



Creativity and Innovation in Social Entrepreneurship: A case study of the Champions Programme in South Africa

SB CASSIM

University of KwaZulu Natal, Graduate School of Business & Leadership College
CassimS@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract

This article explores the concept of social entrepreneurship in the context of its potential to contribute to economic growth and development in South Africa, a country typified by significant social and sustainable development challenges. It focuses on the importance of creativity and innovation in social entrepreneurship to this end. One technique/element of creativity and innovation, namely design thinking is explored. Design thinking is a human centred approach to innovation that was traditionally applied in business to product design, service design, and information system design to create new and innovative business offerings. The article reflects on the application of the principles of design thinking in a social entrepreneurship development intervention, called the Champions Programme at the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. The article demonstrates the application of design thinking on a group of marginalized, previously disadvantaged community members and illustrates the positive impact of the design thinking methodology on the offerings/products; business models, processes, markets and/or services in the social enterprises participating in the programme over a period of the past 4 years of offering the programme.

Key phrases

Design thinking; reflective practice; social entrepreneurship and South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

Social entrepreneurship is increasingly coming under the spotlight of academics, policy makers and practitioners across the globe as confirmed in the scientometric analysis of the

field (Sassmannshausen & Volkmann 2018:263) and Saebi, Foss and Linder (2018:20). This is largely because of the potential that social entrepreneurship holds for contributing to economic and social development (Borzaga & Tortia 2009:198). Economic development researchers are generally focused on new ways of stimulating and promoting sustainable economic growth in a region, while social development researchers and academics are concerned with the filter through effects of economic growth on inclusivity, equality and the overall improvement of the quality of life of communities in a region.

The somewhat intractable problems of poverty, inequality and youth disenfranchisement across the globe are impacted on both positively and negatively by the unparalleled developments in telecommunications and technologies, hyper competition, scarcity of natural resources and environmental degradation variously reported in the United Nations World Economic and Social Survey (United Nations 2017, 2018) and in the World Economic Forum (2018). These problems demand new and different approaches to solving the old and new social problems at global, national and local levels. This need for creativity and innovation is heightened in the 21st century environment in which states and markets do not find it possible to solve society's problems and which is characterised by governments' new approaches towards citizens' self-sufficiency and market driven models of welfare. Entrepreneurship and more recently social entrepreneurship have emerged to present innovative solutions to these problems (Bruton, Ketchen & Ireland 2013; Dhahri & Omri 2018; Kim & Lim 2017).

2. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There is a lack of consensus on a definition for social entrepreneurship (Aliaga-Isla & Huybrechts 2018). Social entrepreneurship may be described as "a process that catalyses social change" (Mair & Marti 2006:37). As the research on social entrepreneurship mirrors the research work on entrepreneurship, it may be concluded that entrepreneurship has grown into a discipline in its own right. This is confirmed in the results of a scientometric analysis of the field of entrepreneurship, which reports the field as mature and one that is characterised by growing specialisation and interdisciplinary (Chandra 2018:19).

The same however cannot be said for social entrepreneurship, a concept which is characterised by confusion, ambiguity and misunderstanding. Much of this arises from the multidimensional nature of the term. Social entrepreneurship manifests in a variety of

organisational forms, ranging from a commercial venture with a social purpose; to a social impact business, an enterprising non-profit, a benefit corporation (B Corp) amongst others. While there is progress in the practice and development in research, it is characteristic of an emerging discipline and has been characterised as being in relative infancy (Bacq & Janssen 2011:377). Further, the academic research in the nascent field is developing from a focus on personality/characteristic traits to the processes involved, to the outcomes it generates, to more recent work on the management of these enterprises (Doherty, Haugh & Lyon 2014:418) and even more recently on social innovation (Lubberink, Blok, van Ophem & Omta 2017:2). In the emerging economy space the community entrepreneurship and collective entrepreneurship (as in co-operatives in South Africa) are emerging as fields of research (Haugh 2007:161; Nwankwo, Phillips & Tracey 2007:92). In a systematic literature review Phillips, Lee, Ghobadian, O'Regan and James (2015:4) describe social entrepreneurship as a nascent field which was in the decades past characterised by disparate and disjointed views. One common theme emanating from all of the growing literature (cited above) is that social enterprises emerge as innovative solutions to social problems, leading to sustainable social transformation. This ability to combine elements from commercial business with those from non-profit or volunteer organisations is what sets social enterprises apart. The profit motive in these organisations is pursued to sustain and support the social mission. Thus, social entrepreneurship may be found in a range of sectors for example health, education, environment, poverty alleviation, food security and economic development (European Commission 2015:33; Gordon Institute of Business Science 2018:19; Huysentruyt, Mair, Le Coq, Rimac & Stephen 2016:15; Temple 2018:19).

3. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT

Regional development is a socially constructed phenomenon with principles, norms and values that tend to develop over time (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose & Tomaney 2007:5). Traditional analyses of the impact of social entrepreneurship focused on economic measures while the social and quality of life effects appeared to be subsumed into a wider definition of economic development (Zahra, Newey & Li 2014:138). While the debate on investment in economic development versus social development sparked off by the philosophies of the Nobel Prize Harvard economist Amartya Sen and Professor Bhagwati of Columbia University rages

(Ghatak 2018), social entrepreneurship by its very essence follows the Sen argument of individual development and is poised to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits that accrue to individuals, communities and regions. This article takes the view that regional development requires a holistic perspective to include economic and social value. Consequently, the view taken of social entrepreneurship is that of making a positive contribution to social and economic development.

Social entrepreneurship is widely considered as innovative responses to state and/or market failure in meeting social needs. As such, it has the potential to contribute positively to sustainable and inclusive social and economic development. Social enterprises by virtue of their social missions, deliver social value that either the market or the state fails to provide. The commercial sustainability pursued by social enterprises contributes to economic value through revenues, employment and taxes. Social enterprises may thus be defined as a catalyst for sustainable local and regional development by contributing to economic value; social value; regional value; environmental value and political value (Kim & Lim 2017:10).

4. SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is described as having “significant contextual dimensions for understanding social entrepreneurship” (Littlewood & Holt 2018:527). The persistently high levels of poverty; exceptionally high unemployment and the failure of the state to provide much needed services, sets the scene for the emergence of social enterprises to fill these gaps (Urban 2015:640). Several of these enterprises operate on the ground without the owners necessarily knowing the term social enterprise. The practice seems to be overtaking scholarly work as there is relatively little research on social entrepreneurship in South Africa (Littlewood & Holt 2018:526).

The maiden State of the Nation Address of the new President of the country (Ramaphosa 2018:Internet) refers to the importance of entrepreneurship (and by extension social entrepreneurship) to alleviate some of the countrys’ most pressing social and economic problems. It must be remembered that entrepreneurship has in the last decade risen in importance as evidenced by significant public-sector commitment. The topic of social entrepreneurship (with possibly greater potential) has not yet gained currency in the articulations of public and/or private sector in South Africa. It may be interpreted to be included in the discussions on entrepreneurship and there is early evidence as in the recent

work at the ILO (International Labour Organization 2018:Internet) that the focus on social entrepreneurship will intensify in the near future.

5. CREATIVE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: DESIGN THINKING

While entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship hold promise for delivering on the goals of employment creation, poverty alleviation and equality, the investment in entrepreneurship in South Africa appears not to be producing any significant results. Despite the high media visibility of entrepreneurship, the most recent Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM Reports) demonstrates that there are fewer people starting their own businesses in South Africa. The Total Early stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate for South Africa for 2016 is 6.9% (Herrington, Kew & Mwanga 2017:24). This is a 25% drop on the 2015 figures for the country. The current TEA rate places South Africa 46th out of the 65 countries participating in the research in 2017. Relative to South Africa's GDP per capita, the TEA rate should be in the order of 20% (nearly 3 times the current rate). Further, nascent entrepreneurial activity (that is people involved in setting up an enterprise but have not paid wages and salaries for more than three months) is at 3.9%, down from 2015 by 30%. In addition, the high discontinuance rate and the low levels of established business rates suggest that any gains from new enterprises are cancelled by exits as reported in the most recent GEM Report (Herrington *et al.* 2017).

The discouraging findings from the 2016/2017 GEM South Africa Report despite governments' commitment to developing entrepreneurship begs the question of what might produce higher levels of sustainable entrepreneurship in the country (Herrington *et al.* 2017). Several reasons and strategies have been put forward and amongst them is the importance of creativity and innovation in ensuring sustainable entrepreneurship and by extension social entrepreneurship (often referred to in the literature as social innovation). Creativity and innovative capacity are thus advanced as necessary skills for entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship success.

Innovative social entrepreneurs are already contributing to solutions to some of the worlds' most pressing problems with "solutions such as fair trade, distance learning, mobile money transfers and zero carbon housing (Urama & Acheampong 2013:9). One can add to these examples, low-cost, high-quality healthcare of the type that is delivered in India, or the emergence of electric cars and using drones for fast deliveries among others. This evidence

is proof of the importance of creativity and innovation in social enterprises for economic and social prosperity (Douglas, Rogers & Lorenzetto 2014:12).

One approach to ensuring creativity in social entrepreneurship is design thinking. Design thinking is a concept that is emerging in popularity in research and practice (Hassi & Laakso 2011; Johansson-Sköldberg, Woodilla & Çetinkaya 2013; Liedtka 2018; Micheli, Wilner, Bhatti, Mura & Beverland 2018; Shapira, Ketchie & Nehe 2017). Design thinking has been defined as a mind-set, a process and a toolbox (Brenner & Uebernickel 2016:7) and closely linked to finding innovative solutions to problems. There has however been controversy about what constitutes design thinking and what the outcomes might be. This may be attributed to the varied origins of the term (Micheli *et al.* 2018:2) and the fact that design thinking emerges as an amalgamation of several fields most notably design, engineering and more recently management. To provide clarity and develop an evidence base of results and understanding, the original proponents who popularised the term, the Hasso Plattner Institute School of Design Thinking (at Postdam) and the Stanford Design School set up the Design Thinking Research Programme. Their research results are published in volumes entitled Understanding Innovation with the eighth volume just published focusing on the nurturing and development of a “problem oriented mind-set over prevailing solution-fixation practices and behaviour” (Leifer & Meinel 2019:3). Interestingly, the 2018 volume focused on examining and advancing the rich theoretical foundations of the field to improve design practice. These theoretical foundations range from an explication of creative thinking theories dating back to the work of John Arnold in the 1950s’ (von Thienen, Clancey, Corraza & Meinel 2018:16) to a human needs based design theory based on the work of McKim (also of the 1950’s) reflecting on designers as makers and emphasizing experience and prototyping, which are the hallmark of design thinking to this day (von Thienen *et al.* 2018:17).

Design thinking is defined by (Gruber, De Leon, George & Thompson 2015:2) as a “human centred approach to innovation that puts the observation and discovery of often highly nuanced, even tacit, human needs at the forefront of the innovation”. There are several conceptualisations of the term, with the strongest common themes being user centricity and empathy to the human condition (Douglas *et al.* 2014:4).

The term has gained popularity in recent years (Micheli *et al.* 2018:1) as design thinking is applied both “inside” and “outside” the design profession (Gruber *et al.* 2015, Kimbell 2011:285). The process requires the adoption of a different mind-set to what is regarded as mainstream in the context (Docherty 2017:720), and requires empathy, tolerance of ambiguity; generating multiple solutions, prototyping early, testing and iterating versions of the product/ service offerings (Brown 2008; IDEO 2016, Johansson-Sköldberg *et al.* 2013, Kimbell 2011; Liedtka & Ogilvie 2011) and summarised in the new contribution by (Liedtka 2018:6,7). In this way design thinking focuses on generating solutions to complex (sometimes referred to as wicked) problems and sustainable solutions (Cipolla & Moura 2011:49).

In essence this is what social entrepreneurs engage with. Complex or so-called wicked problems evidenced in communities are essentially social challenges that may be resolved using the principles of design thinking. Using a human centred, analytical, participatory approach, design thinking has the capacity to produce impact laden solutions to the so-called wicked problems experienced in communities. The application of design thinking to social enterprises is an emerging area of interest and early work demonstrates positive results (Cipolla & Moura 2011:49, Shapira *et al.* 2017:286).

The process of design thinking is described in a variety of ways by design thinking practitioners from the early work of (Simon 1996) whose work has commonly been synthesised into seven stages: Define, Research, Ideate, Prototype, Choose, Implement and Learn. Methods developed since then appear to be based on this original work.

Dubberly (2004) who documented over a hundred descriptions of design processes from a variety of disciplines to more recent reviews of Curedale (2018:184) who covers the full spectrum of the design thinking mind-sets, requirements and tools.

The more popular models have been identified and reviewed by Micheli *et al.* (2018:8). They include the IDEO Model which comprises the following stages: Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation (Brown 2008:88). Another included in the list is the IBM toolkit. The toolkit which focuses on a loop comprising the stages: reflect, make and observe. Another popular design thinking methodology is proposed by Liedtka and Ogilvie (2011:21), described as the four question framework: “What is? (exploring the current reality), What if? (envisioning a new future), What wows? (makes some choices), and What works? (takes us into the

marketplace)". Perhaps the most popular methodology is proposed by the Stanford Design School (d.School 2010) and is characterised by five stages: Empathy; Definition (of the problem); Ideation; Prototype and Test. This has been the design thinking procedural model used in this case study. The author describes examples of how the elements of the model were used in a social entrepreneurship initiative and with what effects.

6. THE CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME

The Regional and Local Economic Development Initiative (RLEDI) is housed in the Graduate School of Business and Leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban, South Africa. The RLED Initiative is designed to explore and implement a variety of programmes/interventions for regional and local economic development. It is a partnership initiative between the University of KwaZulu Natal and the Provincial Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs initiated in 2010. From the bouquet of initiatives offered, is a social entrepreneurship programme called The Champions Programme. Champions are described as "changemakers", those making impact in much challenged communities from across the very poor Province of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. Champions are not necessarily university students (in fact 90% of the cohorts are not), but community workers committed to creating improvements in the lives of their communities and their regions. The programme recruits these Champions through nominations by economic development specialists, municipal managers, traditional leaders, chambers of commerce or business, ward councillors or any person occupying official positions in communities who observe and can vouch for the development effect and commitment of individuals to the economic development and/or well-being of their communities. These individuals may be operating from loosely defined or informal organisations or small businesses or formal structures like cooperatives or non-profit organisations (NPOs). These nominees are subjected to a selection process and approximately 15 candidates are selected to participate in the programme each year. In addition, the programme annually recruits students (from the wider University community) to work with Champions during their year at University.

The Champions operate in environments that may be described as challenging in that they operate with very limited resources and in environments generally characterised by poverty and unemployment. Most often these Champions have grown up in these constrained

environments and work to bring about change in their communities. These Champions see themselves as responding to their social responsibilities, as classically described in the literature, through their organisations that operate not for private gain but to generate social value (Doherty *et al.* 2014:420; Mair & Marti 2006:38; Peattie & Morley; 2008:99; Peredo & McLean 2006:60). The Champions' organisations are shaped by regional and local level institutional characteristics. They face pressure (without necessarily recognising it) to respond to the social demands they identify and address. More often than not, they do not appreciate the importance of a commercial logic to develop financially sustainable ventures as social enterprises in more developed environments do (Dohrmann, Raith & Siebold 2015:130). Unlike their counterparts in the more developed world, South African social entrepreneurs generally do not search for and identify opportunities in their communities, but are acutely aware of the environments they operate in and muster limited resources to provide social goods and create social change. While some reference is made to this feature in the literature (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern 2006:9) the version of the modern social entrepreneur is one who identifies opportunity and resourcefully fills the "market based gap" for the provision of social goods and services to target markets (Aliaga-Isla & Huybrechts 2018:649) is far removed from the typical social entrepreneur in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

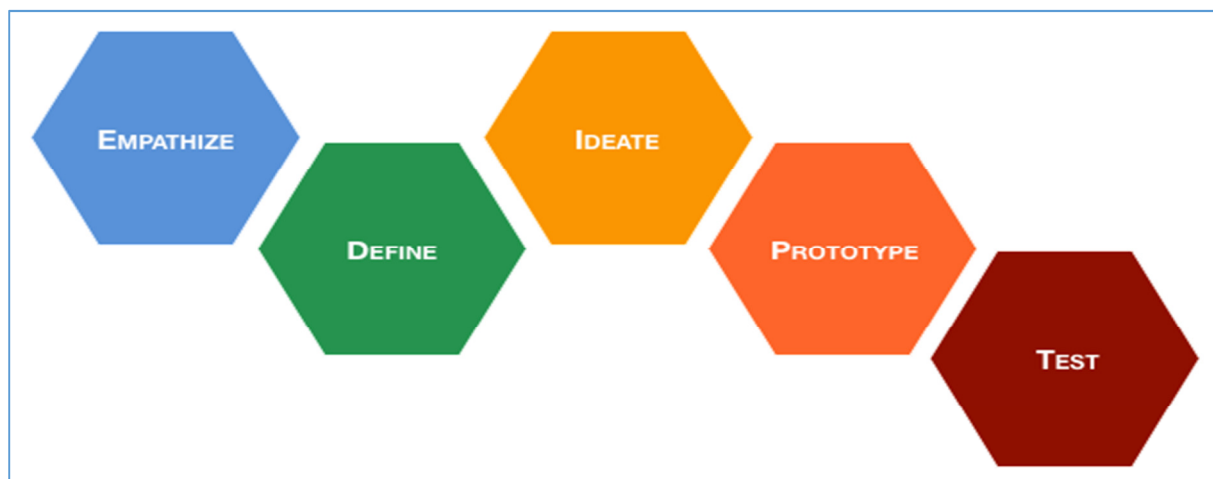
Further, the authors' personal experiences in working with entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs over the past two decades is consistent with the views of Bacq, Hartog and Hoogendoorn (2016:711) who reference what the author terms a "fragile entrepreneurial profile". These social entrepreneurs may be characterised by lower self confidence in their abilities as entrepreneurs. They often struggle with developing a commercial logic until the values are demonstrated to them and even then, with some difficulty.

In addition, these social entrepreneurs emerging from very poor and marginalised communities develop solutions to meet the needs that are generally not very innovative or creative. Often their solutions are standard responses to such problems offered by state or donor support agencies. It is this lack of focus on creating innovative solutions resulting in "me too" types of solutions that inspired the author to introduce design thinking into the Champions Programme.

6.1 Design thinking in the Champions Programme

There are many versions of the process of design thinking in practice. This programme uses the design thinking process described and taught by the Stanford d-School. They allow open access to all resources through a Creative Commons License. The author completed the online course through Udemy and completed the Human Centred Design course by IDEO (2009). Essentially, the design thinking process as described earlier comprises 5 stages as shown in the Figure 1 below. This section describes the implementation of the process the responses to these.

Figure 1: The Design Thinking Process



Source: Design Thinking Playbook, Stanford D school. [Internet:<https://dschool-old.stanford.edu/sandbox/groups/designresources/wiki/36873>; downloaded on 26 February 2016].

All candidates enrolled for the Champions Programme attend one Social Lab per month. This comprises a two-day action learning experience of reflection, diagnostics, exposure, implementation plan (in a plenary) after which they go back to their enterprises to implement their learnings. Participants of each cohort are exposed to a Design Thinking Sprint over a two-day period during one of the early Social Labs that they attend on the campus of the University. The Champions undergo a deep reflection of their personal positions and their aspirations for their projects/ enterprises and their communities, and then complete a Social Enterprise Diagnostic (an assessment of the state of the enterprise developed by the author) in separate Social Labs prior to embarking on the Design Sprint Social Lab. Each Social Lab contains an “inspiration session” where either the facilitator or Champions present a truly

innovative idea that they may have come across in the past month. It may or may not relate to their problem/ enterprise but serves as an 'innovation inspiration'.

The overall programme may best be described in a story of a Champion operating in a social enterprise making positive impact on what may be described as a serious social ill. The enterprise is called Iziko Stoves. The social entrepreneur was concerned about the contribution to landfill by used paint cans. He was also struck by the health risks of open fire cooking and cooking on primitive cook stoves, practices that are widespread in rural communities across Africa and indeed in the developing world. Iziko Stoves was born, using innovative and environmentally friendly designs. As a Champion the social entrepreneur was also concerned with the high rate of drug addiction in his community. Using his design thinking skills, Iziko moved in to a drug rehabilitation centre, training patients who were being treated for substance dependence, in stove production (through welding and painting) but also equipping them with basic business skills. This programme has been running for some years and the enterprise has been lauded for its innovative approach and human centeredness in dealing with a serious social ill in the region.

The stages of design thinking are now presented with some examples of how they were used by Champions in developing their enterprises.

6.2 Empathy

After careful attention to the physical arrangements, participants were taken through the first stage of building empathy. Unlike the process of the design thinking course offered at Stanford this process allowed the participants to define their own challenges. Each individual defined the challenge in their communities and reflected on a deep understanding of their community needs, world views and what is meaningful and mattered to them. This process is required to build empathy which is at the essence of the design thinking approach. The Design Thinking Process refers to the outcome of good designs emerging primarily from a solid understanding of the beliefs and values of the people for whom the design is being developed.

This stage of the process does not require a great deal of time or attention in this context. Invariably, Champions themselves come from these poor marginalized communities and understand acutely the lives and challenges of the communities they live in and serve. It

does however help them to share their views of these with their colleagues to better articulate the analysis of the situations they live in. This is sometimes referred to as analysis, which involves disaggregating the complex problems they are attempting to solve into smaller components. The Interaction Design Foundation (2018) refers to this as part of an analysis, synthesis iterative process. So, where for example a challenge of poverty was defined, Champions would have analysed the underlying factors to poverty in their regions and arrived at issues like failing crops which in turn may be the results of lack of skills or poor rainfalls etc. One Champion for example was prompted by exceptionally high levels of youth drug addiction in his region. His analysis led to examining the high levels of youth unemployment, and a lack of recreational and entertainment facilities. Another Champion was prompted by low levels of economic activity in the tourist sector in her region. She analysed this and defined environmental degradation as a primary issue. Another Champion was concerned with low levels of health in her region. This was disaggregated into a lack of information and knowledge. Interestingly two Champions disaggregated this same challenge (of low levels of health) into the lack of protein in the diets, thus contributing to poor health in both their regions.

6.3 Define

On the basis of the deep understanding, Champions then move on to what they described as perhaps the most difficult component of the process, that of defining the true challenge. This process which if defined will direct the next few stages with clarity and focus. The Design Thinking Guide refers to this as the Point of View (PoV). This Point of View may be described as a meaningful and actionable problem statement. The Point of View requires a reframing of the challenge into an actionable statement. The design thinking process suggests a few techniques for delivering on this. Group affinity diagrams; space saturate; empathy mapping; why; laddering and “how might we” techniques to develop an actionable problem statement.

Using the above examples one Champion defined the following PoV: “How might we equip illiterate homeowners with crop production skills that are easily accessible and attractive enough to motivate home owners to learn how to farm successfully”. Another Champion asked “how might we provide cheap and good sources of protein to families in my region”.

Champions were then given the opportunity to present their thinking process thus far. They were allowed 5 minutes to present the problem they started off with, the analysis of the problem into various components, selection of one manageable component and the framing of the PoV. The entire group provided feedback and input into the PoV. Champions were then given time to reflect on the feedback and re-formulate the Point of View as the deemed appropriate. They had the opportunity to test their ideas with the facilitator or outside experts who were available to them.

This stage was exceptionally useful to Champions who interrogated their definition of their problems and who informed by the opinions and experiences of their peers, and through an iterative process went back to the challenges and their articulation in their PoVs. The PoVs essentially break down a complex issue into manageable problems. Participants in the programme immersed themselves in validating these PoVs. There was often a “to and fro” as social entrepreneur’s start off wanting to solve the world’s wicked problems all in one sweep but realise how futile such effort is. Breaking this down into a clear issue enabled a clear focus on generating innovative but pragmatic solutions.

6.4 Ideate

The next stage in the Design Thinking process is the most creative and innovative part of the process. Participants were encouraged to find creative solutions to the problems they articulated. They were then exposed to several idea generation tools to help them expand the solution space. These included brainstorming, brainwriting, SCAMPER, mindmapping, sketch booking, game storming, “how about”, “what if” etc. Initially, Champions worked on their own for unrestrained free thinking, after which they were requested to team up with students from the Graduate School of Business & Leadership. These students probed, prodded and exposed the Champions to cutting edge interventions sourced from the Internet from across the globe. These diverse teams of students and Champions engaged in a process to redevelop their idea boards.

This process of ideation is often the most demanding but also the most exciting as Champions confront the spectrum of the most amazing ideas and generate possibilities to solve their problems. Ideas abounded in this phase, from for example free protein loaded snacks to protein patches to be absorbed by the skin, to entertaining protein bubbles from which kids ingest their supply of proteins without consciously doing so.

Champions who are generally serious and committed individuals were transformed with “kid like” activities but remained grounded by virtue of the seriousness of the problems they aimed to address. The Champions were then required to reflect on the process and document the ideas they generated, without critique or passing judgement. They were then required to select three or four ideas that they considered and that would have the potential to succeed in meeting the needs of their communities. They considered their current projects, their current realities and their past experiences to narrow down their selection. These three or four ideas would have to survive a round of testing in their communities. Champions were required to build some version of the idea as a tangible representation for consideration

Participants were trained in soliciting feedback on their possible solutions from their communities. During their time in their communities (between Social Labs) they tested, documented, reflected, refined, rejected and retested the surviving ideas. Champions for example shelved some of the initial ideas as perhaps the technology was too distant; lack of bandwidth in rural communities; suspicion and aversion to adopting new technologies by potential beneficiaries etc. A sobering reality check was experienced by nearly all Champions as they seriously interrogated the feasibility of the ideas during this selection phase.

6.5 Prototype

Testing an idea is near impossible without a physical object or concept. This can only be achieved through prototyping. Using the principles of Lean Startup (Ries 2011:104) Champions were encouraged to develop a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) which is an early stage inexpensive version of the product/ service/ model (Ries 2009). It may be an artefact that may be incomplete but sufficiently developed to allow customers to respond.

Champions used a variety of techniques based on the actual service for this ‘build’ phase. A combination of model-building, technology applications and visiting the local “maker space” (in the City) generated these MVPs for each enterprise. Champions presented these MVPs to the wider group which provides peers and the course facilitator the opportunity to assess the innovation in comparison with their current offerings and in the context of their realities and ‘cutting edge’ practice. Students may not come from these locations but invariably know and appreciate deeply the contexts in which Champions work.

Interestingly, the two Champions who were working on the protein deficiency in their communities developed slightly different versions of a similar solution model. One developed Kikilikigi, a novel chicken rearing programme that distributes free 14-day old chicks to households (with feed and material to build a pen) for their personal household consumption. Kikilikigi has a buyback programme (of excess stock of chicken) to generate income for communities through firm markets. The other Champion developed a rabbit breeding and rearing package called Camelot which saw her selling a pair of rabbits to households. This included training on growing rabbits, supplying materials for building the rabbit hutch and developing a WhatsApp network of rabbit growers to share knowledge. She too incorporated a buyback scheme to slaughter and supply rabbit meat to the tourism sector in her region. Her system included training on the harvesting of rabbit urine for use as fertiliser in their gardens and for sale in their communities. Camelot included training on harvesting the skin for fur.

6.6 Test

The intention of the test phase is to uncover design faults before it is too late to rectify them. While this stage is described last, the practice of design thinking requires Champions to test their concepts continuously. It must be remembered that design thinking is not a linear process but an iterative process. Testing the prototype though, is referred to as “fail fast and fail forward” in the lean start up vocabulary. Uncovering user difficulties prompt the design team to go back to the drawing board to overcome them and integrate the new solutions into the prototype. Several iterations of the model might be required.

The poultry project for example uncovered that free-range broilers were most favoured in the community. The Champion then developed a system using wild reeds (abundant at the river edge) to demarcate and keep the chickens in check. He too had to develop a training package for the growth of healthy birds that he had not planned for in the initial round.

Camelot farms realised that promoting rabbit meat for consumption was far more difficult than she imagined. She had to redevelop a marketing education programme which incorporated demonstrations on how to prepare the meat in African dishes to create interest in the idea. She solicited the help of local women who were known for the preparation of good food to be her advocates in the slow process of conversion to a cheap and good source of protein. In addition, she educated households on the by-products of rabbits,

namely urine as fertiliser and skin for fashion accessories as additional income generating activities to further influence programme members.

7. LESSONS LEARNT

Some interesting learnings may be captured from this reflective exercise, the process of which is evolving over time. The design thinking exercise demonstrated the potential for creating and/or refining innovative solutions to problems. As described in the various stages through the process, social entrepreneurs refined their solutions/ processes or their entire enterprises to become more innovative. The design sprint started off as an experiment in promoting epistemic fluency in a group of lowly educated mission driven practitioners and gained momentum as the process saw positive results. Design thinking can be thus be used positively in community settings which are not generally associated with innovative thinking and/or behaviour.

The interaction with the student teams (volunteers) proved to be very valuable. Diversity of thought and ideas contributed to the creativity and served as a testing ground for the various phases in the design thinking process. This experience was a 'win-win' as students learned from the experiences as much as the Champions did.

Participants enjoyed the novelty of the design thinking approach and appreciated the applicability and iterative applications in their enterprises.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this reflective exercise is in the power of design thinking in engendering inclusivity. While previous discussions centred on the importance of user-centeredness and participatory design (Bjögvinsson, Ehn & Hillgren 2012:104), this experience demonstrates the potential when community activists design their own solutions for themselves, analogous to when the user becomes the designer.

It is also important to document that the Design Thinking process requires time and patience to yield good results. There were some occasions when the facilitator felt the urge to move on to make progress in the programme. Interestingly, the Design Thinking programme in adopting its own principles was continuously pivoted in iterations and in between, to ensure positive outcomes.

8. CONCLUSION

Design thinking is a human centred process which has been described as “messy” (Liedtka & Ogilvie 2011:10). This suggests that it is an iterative, flexible process that comprises several stages of continuous learning and development to arrive at novel desirable, feasible and viable solutions to complex problems. This process is well established in the technology space with Human Computer Interaction paving the way for the development of the method.

In recent years the process has been applied in a range of industries and to a range of problems from health to education to science. This application of design thinking to a social entrepreneurship programme is prompted by the similarities of design thinking principles with social entrepreneurship especially in their orientation to human centeredness, altruism and experimentation and testing and also by the complexity of the social and economic challenges facing Champions in their poverty-stricken rural communities and in their search to make positive changes in their communities.

For example, a focus on the provision of food to HIV positive mothers and girls, design thinking has delivered an innovative solution in a women’s baking co-operative that works as an incubator comprising free standing wood-fired ovens in which these women bake bread (and subsequently pizzas and muffins) to feed their families. Through the sale of the products, the “HIV Walk- in Centre” generates additional income for the co-operative.

From tanning hides left over from ritual ceremonies, another Champion has developed an enterprise training women and young people to handcraft leather goods from waste leather sourced from nearby footwear and furniture manufacturers. This concept emerged from the process of design thinking.

There are several stories of how the process has delivered innovative models/ products and services that continue to make positive change in communities served by Champions of KwaZulu Natal. This exercise has demonstrated the use and power of Design Thinking in an unusual environment with positive outcomes.

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