"Re-engineering" the International Community in the 21st century

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1.1 Social Entrepreneurs & Social Networks

This is a research about people who solve social problems on a large scale. Most of those characters are not famous. They are not politicians International Relations people or philosophers. Some are doctors, lawyers and engineers. Others are management consultants, social workers, journalists and teachers. Others began as parents. They are scattered far and wide. In South Africa, Brazil, Poland, India & the United States. What unites them is their role as **social innovators or social entrepreneurs**. They have powerful ideas, to improve people's lives and to have them implemented across countries and, in some cases, the world.

The purpose of this research is to call attention to the role of a particular **type of individual actor, who propels social change in the International Community, through social networking**. Social entrepreneurs have a profound effect on society, yet their corrective function remains poorly understood and underappreciated, both in society and the economy.

Although they have always existed, for a variety of reasons, their presence is on the rise today. The designation "Social Entrepreneurs" has gained popularity in the 21th century. Leading American Universities offer courses in Social Entrepreneurship and journalists, philanthropists & development workers frequently invoke the term. However, most of the attention focuses on how Business & Management skills can be applied, to achieve social ends. While this is an important trend, this research proposal looks at social entrepreneurs differently. It views them as **transformative forces in social networks**. People with new ideas, to address major problems, like the world poverty, immigration & even terrorism.

2.1 The Parameters of Social Networking
A. The Network Society

New Media technologies have turned the world into a global village; Netscape's visionary and disruptive initiatives were just one indication of the radical implications of new technology for social networks & communication at large. We can pretty much imagine

this new society's contour. But only the outline. Visualizing a concrete image of things and understanding all that the super digitalization of reality implies is no easy task. Hypotheses fly and interpretations abound. Yet, while nothing is unimaginable anymore, there is only one certainty: we are all going to be experts in "conversion". The multimedia is creating entirely new ways of thinking in communication at large. The world will soon belong to 'digital kids', that generation with no memory of life before MTV, personal computers and the Internet.

More importantly, after years of interfacing with computers and exposure to thought patterns that branch out, the very way in which digital
kids' brain work will be different. They will think less in a traditional, linear, narrative way, and more in a treelike fashion. Their ideas will be linked but not strictly linear. This generation's thought processes will be different, not just in degree but in nature. They will be a jumping discontinuity.

We know that it takes more than mere adaptation of old techniques applied to new technology to come out ahead. It means that we are going to have to **invent new languages and to redefine what we mean by 'quality' discourse with the community through social networks, and in this case International Organizations.** Interactive media users will choose what they like, when they like and whenever they like. They will even be able to pay to ignore information and messages they choose. But since they will no longer approach this passively, now, more than ever, politicians and opinion leaders are going to have to approach them in a more intriguing way. This calls for more creativity. From now on, only apt, intelligent, appealing, or even funny images that speak to them and say something new will be worthy in their eyes.

To keep the public's emotion aroused and therefore encourage participation in the shared vision, whether social, political or economic, social entrepreneurs will have to constantly pique their curiosity. This means **exploiting the participatory aspect of new technology** to its fullest. The role of multimedia will in that case be to deepen relationships on a personal level. Users need to get together, to have a sense of camaraderie, of community, of clan spirit. By encouraging their participation in 'real time'

during their first grand initiation on-line, what used to be a shared philosophy becomes a shared interest.

At the heart of this, almost virtual treasure, is the quest for acceptance in the clan. Those who have solved the puzzle and gotten through the traps of the media actually become elected members of the clan. Welcome to the brave new world of social entrepreneurs and social networks. A powerful tool of leadership, for those who survive the media loop, get their ideas across society, and implement social change.

When the future is hard to predict, you have to experiment, learn by doing, and gradually visualize what's opening up before you. In political communication & crisis management nowadays, fiction meets reality-an afflictive reality. The almost virtual becomes one of the
effects of interactivity and, in turn, Interactivity becomes the proliferation of communications channels. It draws concentric circles that we enter and exit at will. We already know this.

What we don't know is how quickly it will affect our daily & economic lives and our social behavior. It's up to international Organizations to keep their eyes and ears open, to anticipate. And what does the economic future, in the age of information, have in store for us? Before interactivity even existed we used to say 'The important thing is not what is said but what the one who experiences the message is led to think'.

We believe that, from now on, in times of economic crisis, we can only humbly quote William Kinney, Dr. of Astrophysics in the Columbia University, and his cosmic 'Life beyond time': *Even if the Universe decides to commit suicide, one single indication of communication or connectivity between lives is enough to put the Universe back together*.

2.2 Social Networks as Social Support & Coherence

Yet, apart from technology, it is widely recognized that social relationships and affiliations in community terms, have **powerful effects on physical and mental health**. Although many social scientists from Emile Durkheim on have written about the critical role of social

relationships in health outcomes, it was not until the 1970s that epidemiologists turned their attention to this issue.

In the first of these studies, in Alameda County, California (Berkman et al., 1979), men and women who lacked ties to others were 1.9 to 3.1 times more likely to die than those who had many contacts. A 1982 study in Tecumseh, Michigan (House et al., 1982), showed a similar

association for men, but not for women, between **social connectedness and participation and mortality risk**.

Social networks and support have been found to predict a broad array of health outcomes, from survival after heart attacks to disease progression, functioning, and the onset and course of infectious diseases.

2.3 Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporations as Social Entrepreneurs & Citizens of society

In the old days -1960s, 70s, 80s- corporations prided themselves on "**social responsibility**". With the great opportunities they were afforded, companies needed to **"give back to society**", through participation in & contributions to non-profit organizations, committed to confront society' s most pressing problems. Then came the 1990s, and corporate social responsibility took a back seat to making money. The go-go 90s and the early years of the 21th century, ended in the bursting of stock market bubble, top executives from leading companies being escorted away in handcuffs, and a general reevaluation of the companies obligations to their communities and the larger society.

In the first decade of the 21st century, social responsibility is back with a vengeance. And no one is more responsible, than Paul David Hewson, also known as Bono, and a lead singer of the Irish rock band U2. **Bono, became an iconic symbol of social responsibility**, as he met with the world leaders & spoke before world bodies, to convince governments & institutions to help the world poor. His efforts were rewarded in countries around the world: many governments & institutions responded, by reducing the dept owed to them by third world nations. The lesson? **In the 21st century, serving one's community makes good business sense** as well & has in fact become a front-burner business mandate.

As the arbiters of communications in their organizations, CSR people must be sensitive to society's new realities. This is a particular challenge to an increasingly diverse & multicultural & global community. Dealing in an enlightened manner with diversity, and being sensitive to nuances in language & style, are also considered as extensions of social responsibility and have been an accepted part of Strategic Communication as well.

Community Social Responsibility

In light of the increasing diversity of society, organizations must become more diverse & learn how to deal and communicate with **those who differ in: work background, education, age, genre, race, physical abilities, religious beliefs, sexual orientation,** and other perceived "differences".

Corporate leaders-long absent from public dialogue on community issues- have begun again to take an active stance in confronting societal issues, such as **protecting the environment**. General Electrics, for example, has led its efforts to confront the green house gas emission by 1 per cent by 2012, which is a 40% reduction, when factoring in GE's presumed growth. Ford Motor company, has worked to shift its company's energy use to renewable sources, which account for 4% of Ford's energy use. The London stock exchange market has also devoted significant foundation money, to reducing greenhouse gasses.

Corporate contributions like these, very much depend on profits. If a company earns little, it can't give much to the community. In those cases, **another element of "giving back to the community" is voluntarism**. Many firms have become more actively involved, by encouraging executives & employees to roll up their sleeves and volunteer to help in their communities. At the Walt Disney Company, for example, Disney VoluntEARS spent more than 800.000 hours in volunteer services, over a two year span. At Volvo, hundreds of car dealers, join forces, to raise funds for pediatric cancer research. Same goes for the Greek ELPIDA foundation, based on volunteer artistic contribution from concerts, in order to raise money for the pediatric cancer hospital. Motoroil, also contributed 3% of their annual income, to rebuild a village at the fire afflicted area of Elhia.

Such initiatives contribute to the 21st century business notion that, **a company must be a citizen of the community in every respect**, and accept its role, as an agent for social change in the community.

Community Relations Expectations

For an organization to coexist peacefully in its community, three skills are required:

- Determining what the community knows and thinks about the organization

- Informing the community of the organization's point of view

- Negotiating or mediating between the organization and the community, should there be a significant discrepancy

Serving Diverse Communities

What were once referred as minorities are rapidly becoming the majority. For example, today, 15% of the citizens of European countries are foreign born. For many years, women were considered a minority too, by C.S.R. & I.R. practitioners, but this is no longer the case. Women now dominate many industries. Accordingly, **women, foreigners, gays, senior citizens, persons with disabilities**, and a variety of other

groups have become, not only important members of the labor force, but also important sources of discretionary income. Corporations in a Social entrepreneur role must therefore be sensitive to the demands of all, for equal pay, promotional opportunities, equal rights in the workplace, and so on. Communicating effectively, in light of diversity in society has become an important International Relations challenge.

2.4 Re-engineering Society through Connectivity
Social Networking & C.S.R. in Cross Cultural & Community Relations

It's got to strike us that, a quarter of a century ago, outside the United States, there were very few NGOs (Non Profit Organizations, or involved in development and social networks) and now there are millions of them, all over the globe, thanks to efficient social networking. Peter Goldmark, former President of the Rockefeller Foundation, comments on that:" nobody can make that happen at the same time. Why did they grow? They grew because the seed was there and the soil was right. You have restless people, seeking to deal with problems that were not being successfully coped with by existing formats and were driven to reinvent new forms of organizations and organizational structures".

An important problem in the fight against economic crisis and the abuse of human rights lies in the area of information management. The problem is not in the amount of information that comes out of the field. To the contrary, there are mountains of raw information. The real problem lies in how this information is treated and managed. And, in the age of information and interactivity, **managing information equals assuming social responsibility.**

"In the years to come, dollars and guns will no longer be substitutes for peace and will power. The International Community is" prophetically predicted said President Aisenhauer some 50 years ago.

From the illusion of the hippies & the rainbow communities of the 70's, back to the future of the 21st century, the age of information and globalization, we realize we are witnessing a new era. In an era where even business corporations are supposed to be citizens and give back to society, and -paradoxically- in days of economic crisis, it seems that the community illusion is as not such an illusion after all.

In fact, in an audio-centric world, and with the upcoming shift to individualism, it seems that We are the International Organizations; We are the community; We are the people. And if we sufficiently "connect" to the idea that the world is everybody's business, it seems that we can really make a difference.

To conclude, please allow me, to humbly revoke once more the mandras by William Kinney, Dr. of Astrophysics at Columbia University:

Even if the whole Universe decides to commit suicide, one single indication of communication or connectivity between lives is enough to put the Universe back together.