efforts have been tried in order to successfully build their own organisation; but my

observation of common practice is that many hopeful entrepreneurs are too focused on pitching their own idea to either do research or admit that others have tried similar efforts before. In the end, common sense tells us their businesses will be less successful if they don’t thoroughly understand the problem before pitching a solution and that their businesses might have been more successful if they learned from others first.

While most of the key findings from this research are indeed sound like common sense, there are a lot more factors weighing into each of our daily actions than just common sense. I asked most of the foundation leaders I spoke with if they asked any questions like this of their grantees:

**What ±5 organisations have you spoken with that are working in the same sector, within the same geography, or with the same demographic and how have you built upon the lessons you learned from their successes and failures?**

Each time, I got a similar reaction. Not one of them disagreed that it would be a good question to ask, and was far better than “Who are your competitors?” if we are trying to fuel collective impact. Some noted that they were going to start using it or something like it right away and others wondered why everyone wasn’t already asking those questions. I know it’s not the sexiest superhero trait, but perhaps if there was a Captain Common Sense leading the way in our social change efforts, we’d all stay more on track!

As a summary, I want to leave some final thoughts and reminders for each of the groups of people we have addressed in this report. Hopefully we can collectively shift away from a social sector obsessed with the entrepreneur to one obsessed with positive social outcomes and impact!



### **Funders who invest in social impact**

- Have a theory of change, and fund organisations that do as well, while working towards a what Kevin Starr called a “market for impact”
- Fund organisations committed to learning: ask them which organisations they have already learned from in building their proposed solution and how they continue to learn as they grow
- Measure your own impact and hold yourself accountable the same way you would the organisations you fund: consider asking, “How can we support you to succeed?” over the usual “Prove to us how you will succeed” and use that to make the support you provide better and more efficient
- Find ways to partner with your investees/grantees, which will require gathering their feedback and asking what partnership means to them
- Fund the gaps: Take a panoramic view of the problems you are seeking to change and fund the gaps that you identify in the landscape of the solution; or, provide funding that will help to close the learning or implementation gaps in each individual organisation
- Fund the sharing of knowledge: find and share the “how” stories not just the “what” and “who”
- Remember that, like growing a business, social change requires a whole range of capital to fuel organisational growth, so consider expanding the types of capital offered and adjusting the strings attached
- Collaborate with other funders with similar purposes, to reduce the reporting burden on those you are trying to help.

### **Corporations and large organisations looking to positively influence the world**

(this features less in the report and more in the life maps, but it’s still worth summarising some ideas here)

- Make it clear that you encourage your employees to be intrapreneurial: allowing them to use entrepreneurial skills to shape the positive impact of your business from the inside, and then make sure that you have designed your business systems to allow them to do that

- Collaborate with those who are trying to make a similar change in other companies and organisations
- Attract socially conscious employees by supporting their learning and asking for their ideas on how to create sustainable social change in the business
- Consider supporting “sabbatications”: academics are not the only ones who thrive on sabbaticals and Millennials will be attracted to companies that allow them to take mini-breaks which get them out into the world to apprentice with the problems they care about
- Don’t just measure the corporate social responsibility you do outside of your company, but also the internal social responsibility you need to reshape the inner workings of your business: report those make-overs, teach them, and share them
- Celebrate those all too often unsung heroes internal to your organisation who are the ones that make your business work.

### **People who are looking to have a high-impact career.**

- Heed the Clore mantra: “Know yourself. Be yourself. Look after yourself.”
- Consider the full spectrum of impact careers – most of which include joining an existing organisation to add value – as working with others will help you develop the skills and experience you need to add value
- If you know what area you are passionate about, consider using the questions laid out in the Impact Gaps Canvas to help you understand the problem, the landscape of the solutions and any gaps, as this might help lead to your next high-impact role
- Once you understand your strengths, skills, and experience, and have apprenticed with the problems you care about, you should then be able to identify the skills you need to add value
- Collaborate with or work for people who have the lived experience of the problems you care about: value that lived experience as an expertise and honour the learning opportunities you receive by working with those experts
- If you decide to start a new venture, marry yourself to





the problem rather than your solution, and continue to refine or modify your approach until you find the best way to address your goal

- Counter the Dunning-Kruger effect: if solving a problem “sounds easy” ask yourself, “What do I really know about this problem? How did I get that information? How can I learn more? Am I the right person to take a leadership role in solving this problem, or would I be better off taking a back seat and contributing my skills while I learn?”
- Build upon the ideas of others rather than “innovating” in a vacuum
- Remember that scaling a business and solving a problem are not the same thing: if you are committed to solving a complex problem it will usually involve a spectrum of organisations, so build your lateral leadership skills and work towards collective impact
- Remember wanting to “be” a social entrepreneur is like wanting to be a toothbrush. If we want to work towards “clean teeth,” the path to impact isn’t “founding” something but “fixing” something. If you work on filling an unmet need, or building something important and beautiful, you’ll find work that fuels you.
- Plan for a life-time of impact, not just one act, and remember that starting a business doesn’t need to be your first stop out of the gate: go out and apprentice with a problem until you really, truly understand it
- If you don’t know what you are passionate about yet – that is ok! Go out into the world, start working for smart people and you will bump into problems along the way. Eventually you’ll build a valuable skill from which to contribute and/or you’ll find an issue you are angry and interested enough about that you want to contribute to the solutions landscape – so go out and start learning!



To keep things colourful, and to take us full circle back to the tales of individual “heroes”, this report includes illustrated personal journeys highlighting people’s careers and the lessons they have learned on their paths to impact. These stories are not meant to further the obsession with “heropreneurs” but instead to highlight some of the lessons that are often overlooked in social impact narratives. They focus on people who have apprenticed with the problem (or wished they did), suffered under the heropreneurship spotlight, proven that they are married to the problem, built upon the value of the lived experience, or who exemplify any number of other illustrative terms used in this report to help us reconsider our personal and collective paths towards positive social change.



# From social entrepreneurship to social impact

## 9 PERSONAL JOURNEYS:

### **KRESSE WESLING:**

Intrapreneurship Fuelling Entrepreneurship

### **AVANI PATEL:**

Apprenticing with a problem  
fuelling effective philanthropy

### **XAVIER HELGESEN:**

From living a problem to apprenticing with one

### **ANUSHKA RATNAVAKE:**

Apprenticing with a problem fuelling  
effective entrepreneurship

### **RACHEL FALLER:**

Research and apprenticeship fuelling entrepreneurship

### **KJERSTIN ERICKSON:**

Struggles with the "heropreneur" spotlight

### **LILY LAPENNA-HUDA:**

Lessons abroad fuelling entrepreneurship at home

### **ANDREW HUNT:**

Building Useful Skills + Apprenticing with  
a Problem = Entrepreneurial Success

### **ISABELLA HORROCKS:**

Lessons learned from a failed social enterprise





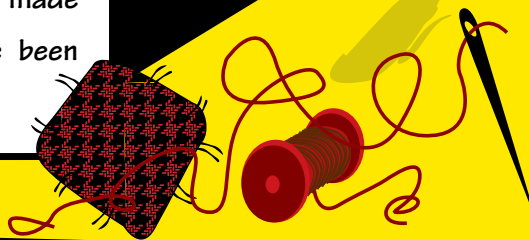
# Kresse Wesling

## Intrapreneurship Fuelling Entrepreneurship

*Kresse's journey is a great example of someone who has married herself to a problem, in her case, managing waste. She has pivoted in her approach, helped start a number of companies along the way, and saved many tons of waste from ending up in landfills or worse. Her impact career started as an intrapreneur in a VC firm. Take a look...*

### Circa 1983: Child dump explorer

As a young child, Kresse loved visiting garbage dumps and was curious as to why so many humans threw out "waste" that could be transformed into useful things. Her prize possession, to this day, is a quilt made by her great-grandmother, made from hundreds of scraps of cloth that would have been salvaged from worn out clothing.



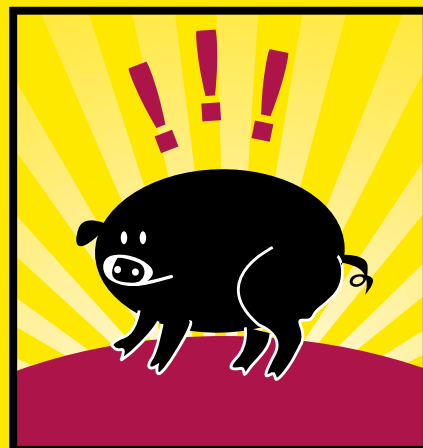
### 1999: A job as an intrapreneur



Kresse graduated from college with a degree in Politics and East Asian Studies. Her parents expected her to go to law school, but instead, Kresse accepted a job with a venture capital firm and moved to Hong Kong. She took the job because she realized "they had the money, contacts, and drive to do ambitious things and that they were willing to experiment. Plus, I knew that if I could successfully convince them to invest in green businesses, that they had the network to really help things scale." It was a highly charged two years of learning. The team researched new technologies virtually every week and Kresse was given a lot of room to explore and introduce environmental technologies.

### 2001: Pernicious Wastes

Kresse focused her research on solution based technologies for difficult waste streams and came across new ideas in two totally different worlds, pig farming and hospitals. Pigs can produce up to 20L of waste-water each day, and given that half the world's pigs are in China, this has huge implications for soil and river health. Hospitals produce hazardous waste. The team identified technologies that could solve both of these problems and helped introduce them to China.



### 2002-2004: An enviro-preneur

The VC fund decided to relocate to the US and change their investment focus. Kresse was convinced that her future should continue to be in supporting green businesses and they offered to pay her for 6 months while she set up her own company. Instead of investing

in technologies she became their agent, and set up two companies to aid their global roll-out. Kresse brought one of these companies to the UK in 2004, and later exited the company to get the funds and time to start her new business, Elvis & Kresse.

### 2005-2015: A long-term love affair with firehose

Upon returning to the UK, Kresse looked for new British wastes to tackle, and came across the endless stream of decommissioned firehose. Lovely and, until then, deemed un-recyclable, Kresse and her partner, Elvis, found a way to turn the "waste" into Harrods-worthy bags and belts. By 2010, they were big enough to have solved London's firehose problem, and began recycling firehose from other parts of the country. In 2015, they celebrated their 10th year of rescuing British firehose, with on-going funds channelled back to support the Fire Fighters Charity, and continue to take on new wastes, up-cycling them into a range of beautiful products.



### 2015: Intrapreneurship again

Kresse has found a way to translate her efforts in her small but growing company into larger impacts within global corporations. Through partnerships with large corporations, she is helping these companies consider how to tackle, repurpose, and avoid waste.



## Summary in Kresse's words:

"As you see, I've been a pure capitalist the whole way through, using business to do the ONLY things it should ever do, solve environmental and social problems. I'm glad I started out by working at a VC because I learned two key lessons. 1) what a business needs to thrive and 2) that companies can be an incredibly powerful tool for creating and scaling positive change.

I figured out that if I could do what I believed in and still make money, no one could ever tell me to stop, or to do something else. It's the same logic when we work with large corporations and show them that they can both make more money AND have a more positive impact while they do. Why would they not want to join?"

## Next steps to fuel more social intrapreneurs

Though Kresse has clearly been married to the problem of managing waste throughout her life, it was her initial job as an intrapreneur that gave her many of the skills she needed to be able to scale her future solutions. We need to create the accolades, hold up the role models, and provide the incentives and support for students to be inspired to pursue intrapreneurial roles. We also need to celebrate companies that offer the kind of freedom and opportunity for intrapreneurial energy that Kresse found in her VC role.

### Educational institutions can:

- Celebrate their intrapreneurial alumni and bring them back to speak as role models and mentors.
- Offer courses and training programmes for intrapreneurs, not just entrepreneurs.
- Create funding opportunities and partnerships to help support students to take on intrapreneurial roles.

### Individuals can:

- Learn more about the issues they care about, and identify the organizations that would be in a position to effect change before jumping to the conclusion that starting a new organization is what is needed.
- Find the best ways to apply their talent, which might be helping organizations grow, scale, or change or might mean taking on an intrapreneurial role before or instead of starting something new.

### Company's can attract future Kresse's by:

- Making it clear that they are ready for internal change by creating programmes to specifically attract social impact leaders, giving them the chance to learn business skills, pay off their loans, and be part of the company's internal change processes.
- The most enlightened businesses might offer these graduates a  $\pm 2$ -3 year role in parallel with a social impact training programme followed by a  $\pm 6$  month subsidized sabbatical, allowing them to use their business skills in support of the social impact organizations of their choice both giving these large companies the legitimacy they need to attract top talent while also bring droves of socially conscious employees into businesses that currently suffer from a dearth of socially innovative mindsets, helping to transition "old" businesses into the new age of social impact.





# Avani Patel

## Apprenticing with a problem fuelling effective philanthropy

*Avani has built a career focused on improving education in East Palo Alto. Her impact journey involves apprenticing with her chosen problem by working as teacher and administrator and then transitioning those skills and experiences into her work at the Peery Foundation. By committing herself to learning the intricacies of the education system in East Palo Alto, Avani has become an expert in her own right, and we can all learn a lot from her journey:*



### 1980's: A suburban life

When she was six years old, Avani and her family moved from the diverse city of San Jose to the community of Los Altos, a wealthy town just south of San Francisco. She says, "I didn't understand much about race, but I did realize that I was part of the 'other.'" She went to a great school, where she excelled, and she became interested in government and politics.



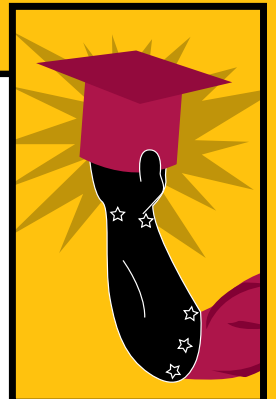
### 1999: Meeting the neighbors



Avani joined a Youth and Government programme offered by the local YMCA and, she noted, "It was the first time I realized that, only four miles away children who were growing up in East Palo Alto were having completely different life experiences than my own. Before that, when I thought about poverty and people who were not given the support they needed to live lives of dignity, I thought of kids living in slums in India that I had seen when our family visited there. I hadn't realized that poverty of a different sort was around the corner from my house. I realized that didn't make sense, because my new friends there were just as capable as me and it wasn't ability but luck that had put me in the position I was in."

### Early 2000's: Studies and perspective building

When Avani graduated from UC Davis, she planned to go to law school, but was wooed by the prospect of Teach for America. She specifically requested a placement in East Palo Alto and soon began teaching math and science in an alternative school in the district. "Many students were disengaged, which resulted in 'behavior problems' while others were so prideful, and it was clear that there was a sense that adults had constantly given up on them. The turnover rate for teachers was so high that students had internalized it as their fault, an inherent problem in themselves rather than seeing it as a systemic issue." Avani began to understand the challenges her students faced as well as the gaps in the school offerings and decided to see what she could do to curb the problems in the system.



# Avani Patel

Apprenticing with a problem  
fuelling effective philanthropy



## 2013: A school system perspective

Avani committed herself to the East Palo Alto district, but thought she might be able to make a bigger impact at the district office level. After realizing her role there was too far removed from the education she wanted to impact, she moved back into her original Teach for America placement school as the Academic Dean. With 3,600 students in the district, she worked hard to share the best practices she was finding across all the schools in the area. When Dave Peery approached her about joining the Peery Foundation, Avani's first thought was, "Why would I want to do that? I love my job! Plus, most of the funders we had worked with in the past were so disconnected from the grantees."

## 2014: Funding the change

Avani realized that the Peery Foundation was different than many of the funders she had worked with in the past: they were very focused on the issues and the impact, were people-centric, and required minimal paperwork from their grantees. It was a hard decision for her to leave the day to day of the school, but she realized that her ability to impact change in education across East Palo Alto would increase if she joined Peery as she could then support programmes in all of the schools across the district. Because she had apprenticed with the problem through the experience she gained as a teacher and academic administrator, she was uniquely qualified to do the role. "I was lucky that about 50% of my relationships carried over - so that trust was already there - and I am still able to spend most of my time in the community," Avani noted.



## Summary in Avani's words:

"If I hadn't already worked for several years in the same district, I would not have built up the trust and understanding that I needed to effectively do my job today. Originally I had thought that the best way I could add value was as a teacher, and of course I miss the day to day with students. I no longer get to see the impact of a 20 min counseling session with a kid who goes back and turns around his or her attitude. But, I am now in a position to share knowledge and resources across the district and help deserving teachers across all of the schools in the area access support they need to improve education. On a macro level, the programs we are funding have already had a huge impact, but there is a lot more to do. I think this role is a good fit for my skills and a great way to continue to support education in East Palo Alto. In the future, I see myself continuing to grow as a grant maker while always having an educator mind-set."

## What can we learn from Avani's story?

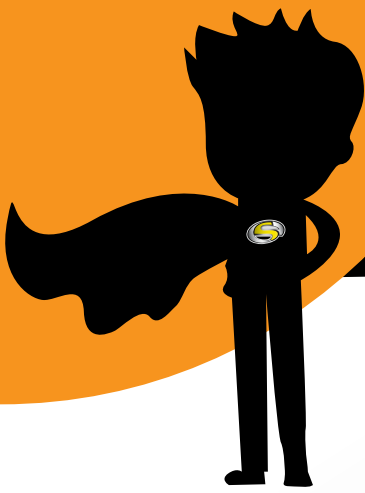
If you are looking to make a change in the world, go out and apprentice with the problem that you care about, but you might want to be flexible about the roles you take to effect change. If you commit to putting yourself into positions where your skills and interests compliment the need, you'll find a way to add value, even if it means taking on different roles than you had originally planned. If working in a funding organization appeals to you, follow Avani's lead and go out and get some direct work experience in the issues you care about, as you will be able to bring that back into your role as a grant maker or social investor. "It is Avani's experience working as a teacher and school administrator that gives her the skills she needs to know what will work and what will not," says Jessamyn Shams-Lau, Peery Foundation's Executive Director. "Her work might not get lots of press or be flashy, but through Avani's patient and deliberate practice she is now a real expert in education in East Palo Alto. She is a force within the community. We need to be celebrating and recognizing people like Avani who have truly apprenticed with the problems they care about."

## What can foundations learn from the Peery Foundation's model:

Other foundations can learn from this model by hiring people who have lived or apprenticed with the problems they are aiming to solve. These grant makers then bring with them the expertise and contacts needed to make more effective philanthropic decisions. The Peery Foundation's approach also allows Avani to be out in the community most of the time, giving her a chance to really understand the issues and the decision makers. "I can see if kids are happy with the programs we are funding, if teachers are seeing an impact, and if principals are seeing changes in their data," she says. "This minimizes the impact on their time as well and reduces the number of trips they need to make to our offices." Many funders are supporting only one type of school, and it is rare that a foundation supports all the schools, from charter to traditional, across a district. "At first the superintendent wanted us to give the same program to each school, but because I was a former teacher and former administrator, I knew each school was different and each had different needs based on the population or staff culture." Another of the Peery Foundation's unique practices is their mechanism for collecting constant feedback. Any time you have a conversation with someone from Peery you get an anonymous survey emailed to you asking how the interaction was and what could have made it better. "This allows us to get constant and honest feedback from our grantees, something that foundations need if we are going to stay grantee-centric," says Jessamyn.







# Xavier Helgesen

## From living a problem to apprenticing with one

*Xavier started building businesses as a teenager, and initially his businesses were focused on immediate needs and interests that he faced in his life. His initial businesses were designed to fill problems he had lived and understood, and he could easily see when they were going off track as he and his contacts were part of the target client audience. His latest business in Africa is focused on solving a problem that he never lived, so he needed to apprentice with the problem and collaborate with a team of people who understood the challenge better than he did in order to succeed. Here's his story:*

### 2001: Better than the bookstore

Xavier and his friends Christopher "Kreece" Fuchs and Jeff Kurtzman identified a problem that they, and many other students, found frustrating: at the end of the year, the books they purchased at the Notre Dame bookstore could be sold back to the same bookstore for very low rates, or thrown away, with no other options in between. They decided to create a market for second hand textbooks, and use the funds to donate to education charities. They understood the student mind-set, and were able to launch a company called Better World Books that now operates in about 2,000 universities.



### 2009: Getting big



By this time, Better World Books had received their first round of significant investment funding, was one of the largest online bookstores for used books, was bringing in \$45 Million in revenue, and had donated more than \$10,000,000 to literacy and libraries. Their warehouse in Indiana had more than 250 employees and the following year, they opened a second warehouse in the UK. Xavier decided it was time to move on to something new and was offered the Skoll Scholarship to attend Oxford's Saïd Business School MBA Programme.

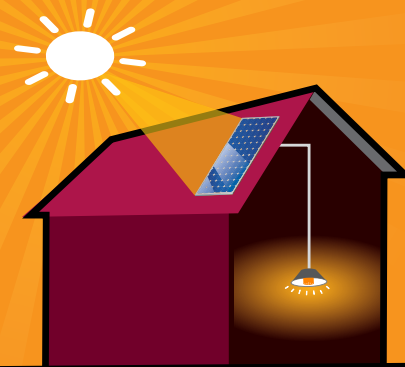
## 2010: Research & development phase



Xavier knew that he wanted to start a new business, as he had been starting businesses since he was 14 years old. He identified a number of global issues that he cared about, and realized that lighting Africa was a challenge he could get excited about and that had a huge opportunity for both impact and income. He dug deep into research mode, learning about every solar company working in Africa, comparing their models, understanding their product and service offerings, and mapping out the problem and gaps in the current solutions. He identified a co-founder in classmate, Erica Mackey, who had lived in Tanzania for nearly a decade and who brought the on-the-ground knowledge that he lacked. Instead of jumping right into their solution, they decided to spend their summer working at GSMA Development Fund, the association of mobile telephone operators, as they knew that mobile money would be key to any model they pursued and taking the time to learn from others would help them design a better company in the future.

## 2011: Apprenticing with the problem

Erica insisted that the founding team move to Tanzania, even though there was temptation to move to Silicon Valley to jump straight into fundraising. "It wasn't until we got on the ground in Tanzania, started sitting in the living rooms of potential customers, and began physically understanding the challenges that we realized our original mini-grid idea wasn't the best solution," Xavier noted. They were lucky that they were quickly able to completely shift their business model as their only external funding had come from a small prize



fund that was not tied to the execution of their original plan. "I'm glad we didn't just try to push through our original idea and instead took the added time to learn and research," Xavier added, "or else we would have wasted a lot of money and effort on an ineffective model."

## 2015: Scaling a tested solution

The founders hadn't grown up with the problem of energy scarcity in their own lives, so they knew it was important to bring in some key team members who had, and have built out their local team. Off Grid Electric is now signing up more than 10,000 customers per month and has taken in \$50 Million in investment. By building a strong team and testing out their model, they have been able to build a company that is set to scale across the region.



## Summary in Xavier's words:

"In designing our solar offering, we spent a lot of time understanding all of the prior barriers to solar use that so many other models had failed to address. We knew we needed a model offering cheap up-front costs, on-going costs in line with kerosene spends, free repairs in perpetuity, easy payment options, and a list of other requirements. Also, I learned from Better World Books that although raising funds for charities is important and can be motivating, there is nothing more powerful than directly changing your customers' lives as an integral part of your business. I wanted to pursue a business model where the growth in impact and income would be directly correlated: in other words, if we signed up more customers, we'd have more impact. Spending time really understanding the problem and the gaps in other business models is what helped us design for scale. I am grateful that Erica pushed us to move to Tanzania as we wouldn't have developed a successful model otherwise."

### What can we learn from Xavier's story?

Xavier and his huge success with both Better World Books and Off Grid Electric certainly fit into the "heropreneurship" category: many people look to him as a role model of social entrepreneurial success. The important thing to note though is that his initial business acumen and experience was built at home, on problems that he intimately understood. His first business was leasing a mini-golf course at the age of 14, and he built a pre-Facebook online platform when he and his friends thought it would be a better way to connect to classmates than the paper version the University of Notre Dame provided. Better World Books was built on the back of a problem he had lived himself – wanting to sell and buy used textbooks. With his move into electricity, it isn't just Xavier's business acumen that is making the company successful, it was the team's deep research, their approach to apprenticing with a problem, and the fact that they teamed up with people who knew the problem more intimately than they did that led them to a successful model. The business model he and Erica had built in their MBA programme, which had won funding from a pitch contest, is nothing like the model they are doing now. It's important to remember there is no substitute for apprenticing with a problem or teaming up with people who have the lived experience of a problem if you want to develop a model that works!

In addition, not everyone is designed to be an entrepreneur, nor does everyone want to take on the financial and personal risks that come with that. You don't have to go out and start a solar company to effect change. Instead, you can use the same process Xavier's used, to map out all of the current solutions in the problem area you care about, and identify companies that are doing great work or might need some help to

improve their impact. Companies like Off Grid Electric need accountants, HR teams, marketing experts and a wealth of other knowledge, so no matter what skills you bring, you can find a way to add value to the ecosystem of solutions!





# Anushka Ratnayake

Apprenticing with a problem fuelling  
effective entrepreneurship

*Anushka never intended to be an entrepreneur. Instead, she followed her passions, and was willing to take risks, volunteer her way in the door, and commit to learning new things in order to secure high-impact roles in fast-growing social enterprises. Along the way, she apprenticed with the problems of smallholder farming and access to finance in rural Africa and built up an expertise that helped make her uniquely qualified to successfully build myAgro. She thoroughly understood the landscape of other solutions and built upon lessons learned from the successes and failures of other efforts. Here's a glimpse into her path:*



## 2004 and before: A global outlook



Growing up in Bermuda, Anushka's perspective was affected by the US culturally and by the UK politically, which solidified her global outlook long before she moved to Southern California at the age of 12. After graduating from UC Santa Cruz, Anushka backpacked for a year around the world and worked for a poverty alleviation think tank in her parent's birthplace of Sri Lanka. While there, in 2004, Anushka saw the effects of the tsunami first-hand on the poorest and most vulnerable communities. This experience solidified her commitment to pursuing a career that would help those struggling to work their way out of poverty.

## 2005: Gaining a useful skill

She returned to the US and worked at a training consulting firm. "It was your generic associate level graduate job," Anushka said, "and I was doing a lot of administrative tasks. I wanted to find a way to use my skills for a cause I believed in, so I looked for a volunteer job to do on the side." Anushka read an article about Kiva just when it was starting, and she was lucky - the skills she was learning in training design were exactly what the team was looking for.

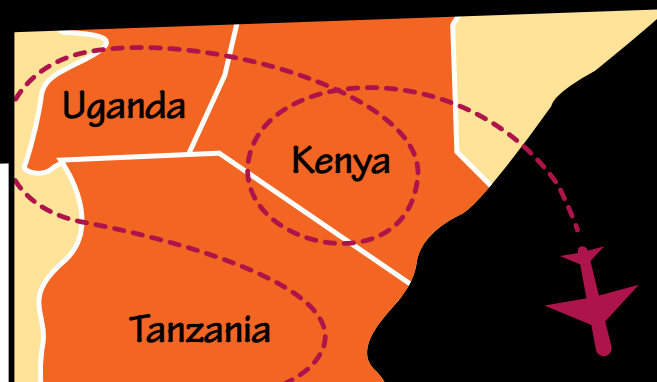


## 2007: Volunteering her way in the door

The Kiva team was still small, only five people. They responded to her inquiry about a volunteer role right away, yet she had to go through four of five rounds of interviews before she was offered the volunteer position. "They told me that they offered me the unpaid fellowship because they saw that I had travelled and worked abroad, so was able to bring a global perspective to their work, and also because they could tell that I was 'scrappy', a quality I think you need to get things moving in a start-up organization." After a month of volunteering, they offered Anushka a paid role.

## 2008: Field work

Anushka spent about two years working for Kiva in San Francisco and was inspired by Jessica Jackley's story of "apprenticing with a problem" – how she had translated her learning from working at Village Enterprise Fund into the founding of Kiva. Anushka visited micro-finance projects in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania where she realized that livelihood improvements were complex, and often required more than just funding to succeed. She decided she wanted to spend more time "in the field" and further apprentice with the problems she was aiming to help alleviate. Inspired by the work of One Acre Fund, Anushka dropped the founder, Andrew Youn, a note. "Are you hiring?" she asked. "I don't have an MBA, but I am willing to help and learn!"



## 2008-2011: Learning the successes and failures of others

Working on One Acre Fund's repayment model, Anushka spoke with hundreds of customers who also wanted a savings plan. "I tested out the savings model at One Acre Fund a few times, changing a beans-credit programme to a sales model where farmers could pre-pay for inputs to grow beans instead of taking credit. Though my day job required me to be focused on credit and loan repayment, I was very interested in the potential of savings models, which is what fuelled me to start myAgro." She convinced Andrew to let her go visit other models in other countries: BRAC in Bangladesh, IDE in India, and a range of Micro-Finance organizations across Africa and Asia. She also found that Oxfam had a savings programme in Mali where 400,000 women were saving weekly, but they didn't have anything organized to do with that money. It seemed like a ready market for an innovative solution that combined agriculture and livelihoods programmes with a savings model.

## 2015: myAgro in Mali

Andrew kept Anushka on payroll for her first year in Mali and then made two years of \$100,000 grants to help get the organization off the ground. myAgro now has more than 200 staff members and has worked with more than 10,000 farmers in their 2015 planting season. They have expanded into Senegal and are using a model based on Anushka's research from the prior decade. Ten percent of her team is international and, when asked what she looks for in hiring, Anushka noted, "People who are curious and not afraid to try new things, who are observant, adaptive and humble. Working on hard-to-solve and important problems is often gritty, unglamorous, and more challenging than what most people have done in their private-sector careers. We need people who can thrive in environments like this."

## Summary in Anushka's words:



"That first associate job helped me open the door to a volunteer role in Kiva when micro-finance was just taking off. If I hadn't been willing to volunteer my way in the door by taking on the unpaid Kiva work alongside my job, or later if I hadn't been willing to take a pay cut to pursue this more impact-focused work full-time, I wouldn't have learned all of the things I needed to to get to where I am today. My decision to move to One Acre Fund was fuelled by the fact that I wanted to make the most impact that I could, and in order to do that, I needed to understand the people that I ultimately wanted to help serve. It is not in my DNA to do something fully without trying it out first. My original goal wasn't to start an organization -- it was to understand the issues. Immersing myself in the hurdles people face when trying to move out of poverty ultimately helped me envision new solutions. Learning from the organizations I worked with and the range of people I met through my research allowed me to build on the successes and failures of others, and Andrew's support meant that I could test out the savings model before launching myAgro. I didn't expect that a volunteer opportunity with Kiva would have led to my work here in Mali, but I feel that I am on the right path to live out the commitment I made to helping people move out of poverty."

### Lessons we can learn from Anushka's experience:

Too often the hero stories about entrepreneurs make it sound like entrepreneurial ideas came to someone in an instant. They don't, and they usually don't happen in a hack-a-thon weekend either. They might get flushed out or brought to life in some type of start-up experience or accelerator programme, but the best ideas don't originate there. They originate from someone's experience of living or apprenticing with a problem, learning about the failures and successes of other attempted solutions, working on and observing the issue from many angles, and eventually identifying a gap, or a series of lessons that can be put together in a new way. That final lightbulb moment when a successful business idea is conceived is usually built upon years of learning. In addition, it is very rare that high-impact ideas are completely "new" – instead, they are built upon the many similar efforts that have come before.

So, rather than waiting for divine intervention to strike you with a "new" innovation with which to improve the world, go out and start working with the millions of efforts already being tried, learn from them, help them grow and improve, identify gaps, and continue to find ways to use your skills and experience add value. It might be as an intrapreneur, like Anushka did at One Acre Fund, bringing her financial experience and savings plans ideas into their already working model, or eventually, as an entrepreneur if or when, like Anushka, you find a gap that hasn't been filled and you have apprenticed with the problem long enough to know you are uniquely qualified to add value. Both approaches are valid, needed, and praise-worthy, and though all of the hype seems to be around the "entrepreneur" what we really need is more "intrapreneurs." A sole-founder or a small team of people start things, but we need hundreds of committed, driven, and entrepreneurial people with learning-mindsets to grow, connect, and improve these organizations so that they can make a dent in the problems our world is facing.

If each of us follows Anushka's steps by applying our skills to issues we care about, we'll be well on our way to a better world. And if you are not sure what you are passionate about, then you need to get out into the world and start bumping into problems, so that you can get angry, get interested, and get motivated to help create change!



# Rachel Faller

Research and apprenticeship fuelling entrepreneurship

*Rachel's journey is an example of someone who took a very deliberate research and learning approach to channelling her impact. She was able to channel her passion for design and her learning about the economic impact of health conditions in Cambodia to create an ethical fashion brand which now has about 50 employees and exports their clothing globally.*

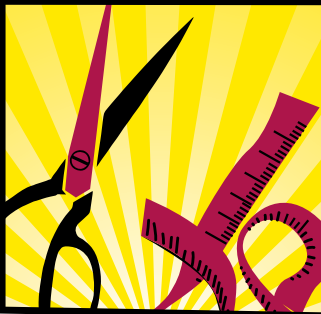


## Late 1990's: A love of fabric

At age 8, Rachel made her first up-cycled garment: a Pippi Longstocking costume out of an old sweater. She studied textiles in university at the Maryland Institute College of Art, but despite simultaneous passions for sewing, garment making, and painting, Rachel could not envision how she might participate in the fashion sector as her research showed her that there was exploitation at every level of the industry. It wasn't until she visited Cambodia for the first time in 2007, when she met several organizations who were trying to make sustainable businesses with a fair trade model, that she saw a way to fuse her artistic passions with something that she could feel good about.



## 2008: A research study



Rachel was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship that supported her to move to Cambodia to research fair trade organizations and the sustainability of their business models. Along the way she met many single mothers who were suffering from chronic health conditions and who were struggling to find work that was flexible enough to let them raise their kids and deal with doctor appointments while still making enough money to support their families. She also saw a gap between the products many traditional craft organizations were producing, and the huge market opportunity for every day fashion that was produced more ethically.

## 2009: A commitment to learning & new-born rice

Rachel committed herself to learning Khmer. She studied diligently in classes, but more importantly, she constantly practiced the language while living with a Khmer family and working with Cambodians all day. She also committed to apprenticing with the problem of the fair trade models she was researching through her grant. While working with a number of craft groups in Cambodia she began to understand what was working and not working for them, both in their business models and product designs. After identifying the gaps in the models and building upon the lessons she had learned, Rachel launched a fashion label Keok'jay, the Khmer word for the bright colour green of young rice plants. Like these fragile and striking stalks, Rachel's start-up was vibrant and promising. She employed women who needed flexible working conditions to balance their health needs, committed to purchasing sustainable inputs including scrap fabrics from large factors, and launched a promising business.



## 2013: Rebranding

After the launch of two storefronts, the set-up of two mini-factories, and a failed merger attempt, Rachel decided to refocus the company. She rebranded the fashion label as Tonlé, the Khmer word for river. This shift allowed her to reposition the company and align it with the more global manufacturing challenges of fashion. Though the company still employs many of the same women Rachel had set the business up to support, she uses the brand to connect the people who buy the products with the people who made them. Tonlé



promotes the model of small, responsible, and personal garment factories where people are treated like people, not machines. A few years later, Rachel's company launched in the US and Australia and now has an online presence where you can purchase Cambodian-made Tonlé products anywhere in the world.

## In Rachel's words:

"When I got to Cambodia, I thought I might start a business right away, but I would not have been able to build a successful social impact model without studying Khmer, living with Cambodian people, and learning about the gaps in all of the other fair trade models I researched. Initially, I hadn't realized how essential understanding the culture would be, and if I hadn't committed to that learning, I would still be struggling to understand the best way to grow and support my team. Before arriving in Cambodia I thought I could just get off the plane and help a group of women start a business for themselves, and leave within one year. I didn't realize how much of a commitment that was. I had to take time to understand the current situation, build trust and relationships, and find a way to channel my skills in a positive way – it takes a lot of time, and a lot of learning!"

## What can we learn from Rachel's story?

Rachel was able to take a skill and passion she had from a young age, and build an expertise, through her studies and experience. She didn't know where it would lead when she started, but she followed the path that her skills and enjoyment led her down and then committed to using that skill to further a greater good. By using her research in Cambodia to help her understand the problems people faced in acquiring and keeping employment while balancing chronic health conditions and family needs, Rachel was able to identify an opportunity to put her skills to use. If she hadn't studied the language, committed to on-going learning about the culture, and continually shaped the business around the needs and demands of the Cambodian women with whom she worked, she wouldn't have been able to design a business model that has been able support their collective needs while providing a role model for other ethical garment factories.



# Kjerstin Erickson

## Struggles with the “heropreneur” spotlight

*Kjerstin’s journey is a story of someone who started off trying to solve a problem she hadn’t lived or yet apprenticed with, and in the end, she had to close down the organization. She has now started an organization based on a problem with which she had first hand experience, and it has made a difference in her ability to design for change. Take a look...*

### 2003: Becoming a “founder”

At the age of 20, while still at Stanford University, Kjerstin started an organization called FORGE, working in refugee camps across Africa. As a young, beautiful, eloquent entrepreneur, she attracted significant press and funding, which brought her organization into the spotlight of the growing social enterprise conversation. Like many foreigners working in an international development context, Kjerstin’s learning curve was steep, and as she continued to learn about the problems she was working to tackle, she began shifting FORGE’s model for change.



### 2004 and beyond: Growing through volunteers

FORGE and Kjerstin continued to attract the spotlight, and with that came an interest from volunteers. In reflecting on the organization’s model, Kjerstin noted, “In the early days, FORGE was built on student volunteers fundraising for both travel and project implementation. It took 4 years to fully appreciate the compromises we were making to our impact by bringing such inexperienced young people into such fragile environments, putting them in charge of critical services for large refugee populations. If I knew then what I know now about the dangers of using inexperienced young volunteers in development environments, FORGE would have started out as a very different organization – if at all.”

### 2011: Closing down

After nine years running FORGE, Kjerstin closed down the organization. By that stage, she had developed an organization that had done work she was very proud of, one that had worked with more than 70,000 refugees. “The problem was, we hadn’t invested in the infrastructure, HR, accounting, and general organizational management structures that we needed to run an organization of that size,” Kjerstin noted. “With 180 staff at the height of the organization, we were so obsessed with keeping our overheads low that we overlooked the need to invest in the systems that would have kept the organization going.” In addition, Kjerstin was feeling the pressure of “heropreneurship.” It was frustrating to her that so many of the stories about FORGE were focused on her own story, not the actual impact and learning they had done as an organization.





## 2012: A calmer life

After closing down FORGE, Kjerstin retreated from the media spotlight, and co-founded a yoga studio outside of San Francisco. "It was during this time that I learned about the trade economy. We were living a lifestyle which was much more expensive than the actual funds we were making, as everyone wanted to trade with us. We'd get new cabinets, our air-conditioning fixed, massages, you name it, all for free in exchange for yoga memberships." Kjerstin had unintentionally started learning about the problem of barriers to growth in the trade economy.

## 2013: An MBA and a new business plan

Kjerstin decided to pursue an MBA to fill the gaps in her business development knowledge, and she was offered the Skoll Scholarship to Oxford's Saïd Business School. "Pursing my MBA was also a chance to dig deeper into my ideas around the trade economy. I felt that I really understood the sector, having been a part of it with our yoga studio, and I could see the barriers that were preventing people from bartering for things that might not be immediately available to them in their community." After graduating, Kjerstin was ready to start Simbi, an online platform aimed at helping people trade services.

## Reflections from Kjerstin:



"When I was running FORGE, I was also keeping a blog on Social Edge, and before we closed down, I wrote a piece that touched on this issue of focusing on the entrepreneur as a hero. Here's a piece of the article:

*'...the mythology of The Social Entrepreneur revolves the whole story around the individual. Through a shrewd sleight-of-hand, our attention is turned away from the collective movement and toward an individual onto whom a Hero's Journey is imposed. The drama of such a tale is high, but at what cost? Kings and Queens are made, and many a speaking career launched...but what is sacrificed? What collective narrative, what real representation of holistic social change, what inclusive vision for proudly joining hands as small cogs in a big wheel?'*

Perhaps this is part of what attracts me to the trade economy – the fact that successful exchanges need to benefit both ways, and there is no single exalted 'entrepreneur' to celebrate. My hope is that people who are looking to create changes in the world think deeply about whether their solutions work on a systematic or symptomatic level. Are you helping to eliminate the problem, or working to make it a little bit less painful? Both are useful, but in a world of limited resources (particularly philanthropic resources), I urge people to consider whether their actions are fully aligned with sustainable change. It's natural to be driven by our own desires to make a difference in the world. But the important part is not who is making the difference, but rather who the difference is being made for. Learning how to put your ego aside for the sake of meaningful, sustainable change is the ultimate form of altruism and it's something we can all strive for."

## What can entrepreneurs learn from Kjerstin's experience?

Kjerstin still believes, "Individuals and entrepreneurs can make real impact, even on problems that they haven't directly experienced, as long as they are willing to learn or take a supporting role." However, she also believes it is much harder to create positive change in solving a problem you don't intimately understand. "Now that I'm working on a problem that I lived myself, I have much less existential angst. With FORGE, we were constantly questioning whether our actions were unintentionally harmful, or imperialist, or if we were forcing our cultural expectations onto the people we were serving. Working on a problem that I directly had – and yet that can affect at least a billion people worldwide – feels much simpler. I can draw from my own experience and context, rather than trying to imagine someone else's. Not only is that incredibly emotionally freeing, it also makes it much easier to be an effective entrepreneur."



# Lily Lapenna-Huda

## Lessons abroad fuelling entrepreneurship at home

*Lily spent time in Bangladesh, learning from experts in international development and microfinance. Though she had gone out to Bangladesh to help others, while she was there she realized an area where she too needed to learn. When she returned home and saw that many other young people in the UK also shared her lack of financial training and job readiness, she set about channelling the lessons she learned abroad into a nation-wide financial and enterprise education programme back in the UK. Here's a peek at her learning journey:*

### 1990s: Entrepreneurial by nature

As a young student in the UK, Lily found theoretical lessons boring. She enjoyed doing things that allowed her to take action in real life, so she started making and selling things, putting on plays, and running car boot sales, all to make money for charities. She noted that "These little entrepreneurial endeavours gave me the energy I needed to survive the many hours in the classroom."



### 1998: Gap year in Zimbabwe

Working in a rural primary school helped develop Lily's interest in international development and kick-start a love for non-formal education programmes. "I learned that I loved working with young people, and I also learned that, when schools connect students and parents to the wider community, everyone's lives can be changed for the better." She joined as the community led AIDS awareness campaigns, a community library building effort, and efforts to positively shift local policy makers on issues relating to education and health. She decided that she wanted to learn more about international development if she was going to pursue similar work in her career.

### 2000-2003: Formal studies

At SOAS, Lily studied Development Studies and African Studies. Rather than growing her interest in pursuing a career in international development she instead found herself getting more and more disillusioned by what she was learning. "It became apparent to me that the aid industry had created many dependencies and had, in many cases, failed to acknowledge and utilise local knowledge and local problem solving," Lily noted. "I wanted to learn more about alternative models for change, and was intrigued by the BRAC micro finance model in Bangladesh." Her prior experience had taught her that her studies in the classroom would only scratch the surface of her learning needs, and that, if she wanted to really understand the development issues she hoped to help tackle, then she needed to go out into the world and learn about them first-hand.

## 2003-2004: A Bangladeshi classroom

Three days after she graduated, Lily moved to Bangladesh where she had the privilege to learn about development from those working in and with some of the most prominent global organizations. She worked with BRAC, an organization noted for its reach and breadth, and was able to meet Mohammed Yunus, the Founder of the Grameen Bank. "I was so lucky to have such formative learning



experiences with BRAC and Grameen. The people I was most inspired by were the women I met who were using microfinance loans to improve their lives and the lives of their families. I realized that the benefits of these specific micro-finance programmes was the combination of not only financial resources but educational programming as well. I realized that the financial acumen these women had gained, both from their life experience and their microfinance experiences meant that they were exponentially more financially savvy than I was and that the skills they had gained to manage their families finances were ones everyone could benefit from cultivating."

## 2007: Back in the UK



When she returned to the UK, Lily realized that she was not the only one lacking financial management and business skills. She found that so many people her age were facing spiralling debt and were financially illiterate. She decided to use the learning she had gained in Bangladesh and apply it to a problem she was able to connect to at home and launched MyBnk, "a social enterprise that works with young people to build the knowledge, the skills, and the confidence to manage their money effectively and to make enterprising choices throughout their lives."

## Reflections from Lily:

"When I was just starting MyBnk, some friends and I went to a Chinese restaurant where I got a fortune cookie that read 'I do not know the solution, but I admire the problem.' That stuck with me and became a motto at MyBnk. I think the key to creating change is to look to problems with a sense of energy, admiration, and opportunity. The most important lesson I took from years of studying and working in international development was that unless you put your beneficiaries at the heart of your work, you will fail them. At MyBnk we co-design, co-create, and co-strategize with young people and this keeps our work fresh, relevant, and effective. I love spending time with the young people with whom we work, it connects me to my purpose, it makes me think of the future, and it is so much fun. "One of our values in tweets sums it up: #YouthAtTheHeart of @MyBnk, why do we do it? - It's all about the young people #obvs." A lot of what I learnt in Bangladesh forms part of the work we do today at MyBnk. The emphasis on measuring impact, the organisational rigour, the solid governance, the complete commitment to quality, and the ambition to remain a learning organisation. The content, culture, and creativity is obviously different as it is based on the vision and motivation of our team and our young people. As we grow into other countries through partner organisations, we look at only sharing with them what they know they need not what we believe they need."



# Lily Lapenna-Huda

Lessons abroad fuelling entrepreneurship at home

## What can we learn from Lily's journey:

If we don't find a way to learn first, and have the people who are meant to be benefiting from our work lead the way, we will get off course, or set off on the wrong path to begin with. While it may seem that taking action is the thing to admire, the real path to impact starts with learning. Too often, the heropreneurship stories we hear about only focus on the direct action taken by entrepreneurs and development workers who go out to help, but Lily's story, and those of so many others who have been able to channel their work into positive impacts, started out by going out to learn. In order to create more opportunities for people to thrive in Lily's footsteps, educational institutions can take some of the support, funding, and accolades currently reserved for entrepreneurs to go out and start something and rechannel that into opportunities for students to go out and learn about and apprentice with the problems they want to help tackle. In this way, they can either become more informed and better equipped entrepreneurs if they do go out and start something in the future, or, just as if not more importantly, they may find opportunities to channel their skills and experience into growing and improving already existing efforts for change.



# Andrew Hunt

## Building Useful Skills + Apprenticing with a Problem = Entrepreneurial Success

*Andrew spent the early part of his career working in advertising. He learned the skills he needed to brand, package and market products to consumers, but he did not feel personally fulfilled by his work. After working in West Africa and seeing first-hand the way that small rural producers were cut off from global markets, Andrew realized that he could use his marketing skills to help generate demand for products he believed in. Here's a window into his story:*



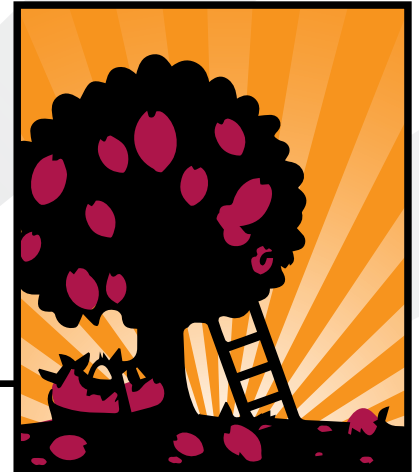
### 1999-2003: An advertising professional



Andrew's first job out of university was with a big London ad agency where he learned how to create and launch brands. His clients were mostly big multi-national companies like Pfizer and Heinz. As Andrew puts it, "I learned a huge amount about advertising and marketing and how to launch new products, but I was spending my days promoting products I either didn't care about or actively disagreed with, like nasal decongestants and frozen ready meals."

### 2004: Struggling with aligning his passion and work

Struggling with what felt like a lack of true purpose in his life, Andrew began to suffer from anxiety and, at the age of 25, spiralled into depression. When a family friend invited him to volunteer his marketing skills to a social enterprise in the Gambia, Andrew jumped at the opportunity for a change of perspective.



### 2005-2007: Aligning his skills to impact

The initial plan was to be in Gambia for just 6 weeks, but the experience breathed new life into him and he ended up staying for three years, working with small-scale vegetable farmers. "Whereas in my previous job 'success' was measured in sales of empty products that nobody really cared about, this work made a real impact. A few weeks after a bumper harvest in a particular village, I would return back to find that one household was building an extra room on the house so that the whole family was no longer sleeping in the same bed. And another family now had their kids in school." Andrew said. "I realized that there was an opportunity to bridge the demand for and supply of products from rural Africa to help more communities like these generate improved livelihoods from their land." For the first time, he felt he was using his skills to create true value, and developed a passion for his work in Africa that would fuel him for years to come.

## 2008-2010: Learning and seeking out the best fit for his skills

Andrew decided to improve his business acumen by doing an MBA at Oxford's Saïd Business School, and then went on to spend the next 18 months working on a range of high-impact projects across Africa. "I knew that I was looking for an entrepreneurial opportunity that combined commercial viability with social impact in rural Africa, but I didn't know exactly what that opportunity was," Andrew noted. "So, I decided to seek out opportunities where I could explore this further". Andrew did a series of short consulting assignments for impact related clients including Zoono - a mobile money company in Africa, a World Bank mango out-grower project, the Baobab Fruit Company of Senegal, and Jacana, a venture capital fund working to support SME growth in Ghana.



## 2011-today: Making Baobab Famous



Whilst in the latter of these roles, Andrew met his co-founder, and together they created a concept that combined his past experiences into what has now become Aduna, an Africa-inspired health & beauty brand and social business initially focused on products made from baobab fruit. There is no such thing as a baobab plantation; every tree is community or family-owned, producing one of the world's most nutrient-dense superfoods. As an estimated 8-10 million households can supply this fruit from a crop that is so abundant it currently goes mainly to waste, growth in Aduna's business translates to increased income for many rural families. "As I was moving through my career journey, I didn't know what it was that I was looking for, but once I found it, I knew this was it," Andrew reflected. "Though my career path wasn't linear and might not have looked like it was

leading anywhere at the time, nothing I did was unimportant to my path." All of those other jobs Andrew had taken provided the knowledge, skills, experience, and network that he needed to create Aduna.



## In Andrew's words:

"I have seen that when there is a genuine commitment to a social mission, business models can be a very successful way to create positive impact. During my time in Africa I came across so many failed aid projects, where all that was left at the end was rusted equipment and discouraged producers. In many cases they were the donor-funded creations of charities, whose positive intentions had been undermined by a lack of commercial know-how. Even though, at the time, I was not satisfied with the impact of my marketing career, I'm so grateful that I spent the time to develop those skills. For me, this now means I am passionate about what I do on a daily basis and am able to apply a skill set that can help create a solution."

### What can we learn from Andrew's story:

"While each of your initial career steps might not be your dream job, if you gain useful skills, you will be able to identify ways to channel them into adding value," Andrew noted. When you graduate from a programme, like Andrew's MBA experience, you don't need to jump right into your "next big thing." As long as your path is pointing in the right direction, you will find a way to gain the experience and network that you need to open up opportunities to put your skills to good use. As Andrew notes, "We can all find our personal sweet spot, it just might take some time, and you need to be prepared to keep trying different things until something clicks. If you are someone who DOES know what you are passionate about, go out and do that. You will be much happier doing the things that you truly care about." Designing a career with impact doesn't have an exact timeline, or an easy "apply here" sign, and unfortunately there isn't an algorithm that will spit out what is right for you, but you certainly aren't going to find it by doing work you don't believe in or where you aren't gaining valuable skills, so get out there, and start apprenticing with the problems you care about and you're bound to bump into something that clicks along the way!





# Isabella Horrocks

## Lessons learned from a failed social enterprise

*Izzy won a grant from a social business start-up award competition and went out to Kenya after she finished her MBA programme to put that money to work. After 6 months, she and her team closed the business down when they realized their model was not going to work as it had been based on some flawed assumptions. Might there be ways for others, like Izzy, to be better supported to learn more about the problems they were trying to solve before funding them to work towards solutions? Let's take a look...*

### 2010-2013: Pre-MBA

Izzy's first job was with Komaza, an award-winning social enterprise that pioneered agro-forestry in Kenya. This sparked her interest in working with small-holder farmers. "I later realized that some of the challenges we saw at Komaza were the same as those faced by the farmers I would later work with through my business, but some were different." Next, she did a stint with a boutique economic consulting company. Two of her main projects were in East Africa, working on World Bank technical assistance projects in the electricity sectors in Tanzania and Rwanda.



### 2013: An MBA

Izzy wanted to do an MBA to move back into the social entrepreneurship space after consulting. She focused many of her elective classes at Oxford's Saïd Business School on social impact courses and decided to get a team together to use their required entrepreneurial project on a topic related to small-holder farming. She learned a lot about lean start-up methodologies and the rigour needed to test your assumptions. That said, she noted that, "No matter how much research we did, while sitting in Oxford we weren't able to understand all of the gaps in the business models we were exploring." Izzy took a course called the Eight Key Challenges of High-Impact Entrepreneurs and she noted that many of the guest speakers left her with words of wisdom that she carried with her: "Get on the ground." "You need to live and breath the problems before you can solve them." "Be disciplined as you test your assumptions." "Admit to yourself if your assumptions are flawed." "Don't attach your ego to your idea."



### June 2014: Winning an award

"Before we left for Kenya, we spent a long time talking to a number of high-profile organizations but we knew we needed the on the ground research," said Izzy. "Getting the information we needed from abroad was hard. From Oxford, were able to have calls with a number of organizations, but not the farmers on the ground. Plus, the academic studies we found didn't really help us - we needed more practical advice and knowledge."

Izzy and her husband, James were selected for a "Skoll Venture Award", and were given £10,000 of funding to start their venture.



## November 2014: Off to Kenya

They got to Kenya and did a month of interviews before launching their venture. They hired a team, and started working to bring farmer's produce to wider markets, but soon realized that some of the key principles upon which they had based their business model were flawed. "We had assumed that text messages would have been the best way to communicate with farmers," said Izzy, "but it turns out that many of the farmers we had surveyed had said they could send text message, when in fact, many struggled with basic literacy. In addition, calls were not always successful either, as they often didn't have enough funds to keep their phones charged."

## July 2015: Closing down

Over the six months that Linkage was in business, the team grew to seven employees, but the flawed assumptions in the business model meant that profitability and ability to scale did not play out in the same way that their spreadsheets had predicted. Linkage closed down and Izzy concluded that their business model wasn't the right fit for Kenyan farmers at this time. She feels glad that they let the company close rather than trying to keep the flawed model going, noting that, "In the start-up world, we often don't let things fail if they don't work. Instead we keep funding them with donations or investments, sometimes fuelling a failed model much longer that it should have gone on." After shutting down Linkage, Izzy and James decided to pursue paying roles and left Kenya, sad to have failed to launch their business, but grateful to have learned along the way. When asked about what the other employees might say about the learning experience she noted, "We did disappoint people on the ground: the farmers and the people we employed. However, in some way, it's no pain, no gain – I don't think we could have learned what we did learn in any other way. Because we could have interviewed and surveyed farmers and motorbike drivers till the cows come home - we spent our first month doing this. Until you actually start offering the farmers an alternative route to market, you don't really know how they are going to behave. I think this is an important next step after apprenticing with a problem – first you research the problem, and then you need to start testing alternative ways of solving it."



## In Izzy's words:

"We knew that the business model that we had dreamt up during the MBA was unlikely to work in reality. However, the entrepreneurship project we worked on in our MBA programme gave us a framework for testing this business model - identifying our key assumptions, and systematically testing them. We are grateful for the funding we got to put theory into practice and test the assumptions around our business model. This funding allowed us to validate the problem – farmers really do receive a low proportion of the value of their vegetables. It also allowed us to experiment with one way of solving this problem - and we concluded that our original business idea did not work in reality. I think more organizations should have open cultures that allow people to learn and test their ideas in a safe way. I love the culture One Acre Fund has created. It appears to be a culture allowing people to learn more, test their ideas, and pilot new projects within the One Acre Fund structure. If they work, they can then scale those ideas from One Acre Fund's solid organizational base. In reflecting on my decision to move to Kenya to start this business, I think that my bit of exposure to smallholder farming work with Komaza was what led me to want to jump into our idea, but if I had no exposure to this work at all, then I think my best next step after my MBA would have been to work for an organization like One Acre Fund."

## What can educators and start-up programmes learn from Izzy's story:

Many business school programmes offer business plan competitions or start-up funding for students, like the Skoll Venture Award programme did for Izzy. All those of us who offer these types of funds to students can learn from Izzy's experience and consider the criteria and constraints that come with our funding. Izzy and James were exceptional in their commitment to learning and sharing the outcomes of the lessons and insights they gathered, but not all failed projects end up with shared outcomes. There are a number of things we can do in order to foster a learning-first culture and to support students to marry themselves to problems rather than their idea for a solution. At the Skoll Centre, as the result of this research and our trials with start-up funding, we have shifted our funding for students in a few significant ways that might be worth considering for your own programmes:

- Student teams are no longer eligible to apply for start-up funding if they have not either lived the problem they are looking to tackle or can prove that they have apprenticed with the problem.
- All applicants must prove that they understand the landscape of current solutions and have built upon the lessons of others in the design of their business model.
- If a student has not yet apprenticed with the problem they would like to help tackle, or is interested in considering a range of ways to get involved in the solution, not limited to entrepreneurship, we now offer funding called "Apprenticing with a Problem." These funds can be used to explore the ecosystem of a challenge, either as a research project, an internship or job placement, or another form of learning journey. This funding will soon be tied to our Oxford Saïd Global Challenge, a new competition we are launching to provide an alternative to the business plan competition, where students will not be judged on the "innovation" of solutions, but rather on how well they understand the problem, the current solution landscape, and the gaps in the current change efforts. In this way, we can award learning about a problem which might lead to students taking social impact jobs rather than starting new start-ups as they will be supported to find the best fit between their skills and the need.
- We measure success not in the number of social businesses our students start, but instead in the number of students who are able to find ways to contribute to solutions to global challenges. In this way, if a student maps out and understands the ecosystem of a problem they want to see changed, we try to offer just as much support and accolades for those who work as intrapreneurs, work in government policy change, or join an existing start-up as those who start new ventures. We believe that fixing incumbent systems is often just as important as new ventures in complex global challenges.
- If someone has apprenticed with a problem and then decides that the best way their personal skills would contribute towards a solution is through entrepreneurship, we still provide an opportunity to apply for start-up funding. In the past, our start-up funding was limited to graduating students, but we now accept applications from alumni. In this way, we are no longer forcing students to be ready to pitch a complete business model when they graduate and they can instead go out into the world, apprentice with the problems they care about, learn more, and later, when they have a more thorough understanding of the ecosystem of the problem as well as a wealth of tools to contribute, they can apply for funding if they see fit.





## Acknowledgements

The term apprenticeship with a problem comes from Jessamyn Shams-Lau, Executive Director of the Peery Foundation, who teaches a course with Todd Manwaring at Brigham Young University. They encourage their students to apprentice with a problem as they pursue their social change goals. Jessamyn was a thought partner in the genesis of this report as it was my interview with her that shifted me away from my original research question, “Which practices of foundations and social investors help or hinder the sharing of lessons learned across the social sector?” I realised from my conversation with Jessamyn, and so many more to follow, that the barriers to collective impact not only rest with funders but with all aspects of the impact ecosystem. As I work in a university and have observed both the shifts in student interests and the impact of entrepreneurship-focused programming, it seemed only fitting that I shift my research to include a look at how we educate for impact. The phrase *apprenticeship with a problem* embodies the approach I believe we need to take, as educators, entrepreneurs, funders, and all forms of change agents, if we are going to achieve the promise of our collective good intentions. Thank you Jessamyn for that reminder and for the use of this great term!

I believe I first heard the word heropreneurship from Pamela Hartigan, Director of the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship. She has graciously let me use the term for this report, and in addition to being my boss at work, has been a guide as I have explored these topics. I’m grateful for her encouragement as I pursued the Clore Social Leadership Programme and this research, and for her flexibility and partnership, providing the freedom to try out some of these ideas in practice. Thanks as well to the whole Skoll Centre team (Alastair Colin-Jones, Pamela Hartigan, Pippa Hitchens, Lyn Hill, Georgia Lewis, Breanne Svehla, and Andrea Warriner) as well as the wider Oxford Saïd Business School leadership including Dean Peter Tufano and Dana Brown for testing out the apprenticeship with a problem approach and for a collective commitment to supporting students to live out the school’s motto of “tackling world-scale problems.”

Thanks as well to Baljeet Sandhu, founder of The Migrant and Refugee Children’s Legal Unit, for her work in promoting the value of the lived experience. Baljeet’s

report on this topic is forthcoming, but her efforts to promote and support those with the lived experience of the problems we all seek to tackle has certainly helped shape my thinking and educational approach. Hopefully there will be more acknowledgement of both the value of the lived experience and the value of apprenticeship with a problem, as well as the efforts that combine the two, and I hope to continue to learn from and promote Baljeet’s work on the topic.

**I am grateful for all those who allowed me to interview them and with whom I have learned in shaping this educational approach:**

Karen Ansara, Terry Baxter, David Bornstein, Gabe Brodbar, Christy Chin, David Damberger, Maggie Dunne, Kjerstin Erickson, Lee Fox, Tom Fry, Xavier Helgesen, Fred Hersch, Amy Herskovitz, Isabella Horrocks, Jon Huggett, Andrew Hunt, Randall Kempner, Rajiv Khanna, Cynthia Koenig, Lily Lapenna-Huda, Jane Leu, Mindy Lubber, Laurie Michaels, Andy Middleton, Clara Miller, Alex Mitchell, Eric Nee, Fidel Nshombo, Sally Osberg, Avani Patel, Melissa Paulsen, Robin Pendoley, Heru Prasetyo, Anushka Ratnayake, Ash Rogers, Victor Sanchez, Baljeet Sandhu, Carol Schachet, Martin Segal, Jessamyn Shams-Lau, George Srouer, Kevin Starr, Eric Stowe, Inga Stewart, Andrea Warriner, Maya Winkelstein, Andrew Youn, Craig Zelizer, Teal Brown Zimring.

Thanks as well to all those who helped guide me in this research process, think through these ideas, and help me edit the many iterations of this report and related work including:

Claire Bennett, Maryann Bylander, Alastair Colin-Jones, Talisa Du Bois, Alice Dyke, Pamela Hartigan, Thomas Hellman, Batsheva Lazarus Hersch, Lyn Hill, Karina Kloos, Charmian Love, Andy Middleton, Rareş Pamfil, Ranu Sinha, Greg Wolff, and my generous husband Andy Thornton, who was patient with me as I allowed this research to overtake our vacations and weekends! Special thanks to Alice Robinson who did extensive edits of this report and helped me get it out the door!



In addition, I have had countless informal conversations about these ideas with many people who should also be on this list – so please note that even if I forgot to add you to my Evernote interview list, I tip my hat in thanks to you all as well. I want to also express my gratitude to Anna Reilly & Matt Cullinan for the use of their beautiful home, from which I wrote up the bulk of this report, and to Luis Barreto & Dur Montoya for making this report and website beautiful.

This report was funded and supported by the Clore Social Leadership Programme and my sincere thanks go out to Dame Mary Marsh, Liz Lowther, the whole Clore Social Leadership Programme team, and my 2014 cohort of Clore Fellows. Their inspiration, fellowship, guidance, introductions, and reminders to “Know yourself. Be yourself. Look after yourself.” have been my fuel, and for that, I am so grateful!

To request a printed copy of this report, please visit:



[www.tacklingheropreneurship.com](http://www.tacklingheropreneurship.com)

### About the Author:

Daniela Papi-Thornton is the Deputy Director at the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship. At the Centre, she has worked to design a number of initiatives that align with the thinking in this report including a social impact careers conference to highlight a broad range of paths to impact, a leadership programme exploring the soft-skills and learning required for social change, funding to support students to *apprentice with a problem*, and a contest and learning programme designed to support students to learn about and build upon the social and environmental efforts of others. Prior to doing her MBA at Oxford herself, she worked in Cambodia, which is where she first realised the value of *apprenticing with a problem*, something she had personally failed to do. The education and youth leadership organisations she founded look very different now than they did a decade ago, and many of the lessons she and her team have learned might have come quicker had she spent more time learning and *apprenticing* before jumping in to start an organisation. One of the outcomes was shifting the travel company she founded from a voluntourism model to a development education travel company built on an approach they call “Learning Service.” She has been working with co-authors on a book on the Learning Service topic, which is forthcoming. Daniela now works to share the lessons she has learned with others with a hope that others will *apprentice* with the problems they seek to change and not have to repeat the same mistakes. She was part of the 2014 Clore Social Leadership Programme cohort and this report is a result of her research on that programme.

[learningservice.info](http://learningservice.info)

[www.lessonsilearned.org](http://www.lessonsilearned.org)

### About the Illustrators:

Dur Montoya and Luis Barreto were born in Colombia and have traveled around the world helping community-based organisations and NGOs spread their message using multi-media, videos, photography and online/print advertising material through their consulting company - [ZoomInProjects.com](http://ZoomInProjects.com)



The Clare Social Leadership Programme develops leaders with a social purpose so that they can transform their communities, organisations and the world around them. The organisation helps make social change happen by supporting and investing in people - people who can become leaders with the resilience, self-awareness and capabilities to tackle the social challenges of the 21st century. It was initiated by the Clare Duffield Foundation in 2007 with the aim of strengthening leadership across the third sector, and officially launched in 2009 later becoming a separate charity in 2010.

This research is published as part of Daniela Papi-Thornton's Clare Social Fellowship. As part of the Clare Social Leadership Programme, each Fellow is required to undertake a piece of practice-based research. The purpose of the research is to help develop Fellows' skills as critical users of research, and to help develop the evidence base for the sector as a whole. The research focus, methodology and output are all chosen by the Fellow.

### **THE SKOLL CENTRE FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Embedded within the University of Oxford, the Skoll Centre at Saïd Business School is a leading academic entity for the advancement of social entrepreneurship worldwide. Founded in 2003 with a generous grant from the Skoll Foundation in Palo Alto, the Skoll Centre's mission is to demonstrate and accelerate the impact of entrepreneurial activity that aims to transform unjust or unsatisfactory systems and practices.

Daniela's Clare Social Leadership Programme application was supported by the Skoll Centre and her thinking has been shaped in part by her role as the Centre's Deputy Director.





[www.tacklingheropreneurship.com](http://www.tacklingheropreneurship.com)