5. The social entrepreneur – Competencies, traits, and motivations

The concept of the social entrepreneur has been determined in Chapter 2 as one of the defining sub-concepts of social entrepreneurship. The purpose of this chapter is to review existing literature about the social entrepreneur and to discuss the different roles of the social entrepreneur with regard to the development of social innovations. Existing literature has addressed different aspects of the social entrepreneur. For example, some have investigated the emotional and motivational aspects of social entrepreneurs (e.g., Miller et al. 2012a), some have attempted to identify typical personality traits (e.g., Nga and Shamuganathan 2010), and others have researched different patterns of behaviour among different types of social entrepreneurs (e.g. Zahra et al., 2009). This literature review focuses on literature which has been identified as following the social innovation school of thought since the understanding of social entrepreneurship in this thesis emphasises social innovation, on the one hand, and since the social entrepreneur has been found to be more central in this stream of literature (Bacq and Janssen 2011), on the other hand. The following section provides an overview about the extant literature on the concept of the social entrepreneur.

5.1 Literature review

Dees’ (1998a) definition of social entrepreneurship in his seminal essay on the meaning of social entrepreneurship outlines several aspects of the social entrepreneur. Dees (1998a: 4) states that social entrepreneurs, upon adopting a social mission, create social value by recognising and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities, continuously innovating, adapting, and learning, and by acting boldly without being limited by the resources at hand (ibid.). Social entrepreneurs are further characterised by exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and the outcomes that they create (ibid.).

In the book “How to change the world: Social entrepreneurs and the power of new ideas” by Bornstein, the author (Bornstein 2004: 233–241) identifies six qualities of successful social entrepreneurs. It is suggested that the first five qualities describe the behaviour of successful social entrepreneurs while the sixth quality describes their motivation. The first quality is the ‘willingness to self-correct’. Although it may be inherently difficult to admit that something does not work, social entrepreneurs are inclined to self-correct since they are more concerned
about the long-term goal than a particular plan or approach (ibid.). Bornstein suggests that this quality of the willingness to self-correct is essential in making SE organisations successful since they must be able to adapt to complex and changing circumstances. The second quality of successful entrepreneurs is the ‘willingness to share credit’. Bornstein states that this quality is a critical path to success since more people are willing to help social entrepreneurs if they are willing to share the credit. This quality also captures the social entrepreneur’s ability to spot important people and their ideas and connect them and to “pull them together” (Bornstein 2004: 235) in order to bring about social change. The ‘willingness to break free of established structures’ is the third quality of successful entrepreneurs identified by Bornstein. Often, social entrepreneurs who are initially involved in existing business organisations or academia, break-off from their context and build their own organisation in the citizen sector since the citizen sector provides a larger latitude to test and market their ideas. What social entrepreneurs gain by doing so is to gain the freedom to act and to “see beyond the orthodoxy in their fields” (Bornstein 2004: 236). The fourth quality of successful social entrepreneurs is the ‘willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries’. Bornstein states that one of the primary functions of the social entrepreneur is to be a kind of social alchemist who combines ideas, experiences, and resources of people from different fields which would otherwise not naturally come together. Facing complex and “whole” problems, social entrepreneurs are willing to engage the world in its wholeness to find solutions to social problems by crossing disciplinary boundaries. Bornstein poses that this “creative combining” of social entrepreneurs may be an intuitive response to the fragmentation and specialisation in modern industrial societies (Bornstein 2004: 237). The ‘willingness to work quietly’ is the fifth quality of successful social entrepreneurs. Instead of wanting to stand in the limelight, social entrepreneurs often work quietly over years. It is due to this quality that some social entrepreneurs are recognised only after years. Bornstein (2004) takes Ashoka’s founder Bill Drayton as an example who had a relevant impact on the practice of social entrepreneurship while working rather unobserved and quietly. Bornstein assesses that this quiet but steady pressure of social entrepreneurs is a crucial force in bringing about social change in the world. The sixth quality of successful social entrepreneurs that Bornstein (2004) lists is a “strong ethical impetus”. Bornstein (2004) names two sources of the motivation of social entrepreneurs. Firstly, it has been reported that social entrepreneurs were often influenced early on in their childhood by parents, grandparents or other close persons who had outstandingly strong values. Secondly, a critical incident in the life of the social entrepreneur, which deeply shook them emotionally, often acted as a catalyst for them to act to alleviate the suffering of others.

In the book “The rise of the social entrepreneur” by Leadbeater (1997), the author writes about the experiences of several social entrepreneurs and identifies several qualities, skills, and
values which are necessary to become a social entrepreneur. Leadbeater (1997: 53) describes social entrepreneurs as individuals who drive their organisation through charisma and leadership, and thus attributes the trait of the charismatic individual to the social entrepreneur. Leadbeater (1997) states that social entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial, innovative, and transformatory. These attributes describe the behaviour and skills that social entrepreneurs employ to achieve their mission. They are entrepreneurial in that they are able to perceive opportunities in under-utilised and discarded resources to use them in new ways to satisfy unmet needs. Social entrepreneurs are innovative since they create new products, new services, and new ways of solving problems by combining traditionally separate resources. They are further transformatory by transforming the institutions they are in charge of and by re-inventing declining and stagnant organisations making them effective, creative, and dynamic. Beyond these institutions they also transform communities and neighbourhoods they serve by creating opportunities for self-development (ibid.). Leadbeater (1997) further states that social entrepreneurs are leaders, storytellers, people managers, visionary opportunists, and alliance builders. These roles are on the one hand attributes of the social entrepreneur which have, on the other hand, implications for their behaviour and also describe their skills. A quality that social entrepreneurs have in abundance is, according to Leadbeater (1997), leadership. They are able to state a mission and mobilise people around that mission in their organisation. Hence, they are very good in motivating people and staff through creating a sense of mission. They are good storytellers and are, therefore, very persuasive and compelling by communicating their ideas and visions through stories and parables. Leadbeater (1997) further states that social entrepreneurs are very good in managing people rather than managing plans and procedures. They have a talent in recruiting the correct staff and spotting crucial people who can help to bring their mission forward. Social entrepreneurs are further, what Leadbeater calls, visionary opportunists. They have a vision and are at the same time pragmatic and opportunistic trying to make use of opportunities even if they do not fit their initial plans. According to Leadbeater (1997), social entrepreneurs are also great alliance builders. They build networks of support for their mission and organisations and are in general very good in networking being able to talk to different people with different backgrounds and political views. They themselves are beyond the traditional political division of right, left, market, and state.

Zahra et al. (2009) develop a typology of social entrepreneurs based on the work of Hayek, Kirzner, and Schumpeter. The authors (2009: 519) state that, generally, social entrepreneurs enhance social wealth by exploiting opportunities and by creating new ventures or managing existing ventures in innovative ways. However, the authors further assess that social entrepreneurs differ in how they do this; they differ with regard to how they discover social opportunities, how they determine their impact on the broader social system, and how they
combine the resources to exploit these social opportunities (ibid.). Hence, Zahra et al. (2009) suggest a typology of social entrepreneurs: The Social Bricoloeur (theoretically inspired by Hayek), the Social Constructionist (theoretically inspired by Kirzner), and the Social Engineer (theoretically inspired by Schumpeter). Social Bricoloeurs address local social needs. Their scope is local and small scale, and often episodic in nature rather than long-term, and they act as local agents who understand and know the often not easily discernable needs of local communities. Social Bricoloeurs need only limited resource requirements and their local scope allows for quick responses to social problems. However, they may still face limited resources and expertise which may prevent them to address other needs or to grow their social entrepreneurial activities to other localities. Social Constructionists provide goods and services, which cannot be addressed by governments, agencies and businesses, to address social needs by building alternative structures. Their scope is from small to large scale and from local to international. They institutionalise their activities to address a social need in the long-term. Since Social Constructionists become active where the state and the market fail to address social needs, they have no competition and may even be welcomed since they prevent the development of severe situations for which the state may be held responsible. Since the activities of the Social Constructionists address on-going needs by institutionalising its services, professional volunteers and staff are required. The third type of social entrepreneurs, viz., the Social Engineers, creates new social systems which prove to be more effective than existing ones in addressing essential social needs. Their scope is large scale from the national to the international level. They build lasting new structures which challenge existing orders. They engage in a process of creative-destruction by ripping apart existing social structures and replacing them by socially more efficient ones and are, therefore, instrumental in driving social change. Since these social engineers challenge existing structures, they may face a high degree of resistance.

Barendsen and Gardner (2004) studied social entrepreneurs in comparison to two other related groups, i.e., business entrepreneurs and young service professionals. The authors found that the motivation of the social entrepreneurs often stems from a trauma which they experienced early in their life and which urged them later to take up a social mission. Other social entrepreneurs, however, who have not gone through a traumatic experience, have experienced a deep transformative incident (ibid.). Barendsen and Gardner (2004) found that both service professionals and social entrepreneurs have been motivated to the same extent by traumatic and transformative experiences. The existence of a role model in their early years also has had an influence on both groups. The authors suggest that social entrepreneurs are similar to the group of service professionals, but their actions are more similar to those of business entrepreneurs. The personality of the social entrepreneur is described by the authors as energetic,
persistent, and confident. The social entrepreneurs that the authors studied were mostly spiritual or religious, which in turn also had an influence on them taking up a social mission. The authors suggest three strategies that social entrepreneurs use: Firstly, they reframe challenges into opportunities. Secondly, they feel very committed to the social mission and the people they serve. And thirdly, they evaluate their work and develop standards to measure their success.

Mair and Noboa (2006) propose a model which explains the social entrepreneurial intention formation. The authors state that “intentions reflect the motivational factors that influence behaviour” and can, therefore, help to predict behaviour. The authors suggest that the intention to set up a social venture develops from its perceived desirability and perceived feasibility. Two variables which are individual based precede the perceived desirability of setting up a social venture. Hence, these two variables are considered to be the antecedents of perceived desirability. The first antecedent is the emotional attitude of empathy, i.e., the sensitivity to others’ feelings; the second antecedent is the cognitive process of moral judgement which motivates individuals to help others for the sake of a common good (ibid.). Similar to the case of perceived desirability, two antecedents of perceived feasibility exist. These antecedents are self-efficacy and social support. Self-efficacy refers to the belief of people in their own “capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to exercise control over events in their lives” (Mair and Noboa 2006: 130). Social support as an antecedent of perceived feasibility refers to the trust and cooperation that social entrepreneurs derive from their social networks. All four variables, empathy, moral judgement, self-efficacy, and social support are, according to Mair and Noboa’s (2006) model, positively related to the formation of the intention to set up a social venture. This, in turn, influences the behaviour of individuals and may lead to the actual setting up of a social enterprise (ibid.).

Also, Miller et al. (2012a) investigate motivational factors of social entrepreneurs by proposing compassion as a motivational construct of social entrepreneurship. The authors propose a model which describes how compassion transforms into social entrepreneurship. Compassion, understood as a prosocial motivator which is characterised by other orientation and an emotional connection to people’s suffering, expresses itself in three different cognitive and affective mechanisms: integrative thinking, prosocial cost-benefit analysis, and the commitment to alleviate others’ suffering. Compassion leads to integrative thinking since the prosocial motivation causes a heightened receptivity towards diverse information and leads to the openness towards new, non-traditional ideas and approaches for solving problems. Compassion as the emotional connection to others further expresses itself in prosocial cost-benefit analysis. In contrast to traditional cost-benefit analysis, prosocial cost-benefit analysis overcomes the individual’s reluctance to engage in activities with higher personal risk, and implies that individuals internalise benefits to others in their cost-benefit judgement (Miller et al.
5. Social entrepreneur

Compassion further leads to the commitment to alleviate others’ suffering. This mechanism makes individuals less responsive towards information that challenges the feasibility and viability of setting up a social venture and, hence, increases the probability that an individual engages with social entrepreneurship. However, the decision to engage in social entrepreneurship depends not only on the cognitive and affective processes induced by compassion, but also on the degree to which an individual perceives social entrepreneurship as a legitimate means to achieve the desired social goals. Miller et al. (2012a) suggest that the perceived pragmatic and moral legitimacy of the social enterprise in combination with the three mechanisms induced by compassion, influences an individual to engage in social entrepreneurship and, therefore, can predict the likelihood of an individual founding a social venture.

In a quantitative study, Nga and Shamuganathan (2010) investigate the personality traits that influence social entrepreneurial start-up intentions. The authors propose five social entrepreneurship dimensions in order to make the construct of social entrepreneurship measurable. These dimensions are: social vision, sustainability, social networking, innovation, and financial returns. The authors suggest social vision as a dimension of social entrepreneurship since social entrepreneurs are driven by their social visions. Sustainability as the second dimension implies that social entrepreneurs seek for sustainable solutions which ensure the preservation and protection of long-term survival and rights of communities and the environment. Arguing that social entrepreneurs use their social networks in order to achieve their mission and that these social networks often prove crucial in the success of their ventures, the authors suggest social networking as the third dimension of social entrepreneurship. The fourth dimension is the dimension of innovation since social innovation and creativity in solving problems is viewed as an important aspect of social entrepreneurship. Finally, financial returns forms the fifth dimension of social entrepreneurship, according to Nga and Shamuganathan (2010). This dimension describes the ability of the social entrepreneur to seize opportunities and compete for scarce resources. To investigate the influence of personality traits on social entrepreneurial start-up intentions, the authors (ibid.) base their study on the Big Five personality traits which are openness, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. The personality trait of openness describes an individual’s openness towards new experiences and novelty, in general. Extroversion as a trait describes peoples’ tendency to be sociable, outgoing, and having a positive attitude and assertive characteristics. The trait of agreeableness describes the ability to foster social consensus while upholding mutual understanding and trust in interpersonal relationships. People with the trait of conscientiousness prefer to conform with rules, try to maintain high standards of performance, and are characterised by a strong sense of responsibility and the need for achievement. The personality
trait of neuroticism describes the individual’s degree of emotional stability. A high degree of neuroticism implies mood swings, impulsiveness, low self-esteem and depression. The authors found that the traits of agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness generally have a positive influence on social entrepreneurship start-up intentions. The trait of agreeableness was especially found to have a positive influence across all five dimensions of social entrepreneurship (ibid.).

Miller et al. (2012b) compare the views of social entrepreneurship practitioners and educators with regard to important social entrepreneurship competencies. In their study, the authors created a survey of thirty-five competencies from social entrepreneurship literature. Social entrepreneurship practitioners evaluated these competencies and rated them according to their importance. To compare the rating of practitioners with educators, the authors created a list of relevant competencies by performing content analysis on social entrepreneurship course syllabi. Competencies that were considered as very important by both practitioners and educators were the ability to problem-solve, the competency of building effective teams, the competency of managing financial capital, the ability to lead and develop others, the ability to communicate with stakeholders, and interpersonal communication skills.

The literature review shows that the existing knowledge about the social entrepreneur is mostly conceptually derived. Very few studies exist which have investigated traits, behaviour, and motivational aspects of social entrepreneurs empirically. It is suggested that the current knowledge about the social entrepreneur can be broadly categorised into three themes. The first theme is about the important competencies of social entrepreneurs. Research about this theme seeks to identify and explain the behaviour and skills that are relevant for social entrepreneurs in achieving their missions. The second theme found in literature is about the traits of social entrepreneurs. Literature in this category seeks to identify the personality traits of social entrepreneurs. The third theme is about the motivational aspects of social entrepreneurs. This theme investigates aspects of the social entrepreneur related not only to motivational affect and emotion but also to cognitive processes which influence social entrepreneurial intention formation. Table 5 summarises the competencies, traits, and motivational aspects of social entrepreneurs suggested by literature.

<table>
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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Competencies, traits, motivations</th>
<th>Literature</th>
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<td>1. Competencies of social entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Recognising and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities.</td>
<td>Dees (1998a)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Continuously innovating, adapting, and learning.</td>
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<td>Acting boldly without being limited by resources at hand.</td>
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The next section attempts to identify important competencies of the social entrepreneur with regard to the development of social innovations.
5.2 The roles of the social entrepreneur in the social innovation process

Many of the above mentioned competencies of social entrepreneurs are related to the complex task of setting up and running a social entrepreneurship organisation. However, since this thesis specifically deals with only one aspect of the social entrepreneurial process, viz. the invention and development of social innovation, this section attempts to identify important competencies suggested by the literature review with regard to the development of social innovations. Hence, this section connects the main points suggested by the literature review with the model of social innovation which was developed in the previous chapter. To this end, three roles of the social entrepreneur as social innovator, change maker, and visionary are suggested. Figure 6 illustrates the different roles of the social entrepreneur with regard to the model of social innovation. Each of these roles emphasises important aspects of the complex process of social innovation and highlights the relevant competencies of the social entrepreneur. The following subsections discuss each of these roles in further detail.

Figure 6
Roles of the social entrepreneur
5. Social entrepreneur

5.2.1 The dimension of formalisation: The social innovator

The dimension of formalisation emphasises the role of the social entrepreneur as an innovator of new products, services, business models, and interventions. Hence, the social entrepreneur is viewed as a social innovator who designs and invents social innovations. Competencies such as creative combining (Bornstein 2004) and integrative thinking, i.e., being open towards new and untraditional approaches (Miller et al. 2012a) are relevant at this level. However, as discussed in Section 4.3.1, social innovations are very diverse and can be conceptualised along a formalisation continuum. It is suggested that the role of the social entrepreneur as a social innovator changes along the continuum. Since on one end of the continuum social innovations are highly formalised, the role of the social entrepreneur as a social innovator demands especially the skill of designing and inventing specific products and technologies. On the other hand, less formalised social innovations such as complex interventions, which are located on the other end of the continuum, and which often also consist of a bundle of different services, demand from the social entrepreneur a rather different invention process. These social innovations are often immediately implemented (dimension of change processes) in a trial and error process and only later formalised into a specific intervention programme. In some cases social entrepreneurs replicate social innovations as part of their activities and do not invent them themselves, microfinance being one such example. In summary, the role of the social entrepreneur as a social innovator emphasises notions of creative combining and openness towards new and untraditional approaches.

5.2.2 The dimension of change processes: The change maker

The dimension of change processes emphasises the social entrepreneur’s role as a change maker. Here, the social entrepreneur is a change agent who pushes through change against resistance from existing structures such as power relations and vested interests. She or he builds new structures by establishing new services, products, or by introducing a complex intervention which eventually leads to a change in social practices. By the very process of creating new structures, old structures are challenged and destroyed. This process can be understood as being analogous to Schumpeter’s idea of creative destruction (Schumpeter 1911; Swedberg 2009). For this, however, the social entrepreneur must often be aware and have an in-depth understanding of existing structures. She or he must be able to understand the root causes of social problems which are often not very obvious. Recognising and understanding the deep structures (Gersick 1991) which lead to a socially undesirable equilibrium, the social entrepreneur skilfully rearranges or establishes new structures which may lead to a higher level of social value (Dees 1998a; Dees and Anderson 2006; Martin and Osberg 2007). Relevant competencies which were identified from the literature review are the willingness to break free from established structures.
5. Social entrepreneur

(Bornstein 2004) and being transformatory by re-inventing organisations, communities and neighbourhoods (Leadbeater 1997). If the social entrepreneur replicates an existing social innovation such as, for example, microfinance, he or she must also know the existing social structures of the specific community he or she is working with and, therefore, needs to adjust and adapt the social innovation to the given circumstances (Evans and Clarke 2011). For example, social innovations such as an eco-friendly and low cost toilet for rural areas may not yield the same social value in different regions. Hence, it is the task of the social entrepreneur to know the circumstances and often also the mind-set of the local people in order to embed the product within a set of services – in this specific example, this include providing loans to purchase the toilets – so that the social innovation can effectively lead to an expansion of human capabilities and the sustenance of ecological capacity.

5.2.3 The dimension of social outcomes: The visionary

The role of the social entrepreneur emphasised by the dimension of social outcomes is that of the visionary. Social change and social innovation are often driven by social entrepreneurs with the ability to envision a better future for communities, the environment, or the world in general which, in turn, becomes a social mission and fuels her or his efforts in activating change processes (dimension of change processes) and in designing the tools (dimension of formalisation) to induce social change. Authors such as Barendsen and Gardner (2004) and Dees (1998a) have emphasised the importance for the social entrepreneur of being committed to the social mission. Another task of the social entrepreneur as a visionary is to evaluate social entrepreneurial activities with regard to if they help achieving his or her vision and mission (Barendsen and Gardner 2004).

5.3 Conclusion

Existing literature on the social entrepreneur was reviewed in this chapter, based on which a classification of the knowledge about the social entrepreneur into three different themes was suggested. These themes are: (1) competencies of the social entrepreneur, (2) traits of the social entrepreneur, and (3) motivations of the social entrepreneur. It was observed that very few empirical studies about the social entrepreneur exist to date and that most studies are conceptual. Building on the model of social innovation which was proposed in the previous chapter, three different roles of the social entrepreneur which are relevant for the development of social innovations were identified: the role of the social innovator, the role of the change-
5. Social entrepreneur

maker, and the role of the visionary. The model of the social entrepreneur draws attention to the complex demands and tasks that a social entrepreneur faces.

Having established a conceptual understanding of three sub-concepts of social entrepreneurship, i.e., the concepts of social value creation, social innovation, and the social entrepreneur, the remainder of the thesis presents an empirical, qualitative study of how social innovations are developed in social entrepreneurship. The next chapter presents the method and data collection procedures used in the study.