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The Key Factors in Social Innovation Projects

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Abstract

This article presents a review of the specialized literature on the critical factors for the planning and administration of social innovation projects and the main barriers or obstacles that these projects face. Social innovation is currently disseminated in Latin America as a solution to the social problems that exist in the region, so it is important to identify the key factors that must be considered in the planning and administration of these projects to guarantee their success. However, in spite of its importance, specialized literature identifying these barriers is still scarce. The methodology used is a qualitative approach of selecting, reviewing and analyzing scientific articles or papers from indexed journals. This article can be useful to people, organizations and institutions involved in the planning and administration of social innovation projects.

Keywords: Social innovation, Social innovation projects, Key factors

1. Introduction

Social innovation is considered a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that has gone from emerging and marginal to occupying a relevant position in the political-social discourse (Abreu, 2011). Currently, there is a special interest in Latin America to know a suitable methodology for carrying out and implementing this type of projects in order to maximize benefits and minimize risks. Social innovation is considered a driver for social change (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010). This article presents a review of the specialized literature on the critical factors for the planning and administration of social innovation projects and the main barriers or obstacles that these projects face.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social innovation

Social innovation according to Murray, Caulier-Grice and Mulgan (2010) are new ideas (products, services and models) that, at the same time, satisfy social needs and create new relationships or social collaborations. These innovations are good for society and improve the capacity to act of

society. According to Saúl (2011), social innovation presents creative solutions for social problems that generate growth and business opportunities, are more efficient, effective and sustainable solutions than existing solutions, that is to say, social innovation creates value for society (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008).

However, the specialized literature also focuses on how social innovation increases social values or benefits for society. Echeverría (2008) argues that, contrary to the companies that innovate to improve productivity and competitiveness to reach new markets, social innovation seeks to increase social values: well-being, quality of life, social inclusion, solidarity, citizen participation, environmental quality, health care, the efficiency of public services or the educational level of a society. In this way a social innovation project is relevant insofar as it is aimed at obtaining social values. This, in turn, indicates that social values must have a measure, in a comparative scale, to guide the objectives of social innovation. This measure must be carried out after a certain action that has social impact had been established in order to find out if, as a consequence of it, the welfare or quality of life of groups of people had improved or not.

These new solutions to social problems usually apply when there are certain characteristics or particular circumstances in such problems. According to Mulgan, Tucker, Ali, and Sanders (2007) innovation is an imperative when problems get worse, systems do not work, and institutions reflect past problems. The problems addressed by social innovation are not simple, on the contrary, they are difficult to solve and very complex (Kesselring & Leitner, 2008).

Ümarik, Loogma and Tafel-Viia (2014) mentioned that social innovations have a series of common characteristics: the trigger for change, social innovations occur, for example, due to unsatisfied needs or in the face of a crisis; agents of change, or drivers of change; social interaction and learning, which promote the transfer of knowledge; the basis of legitimacy; social benefit, or to meet social needs. Furthermore, unlike innovations for competition in the market place, social innovations produce shared value that goes to the hands of society and not to private sectors (Phills et al., 2008).

According to Veresné Somosi and Balaton (2016), innovation is one of the determining factors of economic growth and that the actors of the economy have recognized that in regions where there is a lack of innovation, social innovation can be a compensating factor in these regions. Estensoro (2015) mentioned that social innovation is an issue that still needs further studies to clarify if can expand and improve its impact on society.

Social innovation includes applying innovation to social problems, but a social innovation project shows differences with respect to an innovation project for market competition. In social innovation, the emphasis is placed on the competencies of institutions to generate social values. Social innovations contemplate the convergence of diverse actors and social agents, as well as, different processes around the recognized problem and with demonstrable impact (Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado, 2008).

Social innovation is also an endogenous process of self-organization, that is, the articulation of one's own resources (materials, knowledge, etc.). It is an exogenous eco-organized process, in relation to a changing environment with socio-cultural, historical conditions. (Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado, 2008). On the other hand, Godin (2012) argued that during the first half of the 20th century social innovation was discussed, above all, as a process of adjustment between society and technological innovation.

Innovation is sometimes confused with invention, innovation requires more than an original invention and its application to a new diligence. It is a process that considers the actions that generate a sustained change in time and space. The ability to innovate is not considered an individual skill nor a sum of individual skills, it is a shared social competence among diverse social actors (Engel, 1997).

The pressure on the political and economic factors explains why communities seek to develop social innovations. Generally, these social innovations are related to high poverty rates and problems related to education, health and employment. Economic and structural crises also allow communities to seek alternatives for social innovation, not only linked to government assistance (Agostini, Tondolo, & Tondolo, 2017).

2.2 Social innovation projects

Developing social innovation implies having certain characteristics in such projects: (a) social, that is to say, that benefits a group of people, for example, benefits them in acquiring a better quality of life for a group that is at risk; (b) genuine, that is, it comes from the people themselves and from the support groups; (c) original, it is not a repetition experience; consolidated, that is to say that it has passed the experimentation phase; expansive, meaning that it could be replicated elsewhere; (d) transformative, meaning that it has an impact in relation to social development variables such as costs, employment, coverage, creation of new opportunities (Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado, 2008).

On the conditions for innovation Mulgan, Ali, Halkett and Sanders (2007) indicated that they should be facilitated by institutional agents and public managers. These conditions have to do with legal, organizational, financial and political factors, but these factors alone do not guarantee the success of social innovation, but rather the synergy of all these factors, since sometimes the absence of one is enough to break the link of innovation.

Regarding the scenarios, Alonso-Martínez, González-Álvarez and Nieto (2015) mentioned the importance of socially innovative environments in order to encourage business creation in a region, since it has been demonstrated that socially innovative environments improve the economic and social wealth of a place and contribute, technologically, to the development of a region.

In social innovation, the concept of productivity is also applied, as there is a direct relationship between innovation and improvement of business productivity (Cotec, 2009). In social innovation, this productivity is based on social values, that is, in obtaining better conditions for interest groups measured in social values.

From this point of view, two different theoretical models to study social innovation can be applied, the open innovation model (Chesbrough, 2004; 2005) and the triple helix model (Etzkowitz, 2002), as these models seek to increase the social values of interest groups, not competition in a business market.

In business innovation the open innovation model (Chesbrough, 2004; 2005), argues that the future of the company is something that is created, invented and innovated with all its stakeholders (employees, partners, customers, local communities, shareholders, suppliers ...), companies are no longer able to address the entire innovation process on their own and must rely on external resources (intellectual property, ideas, products, people, institutions) that must be integrated into their own innovation chain . Social innovation necessarily applies the open innovation model, since it requires the interaction and exchange of knowledge of various groups or social agents.

In business innovation, the triple helix model (Etzkowitz, 2002) calls into question the goodness of the linear model of innovation: basic research, applied research, technological development, marketing and product launch, and relates to the university and public research organizations, businesses and administrations. The success of the system will depend, according to this model, on the existence of relationships between the agents as this encourages interaction. In social innovation, the process is not linear, rather it requires multiple interaction between social agents such as public bodies, non-governmental organizations, etc., that participate in the project.

2.3 The stages of a social innovation project

Buckland and Murillo (2013) mentioned that innovation has six stages: (a) diagnosis and analysis of the problem, which is a participatory evaluation of the problem, thinking models systems; (b) generation of proposals, user surveys, bank of ideas, suggestions, etc.; (c) the development of a prototype and pilot test, evaluation of expenditures vs social impact, analysis of income and results; (d) the business model; (e) expansion and dissemination strategy, preparation of matrices of social accounting, benefits of social investment, shared value accounting, social audit; (f) systemic change, comparative results, existence of new systems.

In the development of social innovation projects, four stages are identified: (a) the proposal, this must be applicable to the social need that tries to solve, success in this stage depends on the definition of the social problem and access to ideas and knowledge with which it can be solved; (b) implementation, this depends on many conditions to apply innovation among them the financing

that is required for pilot projects, this is the experimental stage of innovation; (c) learning and development, in this stage the success depends on the set of elements that favor learning and the opportunities that exist for the development of new capacities or to systematize the experience; (d) the dissemination of innovations at the local, national and international levels, the capacity to replicate social innovation to expand the beneficiaries (The Young Foundation, 2007).

In an era of knowing results and new ways to measure social impact, tools have been developed to measure the shared impact between social, economic and ecological value, such as the CIC34 tool, although there are no universal formulas to measure social impact (Buckland & Murillo, 2014).

2.4 Key factors of social innovation projects

The critical or key factors are those that must be considered for the success of social innovation projects because of their own characteristics, they also have various factors that must be managed in order to facilitate a creative replication.

In the literature, several key factors for the development of social innovation projects are mentioned: Buckland and Murillo (2013) mentioned five important factors for social innovation projects, which they called the pillars of social innovation, these are: (a) social impact, which is to achieve a social transformation and solve a problem addressed; (b) economic sustainability, is that the financial model and economic sustainability guarantee survival in the future; (c) type of innovation constitutes an innovation whether closed or open, that is incremental or radical and presents innovative features; (d) inter-sectoral collaboration, that there are different actors in the initiative and that they relate to each other; (e) scalability and replicability, scalability is that the initiative can expand or multiply and replicability is the initiative that can be replicated in a different situation.

For Rodríguez Blanco, Carreras and Sureda (2012) the key factors that influence social innovation in non-governmental organizations are: team training, leadership, organizational culture, team commitment, external pressure, resources and available means, external support and demands of interest groups.

According to Rodríguez Herrera and Alvarado (2008), the important factors or criteria that should be considered in a social innovation are: (a) associativity, which is the ability to organize and mobilize groups, especially the participation of actors; (b) integrality, which is the articulation of knowledge, experiences and responses; (c) sustainability, which is continuity over time thanks to creative solutions that adapt to the restriction of resources, this criterion is a necessary condition for replication; (d) innovation, concrete transforming action generally of a collective nature that offers a response to a given problem, through new processes, new techniques, new ways of organizing the action; (e) replicability, which is the possibility of appropriating the teaching of an innovative experience by other authors in different circumstances.

Howaldt, Butzin, Domanski and Kaletka (2014) also mentioned that there are five key dimensions that affect the potential of social innovations, their field of action and their impact, these are: (a) to understand social innovation, how social innovation relates to technology and business innovation, (b) objective and social demands, how systemic changes are addressed, (c) actors, networks and governance, how social innovation projects are managed, (d) dynamic process, how innovation is dynamically developed, (e) resources, capacities and barriers, including financial, human resources, regulations, etc.

In contrast, Neumeier (2017) identified three key factors for the success of social innovations: (1) the relative advantage that the innovation would have over the current situation, compatibility with the current experiences and values of society; complexity, how complex it is for the environment where it is going to be developed; experience, degree of experience to develop it, observation of results; (2) factors that influence the margin of maneuver of the network of actors of social innovation, which are the responsibility of the actors, organizational culture, organizational structure of the actors; and (3) factors that influence the actual participation process: commitment, skills, competence and willingness to innovate by the various actors.

Other authors such as Rodríguez Herrera and Alvarado (2008) mentioned that the key success factors in social innovation at the endogenous level are: the precise identification of the

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problem, the elaboration of a diagnosis of what is to be changed; the leadership, as it is of group actions and it is necessary to have cooperative leadership, the leadership sustains the innovative impulses, while the exogenous factors are to develop alliances and networks that allow to mobilize resources especially of the knowledge, the expertise, of diverse actors; another factor is that social innovations come into direct contact with policy managers who exchange experience, and also requires an alliance with the public sector to broaden the impact of innovations on a different scale.

Developing social innovation projects requires changes to the current social practice, to implement these changes requires an organized community or non-governmental organization in order to improve the impact on social care or the productive dynamics of social practice (Astrorga, 2004). In addition, these changes to the current social practice must be accompanied by a sum of skills of different social actors, since social innovation cannot be considered an individual skill or as the sum of the skills but as a social competence shared by social actors, social learning intervenes in this aspect (Engel, 1997).

According to Swieringa and Wierdsma (1992), the organization assimilates new knowledge through joint work and joint learning for collective development. The joint work of the different social actors required by social innovation is in both directions, in shared work as a sum of skills and in the generation of collective knowledge through the interaction of the various agents involved in a social innovation project. Sánchez (2014) mentioned that innovation is best developed when there are effective partnerships between small organizations and businessmen and large organizations that can develop the idea on a large scale.

In social innovation, the associative factor among different social agents that form a group to carry out the social innovation project is important, considering the group to the community's institutionality, volunteering, de facto alliances, whether informal or contractual (Rodríguez Herrera & Alvarado, 2008).

Morais-da-silva, Takahashi, and Segatto (2016) mentioned that social innovation goes beyond the initial phases of the project and includes the scalability phase. Its focus is to expand the impact of social innovation beyond the local level, in which there is still a gap in specialized literature. Regarding the scalability phase, Kolk and Lenfant (2015) emphasized that there are difficulties and lack of rules for the scalability of social innovation, which is why government support is necessary.

2.5 Barriers to social innovation projects

The barriers in the projects are those that get in the way of the realization of the projects. In social innovation, there are also barriers that must be considered in the management of these projects in order to minimize their impact and, thus, achieve the objectives set out for this type of projects.

The literature also includes the different barriers that prevent social innovation. According to Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012) the barriers that prevent social innovation are six: (a) lack of technical capacity, (b) aversion to risk, (c) financing structures, (d) the management team does not have enough confidence in innovation, (e) mixed teams: volunteers and paid staff, and (f) lack of experience in innovation.

Oganisjana, Eremina, Gvatua, Kabwende, and Chukwu (2017) mentioned that there are eight barriers in social innovation projects: (a) lack of funding; (b) passivity in society; (c) administrative and bureaucratic barriers; (d) absence of a legal framework; (e) lack of access to information needed; (f) deficiency of society to open up to the experience of other groups; (g) lack of experience in carrying out social innovation projects; (h)) passivity and low level of stakeholder support. They also mentioned that the ways to minimize barriers are: promotional activities, seeking external financial support, educating society, encouraging stakeholders to participate in the project, raising awareness about the problem, and sharing information.

2.6 Importance of the problem

Echeverría (2008) mentioned that the Barcelona Forum in 2004 highlighted the importance of social innovation because many companies and institutions developed projects in this regard. Crawford, Aguinis, Lichtenstein, Davidsson, and McKelvey (2015) mentioned that public bodies are promoting

the creation of companies aware that such actions are important for economic development. Igarashi and Okada (2015) emphasized that the concept of social innovation within the field of innovation is one of the concepts that has attracted most attention.

Authors such as Sanzo-Pèrez, Álvarez-González and Rey-García (2015)entioned that, during the last decade, social innovation has become a prominent topic for academics, companies and public institutions. This growing interest is due to its possible positive effects on social welfare and sustainable development.

Social innovation is considered a driver of social change (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010), so it is important to analyze the key factors that facilitate the realization of innovation projects and the existing barriers for this type of projects to benefit the administrators of these projects and the institutions or organizations that drive these projects.

Nobrega, Macario and Pasa (2016) mentioned that current society presents challenges that point towards a process of social transformation, which requires profound changes in social structures in search for social development and solutions for the effectiveness of social practices. This approach in the social dimension is important because it highlights the critical development of the current model of society, in its economic, political and social dimensions as it relates to growth, as well as the growth of social inequality, unemployment and new risks.

The Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation SICP (2010) mentioned that social innovation is not a new idea, but in recent years it has attracted greater attention from political and economic leaders. So the United States created the SICP in recognition that the best solutions to the challenges will be found in communities throughout the USA. Hillgren, Seravalli and Emilson (2011) mentioned that social innovation has also become a key priority in the latest innovation policy of the European Union and is considered a new field that must be fed.

In Latin America a series of social innovation projects are emerging as alternative solutions to the problems of the region, so it is important to know the main key factors for success in these projects and the main barriers they face. In this way, project managers would have greater tools and knowledge to carry out the projects and minimize the risks.

Social innovation is also important because it is necessary to develop policies on social innovation in different countries. Domanski, Monge, Quitiaquez, and Rocha (2016) stated that in recent years there has been an increase in events and debates on social innovation that is generating a more conducive environment for their development, but despite this, they are considered isolated actions that have not managed to influence the relevant actors for the creation of policies on social innovation.

This is how this trend arises in which social innovation seeks to help society to solve the problems of dehumanization caused by industrialization. The human being is becoming aware of his social role and of his integrating ability to create a systemic universe that can build and reconstruct, attributing to organizations, governments and the so-called Third Sector, the social responsibility to truly satisfy the new needs and challenges of society (Bonilla, 2012).

It is necessary to emphasize that with the progress of the processes of democratization and decentralization, with the consequent increase in the functions of territorial public administrations, political and technical managers have been forced to look for appropriate approaches to face the growing problems and demands of the population (Rui de Britto, 2000).

3. Methodology

In order to find out the critical or key factors that social innovation project managers should consider to improve their social impact, a methodology of qualitative approach was used. This consists of applying a selection, review, and analysis of scientific articles, books, indexed journals and existing documentation on critical factors to consider in the planning and administration of social innovation projects and the main barriers encountered by this type of projects. The search was conducted in databases of indexed articles, books and the internet using the following descriptors in the search: "social innovation", "social innovation projects", "social innovation factors", and "barriers in social innovation". With the selected articles and documents, a comparative, selective and critical analysis was carried out to obtain relevant information. These findings are shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1. Key factors of Social Innovation

Key Factor	Descriptión	References
Social impact	Social innovation has an impact on society	Buckland and Murillo (2013) Rodríguez Herrera and Alvarado (2008) Neumeier (2017)
Sustainability	Social innovation projects are sustainable over time	Buckland and Murillo (2013) Rodríguez Herrera and Alvarado (2008)
Innovation	Innovative projects, new ways of doing things	Buckland and Murillo (2013) Rodríguez Herrera and Alvarado (2008)
Intersectoral collaboration	Collaboration of various social agents, associativity.	Buckland and Murillo (2013) Rodríguez Herrera and Alvarado (2008) Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012) Sánchez (2014) Neumeier (2017) Kolk and Lenfant (2015)
Scalability	The initiative can be expanded to a larger size	Buckland and Murillo (2013) Rodríguez, Herrera, and Alvarado (2008) Morais-da-silva et al. (2016) Kolk y Lenfant (2015)
Replicability	The initiative can be replicated to other locations or organizations.	Buckland and Murillo (2013) Rodríguez, Herrera, and Alvarado (2008)
Social learning	Shared learning among various social actors involved in innovation	Engel (1997
Internal factors to the organization (training, leadership, organizational culture)	Factors related to the work team of social innovation	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012) Neumeier (2017)
Financial resources	Resources for the execution of the project	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012) Howaldt et al (2014)
External pressure and requirements of interest groups	Requirements and demands of interest groups	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012)

Table 2. Main Barriers Identified for Social Innovation

Barriers	Description	References
Lack of technical capacity	The team does not have the technical capacity to achieve innovation.	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012)
Risk aversion	Fear of risk on the part of the work team	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012)
Financing structures	There is lack of total financing to achieve innovation.	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012) Oganisjana et al. (2017)
Management team without confidence in innovation	The team that leads the innovation does not have confidence in achieving innovation.	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012)
Lack of mixed teams	The work team does not have diverse skills and knowledge.	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012) Oganisjana et al. (2017)
Lack of experience in innovation	The work team has no experience in innovation	Rodríguez Blanco et al. (2012) Oganisjana et al. (2017)
Passivity in society	Society is passive in response to its problems	Oganisjana et al. (2017)
Administrative and bureaucratic barriers	administrative and bureaucratic barriers difficult to authorize and execute project	Oganisjana et al. (2017)
Absence of legal framework	There is no legal framework for the execution of the project	Oganisjana et al. (2017)
Lack of access to information needed	Need of information and knowledge sources to develop innovation	Oganisjana et al. (2017)
Passivity and low level of stakeholder	support Stakeholders are passive about project support	Oganisjana et al. (2017)

The results of this review identifies the key factors for the realization of social innovation projects mentioned in the specialized literature, as well as, the barriers that this type of projects face. In Table 1, the main key factors identified in the specialized literature are shown.

When contrasting the various factors outlined in Table 1, it was found that several of these factors are important, necessary, and non-exclusive and must be present in each social innovation project to achieve the benefits. These factors are: social impact, which it is the main objective of social innovation, that there are benefits measured in social values to the beneficiary group without social benefit, and that there is no social innovation. The sustainability factor is also an important factor. This is the ability of social projects to be sustainable over time, especially in the economic aspect. This factor is important to consider in the planning of social projects so that the benefits are sustainable in the future. The innovation factor implies that social projects must have new creative solutions to the traditional social value. The inter-sectoral collaboration factor is important because the synergy of collaborating with many social agents in the search for solutions and sharing knowledge, technologies, and working on the solution together, improves the capacity to develop innovation. The scalability factor allows the projects to grow so that the benefits can reach a larger group of people. The replicability factor is the capacity that a project is replicable to another geographical location or other groups of beneficiaries. All the above-noted factors, (social impact, sustainability, innovation, intersectoral collaboration, scalability and replicability) must be considered in the planning of the social project because they are essential to achieve the objectives of social innovation, they are not mutually exclusive. The other factors outlined in Table 1 are not critical for the success of social innovation, nevertheless, they should be known and applied should the need arise.

Table 2 shows the main barriers identified in the review of the specialized literature. A contrasting analysis of all the barriers shows that the barriers can be present jointly or individually in social innovation projects. All the barriers are considered important depending on the magnitude with which they are present in each case or project. The important thing is that these barriers be known from the planning stage so as to minimize their impact and also be considered in the implementation stage of the social innovation project.

5. Conclusions

An analysis of the specialized literature shows that there are several key factors for the success of social innovation projects. The most important are: (a) social impact; (b) economic sustainability; (c) type of innovation; (d) inter-sectoral collaboration; and (e) scalability and replicability. These key factors are outlined in Table 1.

In addition, the analysis of the specialized literature shows that the main barriers affecting social innovation projects are: (a) lack of technical capacity; (b) aversion to risk; (c) financing structures; (d) the management team lacks sufficient confidence in innovation; (e) mixed teams: volunteers and paid staff; and (f) lack of experience in innovation. These barriers are outlined in Table 2.

It is recommended that managers of social innovation projects take into account these factors when carrying out their planning in order to ensure the project's success. This will minimize the impact of any barriers that may exist, especially, considering the skills of the team in charge of the project, their technical preparation and experience.

In addition to the foregoing, a thorough analysis of the needs for social change and the capacities to be developed in the organization for the beneficiary group of social innovation is also essential. The project should be carefully designed. Besides, to be strong and successful, a social innovation has to be focused, focused on the social value to be obtained.

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