How can social enterprises become a “bridge” between marginalized people and society?

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PURPOSE

The purpose of my research is to show what social enterprises can get rid of the root of social exclusion and realize inclusion of marginalized people in society.

Because of the global economic and financial crisis, many people suffer social exclusion which is a process that deprives people of the resources required for participation in society and limits the choice of life systematically (e.g., Hills et. al., 2002) throughout the world. For instance, about 30million Americans use food stamps (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). In Russia, unemployment increases by 70,000 in a week (Russian government, 2008). In Japan, one of the groups of people who are excessively damaged by this recession is the challenged. In addition to the deep-rooted discrimination that only 7% of the 7million challenged can find jobs in the mainstream labour market, they face heartless treatment, unfair dismissal, by the recession. After November of 2008, the number of unfair dismissal of the challenged amounts to more than 200 in two months (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2003, 2009).

What can and should social enterprises do for tackling such social exclusion and building “inclusive society” that all people can live at ease? It is a challenge for social enterprises since the degree of social exclusion is very serious; however, they have an opportunity to address the difficult problem through socio-economic activity to bring benefits to socially excluded people, extend democracy and encourage solidarity among people (see: Borzaga and Defourny, 2001). In this paper, I discuss necessary conditions of social enterprises which can realize social inclusion.

CHARACTERISTICS AND METHODS

There are two characteristics of my research.

(1) Comparing “successful” social enterprises with “unsuccessful” ones on the basis of a clear definition

We already understand that social enterprises generally help marginalized people to gain confidence, effect changes in their lives and participate in social and economic activity through previous researches such as Nyssens (2006) and Spear et. al (2001); however, we do not find what social enterprises can eliminate the root of social exclusion because of difficulty of making a judgment on “success” and “failure” of social enterprises although all social enterprises can not necessarily achieve social inclusion (see: Amin et. al., 2002). Considering the social exclusion theory that paid work is the most effective way of overcoming social exclusion because it could broaden individual choice, bring confidence and create relationships with various people (e.g., Pierson, 2002) and the social capital theory that a wide network enables people to get a more extensive range of information, material resources and social support as compared to a limited network such as kinship (e.g., Putnam, 2000), I define successful social enterprises as social enterprises which can prompt marginalized people to be able to earn enough income for their lives and get along with others except their families. By comparing successful social enterprises with unsuccessful ones on the basis of the definition, I clarify necessary conditions of social enterprises which can realize social inclusion more appropriately.

(2) Learning from Japanese social enterprises which engage in support for the challenged
As Bridge et al. (2009) suggests, public policy encompassing funding, legal status and tax relief have a great influence on development of social enterprises; however, there are not special laws on social enterprises in Japan unlike Belgium, Italy and Portugal. By looking into the reason why some Japanese social enterprises can contribute to achievement of social and economic independence of the challenged, one of the most excluded groups of people in Japan, under such unfavourable institutional conditions as compared with others which can not contribute to it, I will show transferable essentials of social enterprises which can overcome social exclusion.

I conducted a questionnaire survey to 400 Japanese social enterprises which provide vocational and educational services for challenged adults and children through the random sampling method from April to July of 2008 and obtained 233 valid responses. I also implemented case studies including observation and semi-structured interviews with former and current CEOs, secretary-generals, some staff members and users to 6 successful social enterprises and 6 unsuccessful ones from June of 2008 to March of 2009. Putting the result of the questionnaire survey and that of the case studies together, I grasp the necessary conditions of social enterprises which can handle social exclusion.

**FINDINGS**

There are three major findings in my research. Firstly, what kind of vocational training and education social enterprises offer do not bring success to social enterprises. Secondly, successful social enterprises assign work on the basis of what kind of ability and talent individuals have, not whether they are the challenged or not. Thirdly, successful social enterprises provide services for not only the challenged but also for local residents, for-profit organizations, national and local governments and schools and so on. For example, they give concrete instructions to for-profit organizations on the way of supporting the challenged in the workplace.

In conclusion, I state that social enterprises can not tackle social exclusion automatically and only social enterprises which prompt various people to realize that everybody can help others and promote mutual help among people beyond difference of mental and physical characteristics as a “facilitator” for building the better world, not a mere welfare service provider, can give birth to inclusive society.

Keywords: social enterprise, social exclusion, the challenged, inclusive society, facilitator

**MAIN REFERENCES**


