What is the best way of implementing social innovation?
A practical investigation

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Abstract

Social innovation is currently a leading factor driving social change. It is well established that the success of social innovation is an essential part of pushing society to greater resilience. This study aims to determine the best way of implementing social innovation. Specifically, it investigates whether the established theory and a proposed hypothesis based on it can be supported by the experiences of working social innovation projects. In this context, social innovation projects are projects that implement social innovation in any form it can take.

To test various theories and hypotheses and see what factors should be taken into consideration for the implementation, social innovation projects were asked a series of predetermined questions. Candidates were given the opportunity of answering these through a face-to-face interview or an online questionnaire. Out of 15 selected projects, answers were collected from Venvirotech, Ampros, Helpsy, and Solar Ear. These responses were analysed by dividing the answers into 5 different categories based on our theoretical framework. However, the results obtained differed from what was expected. It could therefore be seen that a part of the theory and the hypothesis did not align with reality.

These results suggest that establishing a concrete methodology on implementing social innovation is difficult and counterintuitive. Nevertheless, there are key factors and steps that will ensure projects move in the right direction. Based on this, social innovation projects should ideally take into account key factors and steps mentioned in this paper while tailoring each to suit their own implementation and objective.

Introduction

As it takes on the role of solving world problems, a strong interest has developed around social innovation. It has proven to be a strong contender; in Europe alone, 1 out of 4 newly set-up enterprises are considered social enterprises (European Commission, n.d.). This is pushing social innovation forward. However, many of these projects fail. How can one make sure they will work when having a good idea and social motivation is clearly not enough? Getting a deeper understanding of the implementation of social innovation is a crucial part of answering this question.

Defining Social Innovation

Improvements or significant contributions made to existing products, processes, or services that constantly surround us can be defined as innovation (OECD and Eurostat, 2005). When these new improvements and changes are linked to solving social challenges, we are more distinctly looking at social innovation.

The term social innovation can be defined in many different ways, such as "*a complex process of introducing new products, processes or programs that profoundly change the basic routines, resource and authority flows, or beliefs of the social system in which the innovation occurs. Such successful social innovations have durability and broad impact*" (Westley & Antadze, 2010).

'*The Definition and Theory in Social Innovation*' (Anderson, Curtis, & Wittig, 2014) best defines it as "new solutions to social challenges that have the intent and effect of equality, justice and empowerment". This definition implies that for an innovation to be social it must firstly be new. As in, it must be an improvement or significant contribution. Additionally, it must address social challenges and have the intent and cause of equality, justice, and empowerment. This can further be explained by adding that social innovation addresses our core social values such as welfare, quality of life, social inclusion, solidarity, citizen participation, environmental quality, healthcare, public services, or the level of education (Echeverría, 2008). Therefore, even if a social innovation does not address matters of equality, justice, and empowerment simultaneously, the overall objective is to benefit our society with these intentions. Consequently, social challenges must include different scale problems related to varying topics, such as climate change, poverty, social conflicts, or any challenge that will have a positive impact on society when it is solved.

Historical background

The recent popularity of the term 'social innovation' has led many to believe that it's a newly conceived concept. Historically however, there have seen many examples of individuals making improvements to circumstances and create social impact. Examples include early modern tradesmen in the Dutch modern-age or a woman's clinic warning against sexually transmitted diseases during the First Word War (Westley, McGowan, & Tjörnbo, 2017).

Geoff Mulan (2006) dates the rise of social innovation to the first industrial revolution characterized by social enterprises and innovation. However, he centres the term on urbanism and industrialization.

The term will be formally discussed later on through the writings of figures such as Peter Drucker and Michael Young in the 1960s (Gavron, Dench, & Young, 1995) and French writers in the 1970s, such as Pierre Rosanvallon, Jacques Fournier, and Jacques Attali (Chambon, David, & Devevey, 1982).

During the last decades of the 20th and the first of the 21st century, the term has been linked to the technological field. However, as social matters have gathered strength, the term has taken on a wider meaning.

At this point in time, social innovation can be considered to be at its peak due to the rise of social concern, institutional support, and corporate social responsibility. These are now key features of many corporations.

Role and importance of social innovation
Social innovation has taken on an increasingly important role of contributing to greater social resilience. Now, it is considered the central driver for social change.
Humans have always been inventive. Through social innovation we can use our natural tendencies for exploration and innovation to benefit our society and help to solve the challenges we are facing.

These innovations are not single solutions to problems but a stepping stone to shift an entire system. This will ultimately contribute to greater social resilience.
Even though social challenges have changed over time and social innovations have been abandoned or displaced, many of these are embedded in society's core.
Social innovation is turning into a global phenomenon and is being given importance to by many apart from just NGOs and social enterprises.

Objectives
Having understood social innovation, its background and importance, it is important to understand how best to implement it. This paper addresses the research question, "What is the best way of implementing social innovation?", with the objective of seeing whether the theory on social innovation aligns with reality, and if not, what changes can be proposed.

Social innovation is a broad concept. In order to achieve an answer to the research question, it has been divided into 5 different objectives.
- The first objective is understanding the motivation behind social innovation projects. How and why do these projects start? What context and background do they have? By studying in-depth how theory and real word experiences answer these questions, the process of implementing social innovation can be addressed.
- The second objective is to conclude the most common shape of a process of implementing social innovation. This can be determined by addressing how these projects are implemented and the steps that are taken.
- The third objective is to point out who and what projects rely on. This is important to establish the essential agents and resources the social innovation project needs. Through this, the main strategy that used can be revealed. This is essential as these projects rarely take a for-profit form and might not be based on the same strategies as for-profit projects.
- The fourth objective is to target the kind of goals that are mainly used. Are these goals clearly defined? Doing so will encourage a deeper understanding of what goals are usually like, and also whether these goals are linked to their motivations.
- Finally, the fifth objective is to get an insight into the type of information and knowledge social innovation projects rely on. Through this, the approach of the information can be identified, making it possible to see whether projects maintain their information and knowledge or if they frequently have to update it.

By achieving these five objectives and combining the results from theory and reality, this paper addresses whether the two align. Furthermore, the paper discusses if there needs to be adjustments made to ensure the best possible way of implementing social innovation.

Theoretical Framework
State of the art
As mentioned earlier, social challenges can come in all shapes and sizes, which makes social innovation a very wide concept. Whether it is a product, process, or programme, it can be interpreted and implemented in many different ways. For the simplification of this study, we will refer to the implementation of social innovation as a project that can have the objective of establishing a social innovation in any of the shapes mentioned above.

Due to the diversity of social innovations, there is an inconsistency between social challenges, with each being unique and difficult to standardize as a theory. This makes social innovation a complex term that does not follow a continuous linear pattern. It is therefore difficult to establish a concrete methodology or defined school of thought (Nicholls, Simon, & Gabriel, 2015). On the contrary, it is a term that is often interpreted by social innovators to meet their needs, hence leading to the improvisation of its usage. Pue, Vandergeest, & Breznitz, (2015) presents a framework for the process of social innovation in general terms. This process starts with a social entrepreneur or enterprise that forms a social strategy. This is when an individual forms a new approach based on creativity, knowledge, and experience in order to reconfigure a social problem.

Thereafter, the strategy will be formed by putting together the social innovators' creativity. This must be done by researching the information about the social challenge to have as much knowledge as possible. Moreover, this can include examples from their own and others' experience as this can help decide the best approach to solve the problem. The strategy will also be a key moment at which the project's objectives are planned and instituted.

From there on, the project will be presented to the public by a way of introduction. This allows the public to see and understand the bases of the project before it is put into action. This serves as a way of gathering initial support and is a strategic attempt of convincing the public to embrace the strategy.

Once introduced, the project is ready to be adopted into the market for social innovators to attempt accomplishing all the established objectives. This stage involves the revision of all that is being put into practice, what has been learnt, and any new relevant information that might be available.

Finally, the project will culminate by achieving its goals. These should also be evaluated, since meeting the goals does not necessarily mean a successful contribution to the social challenge. This can often be the case because the ideas of what causes the social problem might have been mistaken, or negative externalities might have arisen. With regard to the outcomes, it is also important to mention that social innovation is not just about solving a problem but can also mean a partial contribution to the final solution. It is a term that must be understood in a wider frame as a way to further improve society. Every contribution counts. Brown & Wyatt (2010) explain a new approach to creating solutions called design thinking. It is based on the notion that customer insights are essential for addressing their needs.

Therefore, the process of creating these new solutions starts by finding an inspiration or an opportunity that motivates people to find solutions. This first stage of motivation then creates a brief, which is a way of constraining the project to a budget, technology available, and the market segment that will establish objectives and measure progress.

However, it is imperative that the brief is created having experienced the reality of the problem first-hand.

After having spent time studying the problem, it is possible to move on to the design of the solutions. In this stage, the ideas formed at the design stage are turned into conceivable action plans. The best course of action for this stage is not to restrict the ideas that come up, but to boost new ideas by putting together diverse teams and then brainstorming ideas. This prevents the action plan from falling into the conservative, restrictive tendencies that organization tend to have.

These action plans are taken to the final stage of implementation where prototypes are created. Here ideas are turned into actual products, tested, and the products are reinforced if needed. Therefore, this stage presents the solutions for the problem and sees if changes need to be made.

Nevertheless, none of these stages can be carried out without creativity and problem-solving embedded in the core of the project, and the willingness to work with the problem hands-on.

Factors of Social Innovation
The process of implementing social innovation is not that different from implementation of innovation in general. However, studies have shown that there are several factors that apply to the term (Mulgan, The Theoretical Foundations, 2012) that must be taken into consideration when executing a social innovation project.

Firstly, most social challenges are based on contradictions, tensions, or the public's dissatisfaction. This can sometimes make the social challenge even harder to innovate on as there might be different takes on what the problem actually is. An appropriate example is the ocean plastic-waste crisis which has different sources of the problem and approaches to a solution. Additionally, something to take into consideration is that the more history the social challenge is linked to, the more impact and public following it is going to have, such as inequality and labour challenges (Fuller & Myers, 1941). That also means it is probably a harder problem to solve with more tensions related to it.
Moreover, social challenges are dependent on a wide array of actors that can be divided into three categories: the developers, or the social innovators who initiate and operate the solutions; promoters, who work as partners and to provide the connections, infrastructure and funding needed; and supporters, who are going to defuse and expand the knowledge of the innovation (Butzin & Terstriep, 2018). Some examples of social innovation actors are NPOs/NGOs, public bodies, private companies, research & education, foundations, individuals & networks, social enterprises, public-private partnerships (PPP) and others. Social recognition is essential for social innovation to obtain supporters. Without social recognition, even promoters will not be able to identify the project as viable and will not believe in it.

As important as understanding the actors associated to our project is, we must also know that each project has a set of vital resources, without which the project cannot be completed. This is especially true with social innovation, as complex social challenges are going to be very specific. However, by vital resources we do not only refer to physical necessities, but also a specific function or action that must be embedded before the development of the social innovation.

Social innovation thrives on trial and error; even if just an improvement, it needs to be tested. This usually uncovers any errors that hamper the working of the innovation. Due to the complexity of most systems, it is unlikely that the company will get it right in their first attempt and will need alternatives before reaching the objectives.

Furthermore, by formalizing the project, it will be officially considered social innovation and attract the necessary promoters for the project. This is important; without that recognition, promoters might not be able to provide what is necessary for the expected outcomes. Moreover, by formalizing the project, it will ensure the correct recording of it for future use.

This leads us to the next factor: one social innovation might inspire the creation of many others. After all, it is a matter of looking at the big picture and not just one social challenge. By achieving one social innovation, more can come forward until the social challenge is solved.

However, the final factor is that the knowledge created from social innovation is liable to decay due to the fast pace of society and the system's complexity. Even if embedded in our society, most information is historically contextual, which means it will lose its value and no longer be as useful as was once thought.

Hypothetical system of implementing social innovation.
As a result of putting together and sharing the theoretical information up to this point, a hypothetical system for the implementation of social innovation can be constructed (**Error! Reference source not found.**). This system will take on a form similar to that proposed by Pue, Vandergeest and Breznitz (2015), but with small adjustments to make it simpler for analysing and understanding complex models without over simplifying (Rose, 2007), and a more engaging approach as Brown and Wyatt (2010) suggest. It will consider all factors mentioned above.

As mentioned earlier, the model constructed by the Innovation Policy Lab starts with a social entrepreneur or social enterprise. However, social challenges are usually the reason why the project began. This, in some instances, can arise due to a social enterprise or a social entrepreneur in search of a social challenge. Whether projects by social enterprises or entrepreneurs can be considered social innovation is up for debate. After all, a social entrepreneur is merely an entrepreneur with a social interest (Westley & Antadze, 2010). Moreover, although a social enterprise might respond to social challenges, it can still be a a profit-orientated project that is hybrid (Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, 2001). This is unlike social innovation, which has the objective of creating change at a systemic level that can transcend many different sectors (Phills Jr, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). However, it can be argued that social entrepreneurship and social enterprises are a part of social innovation and even if not its purest form, they can promote it. For this reason, we will consider them valid starting points as they address social challenges that may lead to social innovation later on.

This will inevitably mean that regardless of who it is for or where the idea is produced, the process will start at the same point; establishing a social challenge that needs to be addressed. Therefore, we will assume that the strategy will be developed after the social challenge has been established.

Once the strategy has been determined, the project is ready to be presented to the public. This not only provides the necessary actors, but also, as the article on design thinking by Brown and Wyatt (2010) suggests, will obtain insight on the developed ideas from the intended receiver. This allows the social innovators to make any necessary changes to the strategy before its adoption.

Once introduced with all the necessary changes made, the project is ready for adoption into the market where the strategy will play out. Here attempts will be made to accomplish the project's objectives. These objectives must be followed and analysed, not only at the end as outcomes, but while the project is playing out (Beale, 2006). This will ensure that the project is following the right path and is adaptable to the social changes it will foresee. Finally, the project will come to an end after reaching its outcomes. These should be evaluated for future projects or for the renovation of the present project by measuring the contribution made to the social challenge. The renovation of the present project can appear when the proposed social innovation is very complex and can only be accomplished by the division of projects. For this reason, it is important to highlight that social innovation is not just about solving a problem. It can also be a contribution. Consequently, we achieve a process that takes the following shape:
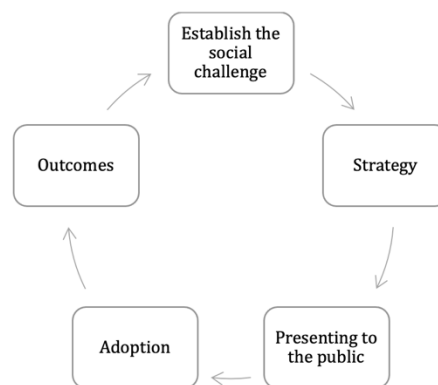

Figure 2.3-1. Hypothetical system of the implementation of social innovation

Furthermore, all the factors mentioned earlier are presented individually with the intention of considering them in the wider picture. However, for the purpose of understanding what the theory suggests about this process of implementation, we have applied the factors to the system.

In the first stage of defining the social challenge, we must understand what the problem actually is and where the public stands on it. It is best that we take a step back from the accumulated tensions and look at the facts and true insights. In doing so, we will be able to innovate without bias while understanding the big picture and action the challenge needs. This will result in a clear definition of the social challenge being formed. However, we cannot forget that the larger the historical background is regarding the issue, the harder it is going to be to define and solve without steering too far from the challenge.

Once the social challenge is established, we can move on to the second stage: strategy. When deciding on what strategy will work best, we must have a clear picture of the actors, what they can offer the project, and what we might need to offer them. This in totality will create a clear understanding of what the needs of the project are.

As part of the project's needs, we must establish what the vital resources are. Not getting this done during the strategy stage can risk the developers not realizing the lack of certain resources and will not be able to follow the strategy.

It is also essential that one aspect of the presentation to the public should focus on getting the social recognition needed. This will subsequently ensure that the social innovation will survive the duration of the project and last longer in our society. Whether it has been included in the strategy to obtain recognition whilst presenting the project or not can later affect the emergence of the project. Including it ensures obtaining more support.

When taking the social innovation live, as stated as a factor earlier, most social innovation goes through trial and error before reaching success. For this reason, it is important to consider the great probability that the first launch of the project may fail, but this is normal and should not discourage innovators from pushing forward.

Once the project reaches its outcomes, it is crucial to get them formalized. It is important to get the plans for the project validated at the beginning through a formalized strategy, and the end result must also be correctly recorded for future use. These outcomes, whether achieving small objectives which bring us close to solving the challenge, or those which have solved the challenge entirely, will have a larger impact on our society's future. Therefore, if the project has not achieved the outcomes expected and has partially contributed to solving the challenge, it must be recorded.

It is important to note that throughout these stages it is essential to have as much insight into the problem as possible. Dealing with the social challenge hands-on will not only provide a better understanding of the issue but also give insight on essential details that could have been missed out (Brown & Wyatt, 2010).
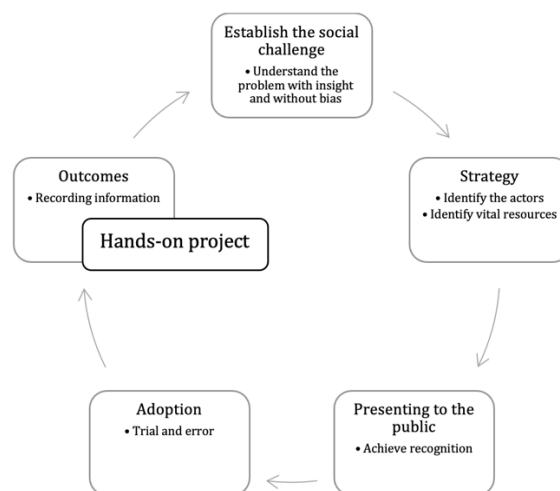

Figure 2.3-2. Hypothetical system of the implementation of social innovation with factors

Research Methodologies
Methodological approach
As this paper's main objective is to address the question "*What is the best way of implementing social innovation?*", our aim is to achieve an in-depth understanding on the topic. Therefore, by putting together theoretical secondary data[i] on social innovation and how it works, and a primary data[ii] collection on what social innovation projects are

achieving in reality, we can contrast and determine if the theory aligns with the and reality of implementing social innovation.

Moreover, by putting together the theoretical secondary data, we have been able to form a hypothetical model of the process of implementing social innovation. This will also be contrasted with reality to see if it aligns and be successful.

Hence, as this paper works on achieving an in-depth understanding by contrasting social innovation theories with real-world projects, most data is qualitative, i.e., based on ideas and meanings, with the exception of some quantitative primary data that has been collected (Gibson & Brown, 2009).

Methods of data collection

Firstly, as much theoretical data as possible was collected from books, academic journals, and papers related to social innovation from local and university libraries, and Google Academic. The focus was to find relevant theoretical information on the way social innovation is implemented and the factors that surround it.

Afterwards, interviews and surveys were conducted. These consisted of 18 questions; 7 open-ended and 11 close-ended answers. The aim was to conduct as many interviews and surveys with projects that work on social innovation as possible between the 1st of March and the 30th of April 2021.

The participant was defined as a worker who has a job related to the process and implementation of the social innovation project they work on. Participants were given the choice of doing the interview or survey as both are asking the same questions. They were also given the chance to add any further relevant information they could provide. In the case of the surveys, participants remained anonymous, but their projects are identified. For the interviews, participants were asked to be filmed. For referencing purposes, they did not remain anonymous.

The projects chosen for participation needed to meet the one condition of working with social innovation. They were found through web searches and word of mouth. Of the 15 projects contacted through email or their contact information on their web pages, 1 accepted the interview, 3 the survey, 1 declined to help, and 10 gave no response. The projects were briefed on what the study is about, why they have been chosen, their preference between an interview or survey, and a way of identifying the veracity of who the study is carried out by using LinkedIn.

The one interview was conducted through Zoom and the surveys through Google Forms. Both were available in Spanish or English as the study was being conducted on an international level. Furthermore, the questions that were asked were divided into 5 sub-categories related to the objectives.

Practical framework

As has been stated, it is difficult to pinpoint a school of thought for social innovation due to its abstractness and ambiguity. Throughout the theoretical part of this paper, different thoughts on how the process should be implemented and some defining factors were identified. These were also linked together, leading to the construction of a hypothetical model for the process of implementing social innovation.

Nevertheless, to truly see whether such theories can be applied to the real world, a study was conducted to ask several social innovation projects a series of questions. These questions will now be addressed and explained in-depth.

Case study questions
This study was comprised of 18 questions, all chosen with the objectives in mind -- with the exception of the first question. It serves as a way of identifying and introducing the participant answering. It also serves to situate the candidates and focuses their attention on the social innovation project they work on.
To help guide the attention of the candidates and have them answer the questions in a way that will be useful for the study, they were divided into five categories:
- Introduction
- Process
- Essential agents
- Objectives
- Information and knowledge

By doing so, the answers given could be analysed in five different segments that would help identify with greater ease the theories that align with reality and those that do not. Each of these categories have brief introductions so that participants know and understand what the objective is when asking the questions. It can also make answering easier as participants might not have a background to these theories.
The following questions and introductions marked in cursive and grey respectively are the ones which were used for this study. Furthermore, the formatting of the answer is marked in blue, and each section is explained in further detail maintaining the same format as the rest of the paper.

Introduction
These two first questions are a brief introduction to your project and its background.
1. *Give a brief description of your project.*
   (Open end)
2. *What motivated you to carry it out?*
   (Open end)

The objective in asking their motivation is to learn how their social innovation started. Moreover, this helps to see where these projects stand regarding whether ideas and motivations for the projects are come upon or if they are searched for by social innovators.

Process
The theory has suggested that this should be the process a social innovation project must undertake. I would like to see whether that reflects how projects are actually implementing their social innovation.

3. *Does this process reflect the process followed by your project?*
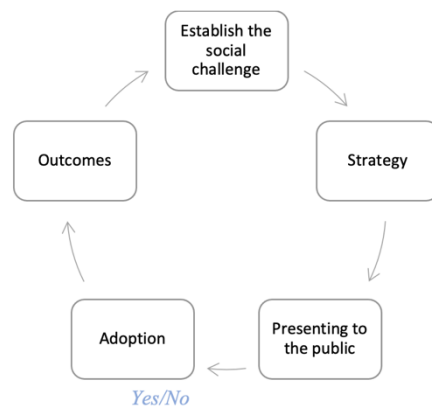
Yes/No

By showing a graphic representation of the hypothetical model of the process, the candidates are able to see and compare it to their own experience.

4. *Do you consider there to be any missing stages you consider fundamental?*
   Yes/No
5. *If so, what?*
   (Open end)
6. Do you consider there to be any unnecessary stages?
   Yes/No
7. *If so, which one?*
   (Choose one option)
   - *Establish the social challenge*
   - *Strategy*
   - *Presenting to the public*
   - *The social innovation goes live*
   - *Outcomes*
   - *N/A*

Having given participants the chance to see if the process represented reflects their own, it is important to see how it differs from it. In some instances, participants might feel there are stages missing or that some are unnecessary.

8. *What stage do you consider most important?*
   (Choose one option)
   - *Establish the social challenge*
   - *Strategy*
   - *Presenting to the public*
   - *The social innovation goes live*
   - *Outcomes*
   - *N/A*
9. *Why?*
   (Open end)
10. *What stage did you consider the hardest to achieve?*
    (Choose one option)
    - *Establish the social challenge*
    - *Strategy*
    - *Presenting to the public*

11. Why?
(Open end)

Finding out what stage they consider most important and the hardest is essential. This sheds light on what areas of the process must be focused on. Furthermore, by asking 'why', we get a better understanding of the reasoning behind their choice.

Essential agents
All projects have essential agents, whether they are actors or specific resources. I would like to know what kind of dependencies your project lies upon.

12. What actors do you depend on for this social innovation project?
(Select those that correspond)
- *NPOs/NGOs*
- *Public Bodies*
- *Private Companies*
- *Research & Education*
- *Foundations*
- *Individuals & Networks*
- *Social Enterprises*
- *Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)*
- *Others*

13. Without what resources do you consider the project cannot be completed?
(Open end)
14. At what stage of the process would you consider having identified them?
(Open end)

By identifying what projects rely on, we are able to see if the theory is appropriate for the different actors involved, and their perspective on that social innovation. Depending on their necessities, they might take a rigorous or flexible approach, which can later on be identified by putting their answers into context.

Objectives
Establishing objectives are a key step in a project, which is why I would like to see what kind of objectives you have.

15. Did you establish clear objectives to solve the social challenge or considered having a wider objective of contributing to help lessen the problem?
(Choose one option)
- *Clear objetives*
- *Wider objective*

16. Have you been able to fulfil your objectives first time round and were they hard to achieve?
(Open end)

Due to the nature of social innovation, it is not always clear what kind of objectives are being established. Some may be very generic, while others are very precise. Depending

on the type of objectives established, implementing social innovation can take on completely different forms, which is why it is an important question.

Furthermore, it serves as a way of seeing whether the theory of social innovation thriving on trial and error aligns with reality, and if they were able to easily adapt or needed several trials before reaching their objectives.

Information and knowledge
Information and knowledge on the innovation and/or social challenge you are working on can change as society moves forward or it can stay constantly relevant. I would like to know what kind of information you are working with.
17. *From a scale of 1 to 5, how often do you have to renovate the information related to the innovation you work on?*
(Choose one option on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being "Information stays relevant, no need to update" and 5 "Information is constantly changing and always needs updating")
    1. *Never*
    2. *Not often*
    3. *Sometimes*
    4. *Frequently*
    5. *Always*
18. *Do you consider that it remains constantly relevant or does it lose its value quickly?*
(Choose one option)
    - *Remains constant*
    - *Loses its value quickly*

By using a numerical rating scale (NRS), the abstract sense of how much participants feel they have to renovate information can be quantified. Studies have shown NRS to be a quick and easy way of validating what one feels (Correll, 2007). Also, addressing whether that information will lose value quickly can justify what the theory suggests.

Methods of Analysis
Data analysis started by analysing, understanding, and putting together what the theory states. By doing so, there could be a deeper understating of the appropriate questions that needed to be asked to achieve the objectives. Therefore, once the theoretical analysis had been completed, the practical framework was designed.

Having conducted the interviews and surveys, the data was collected and a content analysis was done by categorizing the answers into the 5 different categories. This further led a discussion of the relevant information. A thematic analysis was done to see whether there were any patterns which could address certain questions. Lastly, a discourse analysis was done to see what could further be understood by contextualizing the answers (Jaspal, 1994).

Methodology evaluation and justification
The methodology chosen for this paper was based on the idea that the objectives could best be answered with qualitative data. This is due to the theoretical nature of social innovation. A theoretical analysis was inevitable, which by putting together with a study collecting primary data could lead to a deeper understanding on the topic and a provision of new information. This new information not only provides the exact information that is needed for the objectives but might also serve future studies on social innovation.

Other methods could have consisted of achieving the objectives solely through a collection of secondary data based on theories and other studies. However, by doing so, no new information is provided. The most that can be offered is a different perspective on existing knowledge.

As for the methods used for collecting primary data, the initial idea was to conduct as many structured interviews[iii] as possible. These would provide longer and in-depth answers while maintaining a structured analysis. This would make comparison between answers easier. However, due to the Covid-19 global pandemic there was a high chance that many projects would be unavailable for an interview. The more answers attained, the more knowledge, the better the results would be. Therefore, surveys were chosen as an alternative that candidates could choose based on their preference. This would also lead to a higher participation rate. With regards to the method used for the survey, the same investigative questions[iv] were used as for the interviews with the same objective of being able to get a better analysis and comparison. These investigative questions were structured and formatted in a way that would make answering them as effortless as possible for the participant. This prevents tired and weak answers. By adapting these to the language the project is in (Spanish or English) a broader audience was reached.

The first difficulty faced was deciding which projects were apt for the study and which were not. Some projects seemed to be social innovation but ended up having a lucrative motivation instead of a social one. Moreover, due to the Covid-19 global pandemic, there needed to be remote interviews; Zoom made international communication a possibility.

The most surprising difficulty was finding projects that were interested in participating. As seen earlier, the participation size for this study is relatively low. A majority lack of response is an interesting outcome as social projects often benefit from visibility. The Ocean Clean-Up declined to participate due to lack of time and staffing. Lantegui Batuak, a local project, gave no answer which was surprising as this paper is linked to the local university.

Nevertheless, even though the participation size was relatively small, the study was able to proceed and the objectives were met, which is why this methodology can be considered as having given a successful result.

Results

The study carried out for this paper was divided into 5 main subdivisions, which will now be used to present the obtained results from each of the questions asked.

Introduction

Starting out by the questions related to the introduction, the open-end question 1 asks candidates to present themselves by giving a brief description of their project.

1. *Give a brief description of your project.*
   (Open end)

Out of the 4 candidates, our first candidate, the project Ampros, described their projects "Depersonas Cocinando con Sentido"[v] and "Depersonas Cultivando tu bienestar"[vi] as being a combined activity of promoting healthy diets and jobs for mentally disabled people by hiring them as the project workers. The project aims to offer product traceability from their ecological vegetable plots where they produce high quality foods. There will later on be transformed into healthy catering menus provided for school dinners, take-away, or to sell at their network of shops which distribute fresh ecological

produce in Cantabria. Their main objective is to provide an eco-friendly environment with high social value.

The second candidate, Venvirotech, is a biotechnological start-up that works on transforming organic waste into polyhydroxyalkanoate (PHA) bioplastic. The third candidate, Helpsy, described their project as applying social innovation to keep clothes out of the trash.

Lastly, Howard was interviewed on his SolarEar project, which creates low-cost rechargeable hearing aids made by Botswanan deaf women. Howard explained that he has also worked on 8 or 9 social businesses for the under-represented like refugees from Brazil, China and Russia, people with mental disabilities, and physical disabilities. He explained that the main objective of SolarEar is to provide a good education for children with hearing impediments. This will inevitably give them a better chance in life and not put them at a disadvantage due to their deafness.

Question 2 is another open-ended question that aims to understand what the motivation behind these projects are.

2. *What motivated you to carry it out?*
    (Open end)

The main motivation behind the Ampros project was to find new job opportunities for people with mental disabilities. Venvirotech was pushed by a personal environmental motivation. Helpsy's wanted to reduce the climate impact that clothing products are creating and offer better paid jobs that provide decent living conditions.

As for SolarEar, Howard told us that the story behind his motivation started 30 years ago when he was running a for-profit plumbing business in Montreal, Canada. Five years into this process, his 10-year-old daughter Sarah died of a brain aneurysm, and one week afterwards on the first day back at work he was fired because they did not think he would be an asset. After unsuccessful therapy and a new business which he did not enjoy, he went to Africa to help women earn a salary for better health and education to their children. This, he explained, was to give meaning to his daughter's death and also to his own life. On his first day at the office in rural Botswana, a lady brought in a teenage girl Sarah. She needed a hearing aid to finish school for the deaf but could not aspire to greater things because there were no jobs for people with this disability. Moreover, even though Botswanan deaf people are given hearing aids by charities, they cannot always afford or access batteries. Moreover, he explained that there is a stigma attached to being deaf in Botswana because they believe you could be cursed. Therefore, he produced a business plan out of Sarah's hopes and dreams by creating a business making low-cost rechargeable hearing aids by deaf women. He brought money raised from Washington DC, and the school for the deaf invented their first solar charger that provided the rechargeable elements used to start the project by maintaining the same hearing aid components.

Howard also added that from his experience talking to others on social innovation projects they generally have a motivation linked to something in their lives. Therefore, he believes that the motivation generally comes to you from certain aspects of your life instead of being looked for.

Process

As for the result obtained for the questions regarding the process, the close ended question 3 was used to see if the hypothetical process was reflected in their projects. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows that out of the 4 candidates only Ampros answered that they see their project's process reflected in the one suggested.

In the interview, Howard explained that the reality is much more organic; you learn as you go and mistakes are made, without it being so specifically thought out in the first place. From his experience, he explained that the projects are generally not strategically thought out. People come to you and things happen that make it more organic and specific.

3. Does this process reflect the process followed by your project?
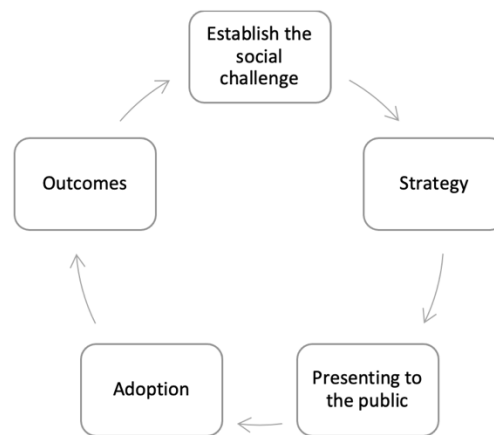
Table 4.2-1 Reflection of the process for the projects

Companies / Reflected process	Yes	No	Total
Ampros	1		1
Venvirotech		1	1
Helpsy		1	1
SolarEar		1	1
Total general	**1**	**3**	**4**

For question 4, it is a close ended question to see what stages could be missing.

Table 0-1 shows that all projects considered that there are stages missing from the presented process.

4. Do you consider there to be any missing stages you consider fundamental?
   Yes/No

Table 0-1 Companies that confirmed/denied missing stages

Companies / Missing stages	Yes	No	Total
Ampros	1		1
Venvirotech	1		1
Helpsy	1		1
SolarEar	1		1
Total general	**4**	**0**	**4**

Question 5 is a follow-up on question 4.

5. *If so, what?*
   (Open end)

For Ampros, it all depends on the methodology used to generate the business idea (for example CANVAS)[vii], together with the business plan or where they can develop each of the steps further; for example, marketing plans could be missing.

For Venvirotech, establishing the social problem should already be linked to the clients. Helpsy stated that most of the actual work is identifying markets/demand and optimizing implementation.

As for SolarEar, Howard explained that a good social business, as distinct from a for-profit business, works as a three-dimensional model. This he represented as a three-dimensional game of Tic-Tac-Toe; at the bottom level you are running a sustainable business with all the different departments needed, such as marketing departments, sales department, customer services and so forth. The second level is the social mission of the organization; and the centre square of every social mission he has worked on is providing education in one form or another. Finally, the third level is the empowerment of your workers by working on communication skills or other relevant skills. Therefore, this three-dimensional frame has to be present globally at all times. To keep their social mission in mind, SolarEar managed to involve the people with the social problem in the solution. This ensured that the stakeholders are listened to. It also helps to take a step back from the values and beliefs you personally might bring to the problem when in reality that is not what the solution needs. Consequently, this model, instead of a less organic and more traditional model, ensures not only that the main objective is always embedded in the business, but that a profit is also in mind.

Question 6 which pinpoints the unnecessary stages from the process shown above. In Table 0-2 we can see that all candidates except for SolarEar stated that they see no need to remove any of the stages that were included.

6. *Do you consider there to be any unnecessary stages?*

Table 0-2 Companies that confirmed/denied unnecessary stages

Companies / Unnecessary stages	Yes	No	Total
Ampros		1	1
Venvirotech		1	1
Helpsy		1	1
SolarEar	1		1
Total general	**3**	**1**	**4**

Question 7 is a follow-up on question 6 from which only SolarEar's answer is relevant. Howard explains that there is no one stage that is specifically unnecessary but the process as a whole. He believes that it should be organic through listening better, not bringing different ideologies to a problem that does not regard them as useful. Further, he believes that it should all be a learning process that leads you on to the next steps. Therefore, no specific stages were identified as unnecessary as we can see represented in Figure 0-1.
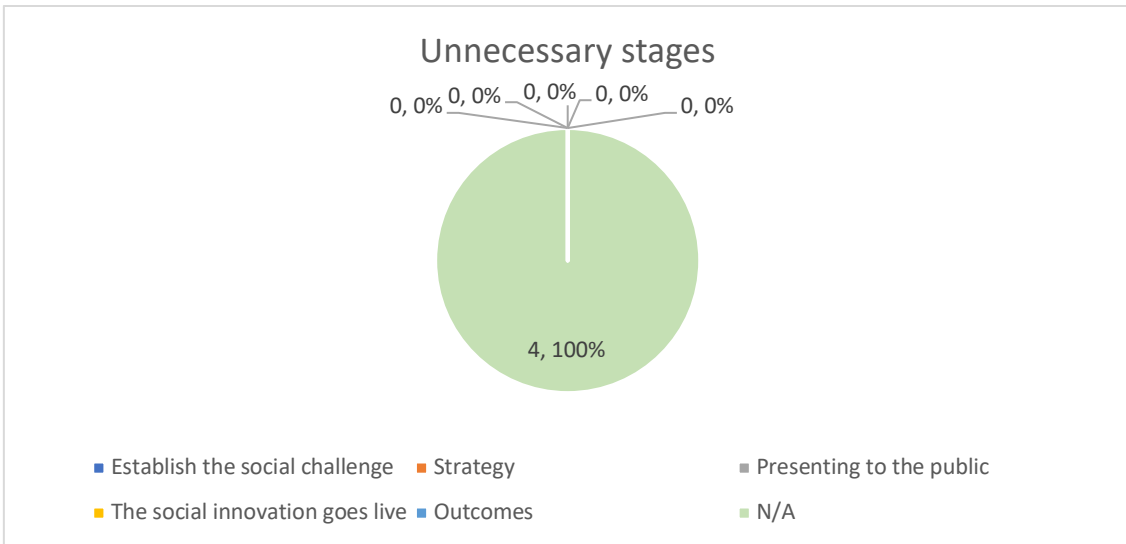
7. *If so, which one?*

Figure 0-1 Representation of the missing unnecessary stages chosen

Question 8 looks at what stages could be considered the most important. In Figure 0-2 we see that Ampros considered the strategy, Venvirotech chose the stage of establishing the social challenge, and Helpsy also opted for the strategy. Howard chose the bottom-up three-dimensional approach mentioned earlier.

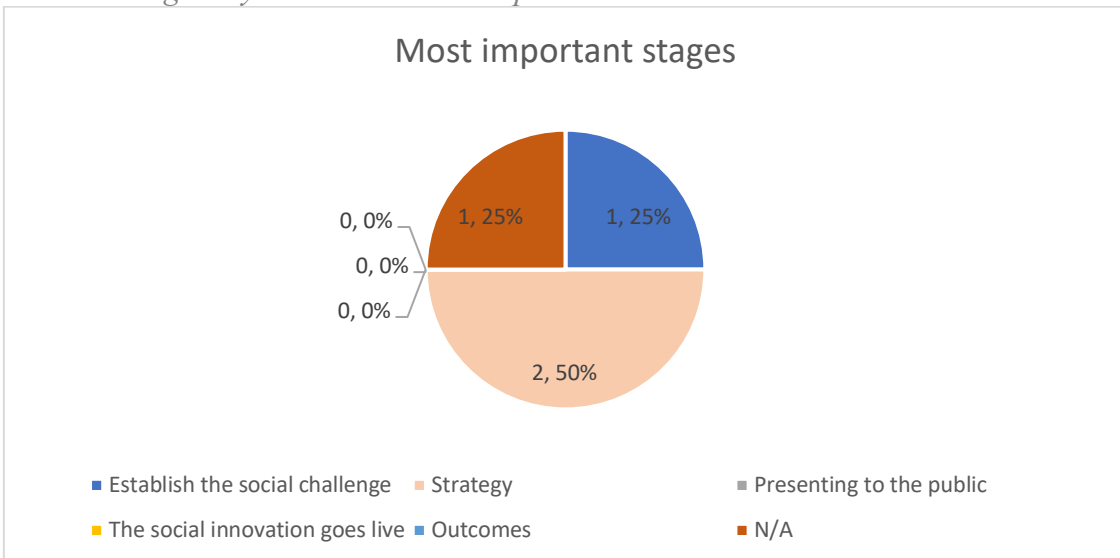*8. What stage do you consider most important?*

Figure 0-2 Representation of the missing most important stages chosen

Question 9 is a follow-up on question 8.

9. Why?

(Open end)

Helpsy explained that they consider strategy the most important stage because a social enterprise by definition operates within profit margins and needs to constantly refine its work to ensure economic sustainability.

On the other hand, Howard considers his bottom-up three-dimensional system the most important. This is because it means they are based on the people that actually suffer the problems. He stated that when working on other social innovation projects, like in Rio de Janeiro, he spoke to the children he intended to help to understand what they really need.

Question 10 is a close ended question to identify the hardest stages of the process. In Figure 0-3 we see that Ampros considered adoption, the hardest stage to achieve. For Venvirotech, the hardest stage was establishing the social challenge. For Helpsy, it is the outcome of the project.

Howard explained that actually putting into practice and working on the social innovation is the hardest part of the project. Therefore, the description that would best fit this is the adoption project.

10. What stage did you consider the hardest to achieve?
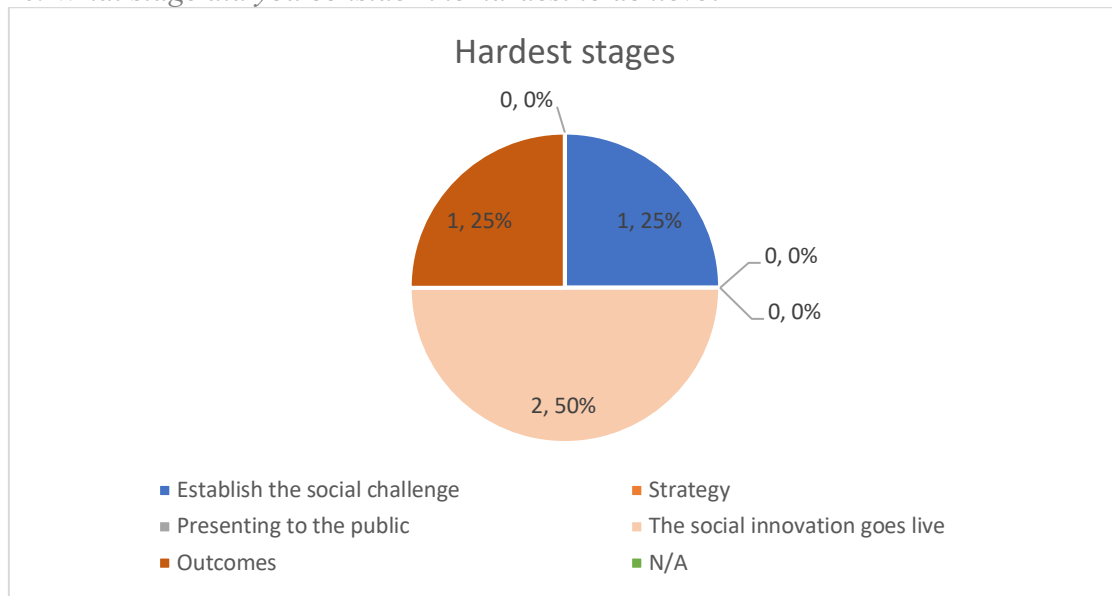
Figure 0-3 Representation of the missing hardest stages chosen

Question 11 is a follow-up on question 10.

11. Why?

(Open end)

Helpsy explained that the outcomes of their work are the hardest part of the project due to the difficulty of what they are trying to achieve. Howard explains that going live and working on the project is the hardest stage because you are constantly making mistakes and having to learn from them.

Essential agents

Related to the questions on essential social innovation agents, question 12 is a close ended multiple-choice answer which was used to identify actors they can rely. As Figure 0-4 shows, the option 'private companies' was chosen most frequently because all projects answered that they depend on them. In second place, we have 'public bodies' which Helpsy and Ampros stated they rely on. Lastly NPOs/NGOs were only relied on by Helpsy.

As for SolarEar, Howard made no distinction on what agents they depend on because their main dependency is on money. It does not matter who the money comes from as long as they are able to obtain it.

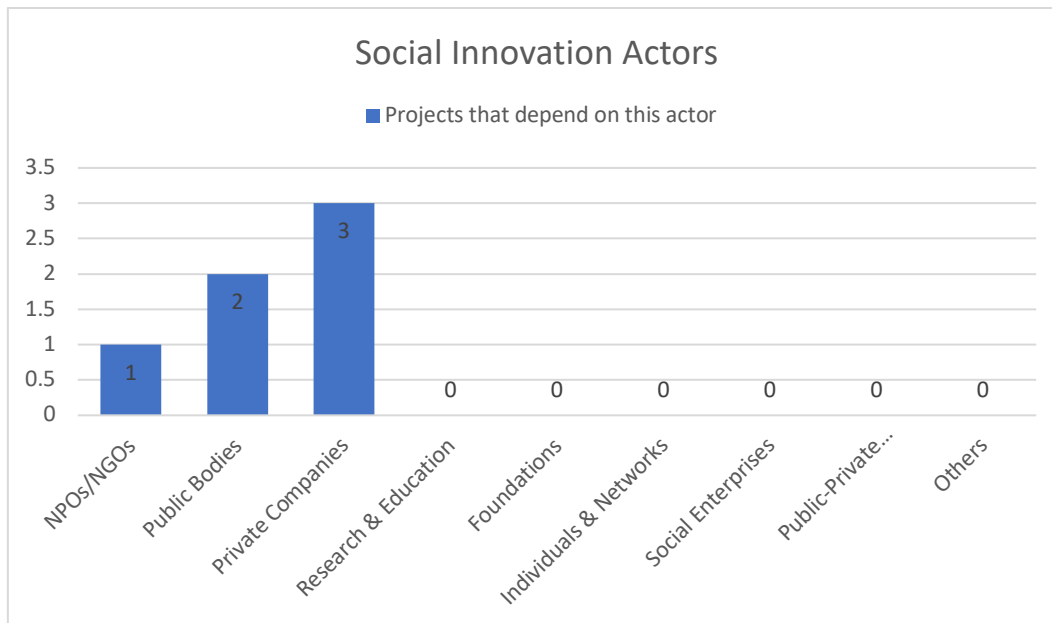*12. What actors do you depend on for this social innovation project?*

Figure 0-4 Representation of the most frequently dependent on actors

As for question 13, it is an open-ended question to see the resources they depend on.

13. Without what resources do you consider the project cannot be completed?
    (Open end)

Ampros project's main resource is investment funds, which currently are very hard to obtain for social economic enterprises. They explain that this is because investment plans are designed to work for for-profit companies without taking social businesses into consideration. Therefore, there is no type of investment plan that have the objective of helping the more vulnerable, which essentially makes funding and investments very difficult for social projects.

Venvirotech does not seem to rely on any specific resources for the project to be completed. As for Helpsy, they would not be able to complete their project without their private partners and a clear and rational regulatory framework.

In the interview, Howard states that whether you like it or not the project cannot be completed without funding. However, he also mentioned that without the input and empowerment of the people they are trying to help, they would not be able to complete the project. Therefore, apart from needing funding, there needs to be a social mission that binds everything together.

Question 14 is also an open ended question to identify the stage at which essential agents and resources are identified.

14. At what stage of the process would you consider having identified them?
    (Open end)

In general, most projects were not able to identify a specific stage o where essential agents and resources they need were identified. Howard explained that it is something you realize very early on during the project. Helpsy said that it is an iterative process, which means that identifying the essentials repeats itself many times throughout the project.

Objectives

Moving on to the questions related to the objectives, close ended question 15 was used with two possible answers to see whether they establish clear or wider objectives. As

Table 0-1 shows, establishing clear objectives was found to be the most frequent answer, but only because SolarEar said they use both methods.

During the interview, Howard explained that for SolarEar, they used very wide objectives because they were solely interested in surviving. Because he was going into a market, he did not have enough experience in, he explains that there was no sense in establishing clear objectives that would create a boundary and limit what they would achieve without even knowing who their customers truly were. However, now that the project is better established and they are expanding the objectives are very clearly defined. Therefore, even though they are branching into new territories, they understand what targets can be met as they have experience in the sector. They know what objectives they should be striving for.

15. Did you establish clear objectives to solve the social challenge or considered having a wider objective of contributing to help lessen the problem?

Table 0-1 Companies type of objective

Companies / Objective Type	Clear objectives	Wider objective	Total
Ampros	1		1
Venvirotech	1		1
Helpsy		1	1
SolarEar	1	1	2
Total general	**3**	**2**	**5**

Question 16 is an open ended question that had the intention of seeing how effective and hard the objectives were.

16. Have you been able to fulfil your objectives first time round and were they hard to achieve?

(Open end)

Ampros answered that no, they are not always able to fulfil their objectives first time round. For the last 10 years they have worked with a strategic plan system that had over 20 objectives last year. Annual management plans with many subdivisions, which makes achieving what is planned hard. Venvirotech answered that they had been able to fulfil their established objectives.

Helpsy, even though they are a fast-growing project, have not been able to meet even 1% of their objectives. Therefore, because they answered before that they have broad objectives, it implies that they have not been able to fulfil these objectives due to the size of the problem.

In the interview, Howard explains that in his case they have barely been able to fulfil their objectives first time round due to many errors being made. These errors provided learning experience throughout the project. He believes he is making mistakes in his upcoming social innovation project without even realizing it. However, he added that the way objectives are fulfilled depends greatly on the personality of who the social innovation project is being pushed by. Through an example he explains that a friend of his who also works on social innovation prefers an approach of thinking before doing, whereas Howard prefers to act and correct the mistakes afterwards. Nevertheless, whether you take one approach or the other, making mistakes is inevitable to achieve the objectives. There is no benefit in over-thinking the objectives. However, it is essential that the errors are controlled and not cause serious damage.

Information and knowledge

Regarding the questions related to information and knowledge that is used by the social innovation projects, close ended question 17 was used with a one-choice answer scaling from 1 to 5; 1 meaning that information stays relevant with no need to update, and 5 that information is constantly changing and always needs updates. From Figure 4.5-1 we can gather that there was a wide array of answers, with 75% of them leaning towards not having to renovate their information very often. Venvirotech never feels the need to renovate their information; Ampros sometimes does; Helpsy always feels the need to do so.

In the case of SolarEar, Howard explained that they do not often renovate their information because he prefers to take a more practical approach of moving forward through trial and amending errors.

17. From a scale of 1 to 5, how often do you have to renovate the information related to the innovation you work on?
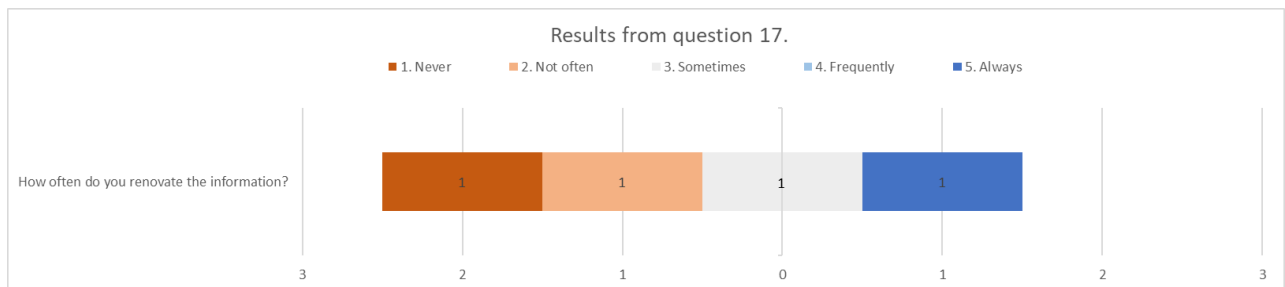
Figure 0-1 Results of how often innovation is renovated by the projects

Lastly, close ended question 18 was used with two possible answers to see whether the information used can stay constant and be constantly used through the project or if it loses its value quickly because of the rapid advances made in society. Table 0-1 gives us the idea that the information used by most social innovation projects remains constant and can still be used.

However, in our interview with Howard, he expressed that technically he could maintain the information they have on hearing aids and keep the project going with it. However, if they not only want to help a few hundred people but thousands, they must seek new technologies. Therefore, even if the information remains constantly relevant, it is in their best interest to update it to improve the progress of the project.

18. Do you consider that it remains constantly relevant or does it lose its value quickly?
Table 0-1 Type of information gathered by the companies

Companies / Information Type	Remains constant	Loses its value quickly	Total
Ampros	1		1
Venvirotech	1		1
Helpsy	1		1
SolarEar		1	1
Total general	**3**	**1**	**4**

Discussion

The research question "What is the best way of implementing social innovation?" can be answered after having completed the theoretical and the practical framework and putting all ideas together to obtain the established objectives.

Addressing the objective of getting insight on the motivation behind social innovation to understand where they come from, theory suggested that social challenges can either be found or searched for, and both could be considered the starting point of the process of implementing social innovation. Participants showed a wide array of answers stemming from personal motivations of trying to help people with physical or mental disabilities, solve climate change or help the overall health of the planet. Thus, if only taking into consideration the answers given by the candidates that participated through surveys one could say that the results were consistent with the theory.

However, if the story behind the motivation of SolarEar is carefully taken into consideration we can see that Howard did in fact search for the social innovation. Although he answered that from his personal experience shows that social problems are not looked for but landed on, his reason to consider that his challenge was searched for is based on him deciding to drop standard businesses and search for a way he could help others, without knowing how to help. By chance, in his search he stumbled upon Sarah and her story, which led him to decide what social cause he wanted to help. Nevertheless, in his search for a social challenge, the core value of social innovation, which is having a personal drive to help society through innovation, was always present. Thus, as this value is also present when finding or coming upon a social problem, these two ways of reaching for the challenge should not be considered as separate. By joining them, the main motivation is always based on a desire to help society through innovation, which can be considered a starting point for adoption regardless of different contexts.

Regarding the objective of seeing how projects are implemented and the steps that need to be taken, not only was a model for process of implementation identified through the theory, it was added on by other ideas and a hypothetical model was proposed.

Interestingly, even though the hypothetical process aligned with the theory, it did not meet candidates' expectations as all but one felt it did not reflect their projects. Furthermore, all candidates considered that there were missing stages, thus concluding that the hypothetical model is not an accurate representation. It could be argued that the oversimplification of a model means that perfect alignments between reality and theory are not going to be possible and therefore does not mean the model should be ruled out. In the case of SolarEar, not only did it not align, but need of the model was rejected all together.

The practical aspect of this paper showed that the process of implementing social innovation varies as much as the different types of social innovation that can be found. Some take a more standard business approach and use similar systems. Others use specific business models while others opt for a learn-as-you-go way of functioning.

Nevertheless, no candidates, except for Howard, found any of the stages to be unnecessary; meaning that whether in that order or not, they should all be considered necessary. By taking this into consideration and adding that the most important stages were considered to be that of establishing a social mission, the strategy, and Howard's three bottom-up system, some alterations could be considered to reflect a more accurate process.

These alterations would start by establishing that there is no need for a clear step-by-step order. Instead, a set of steps which should continuously be addressed can be moulded to suit each project. Establishing the social challenge can be linked to knowing and working with a clear mission in mind, which would be maintained as one step. Strategic work would also be another step, but presenting to the public and taking the project live can be grouped into Howard's dimension of working and being in contact with your clients. By grouping these ideas, we address the clear need of having a closer link to the clients and problem, which the theory and practice both have shown is essential.

Having proposed these alterations, we end up with a similar concept to what Howard proposed through his bottom-up system. However, in this model the outcomes seem to have been left out, which were considered one of the difficult stages of implementation. Therefore, because the theory suggests outcomes should be emphasised and reality shows that obtaining them is not only hard but provides a learning experience, we must consider them as the fourth key component for implementation. Thus, these four key steps or components now make for a better representation as seen in Figure 5-1 for what is needed in the process of implementing social innovation without limiting it to a rigid structure. Instead, this model offers an approach where all steps must be implemented regardless of their order or schedule.
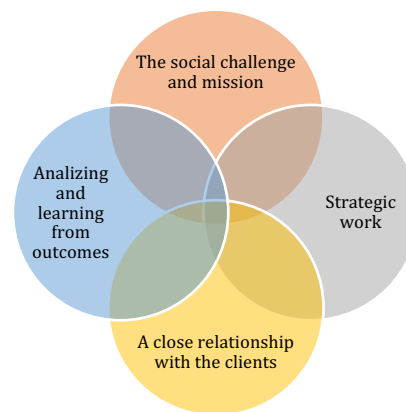
Figure 5-1 Reconsideration of the hypothetical process of implementing social innovation

Thirdly, with respect to the objective of establishing what essential agents and dependencies exist with social innovation projects; we see that even though many agents were identified through the theory, in reality social projects still depend on funds. Thus, any agent which will provide these funds for increased feasibility could be considered essential. However, considering funds essential does not mean they are part of the mission or that they are what drives the project.

It must also be mentioned that in some cases there are legal requirements linked to the social challenge which might also make legal actors and specific laws essential. Furthermore, input and empowerment of the people involved in the project was also identified as a necessity for the project to work. Therefore, as teams are a key component of a project, it is vital that their work is recognized and that they feel valued. This is supported by the importance of team-work mentioned in the design thinking paper by Brown & Wyatt, (2010) mentioned in the theory.

With regards to the fourth objective of targeting the types of goals mainly used, and how difficult they are to achieve, the theory of social innovation thriving on trial and error was identified. The only candidate to have said to be able to fulfil their objectives first time round were Venvirotech. This suggests that it is as hard as stated in the theory to reach

established goals. It should also be mentioned that the difficulty of fulfilling the objectives can depend on the type that they are; for Venvirotech, clear and specific objectives could have been easier to achieve. From the interview we gather that the theory of social innovation projects thriving on trial and error is correct due to the complexity of challenges that require learning on the go.

It is interesting to note the risk of establishing specific objectives mentioned by Howard. Without truly understanding the problem and not having enough experience with it and its clients, these objectives can limit the project. Nevertheless, the more you work with the challenge, the more information you gather, the easier it is going to be to establish specific goals.

Finally, the last objective was to identify the approach taken on information and knowledge to see whether social innovation projects have to constantly renew their information or not. Throughout the theory, it is stated that social innovation is linked to many changes making it difficult for the information gathered to remain useful for long periods of time. However, candidates showed very varied answers, leaning specially towards not having to renovate their information as much. All but one thought that the value of the information remains constant.

It is possible that the topic on knowledge and information is not as black and white as it may seem. It may be true that knowledge for social innovation projects is constantly changing and requires a learning process, but it does not mean that the information gathered up to that point is not useful anymore. By gathering and adding information to the project's knowledge, they are able to get a deeper understanding of the social challenge. Nevertheless, the fact that the information does not decay as stated in the theory does not minimize the necessity of adding to current knowledge. As Howard explained, always being open to new technologies and updates is essential to ensuring the expansion of the project to reach as many people as possible.

Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the best way of implementing social innovation. Based on the literature analysed and the study carried out in this paper, it can be concluded that the best way of implementing social innovation is not through a structurally defined model, but by acknowledging that there are key factors and steps that need to be understood and tailored to each project, thus ensuring success.

This was concluded by understanding the theoretical literature written up to this point, which put together with a hypothesis was tested through an 18-question study on real-life social innovation projects to see if the reality aligned with the gathered ideas. The expected outcomes were that the answers would support the arguments provided, and therefore conclude that they are correct. However, the obtained results varied more than expected, resulting in adjustments needed to pinpoint the most relevant ideas to answer the research question.

These ideas can be summarized as; (1) social innovators must ensure that they truly have a personal drive to help with the social mission, regardless of what motivated them in the first place. This will ensure that the social mission is always present, which will not only push their project forward but get them closer to the problem.

Having a core social mission, (2) projects can implement their innovative ideas by tailoring the steps presented in the model from Figure 5-1 to their processes' needs. These

four key steps were the social mission, strategic work, a close relationship with the clients, and analysis of the outcomes. Moreover, these should be considered without a specific timeline.

Furthermore, even though working with projects where profit is not the main goals is very difficult, (3) it is clear that funding and strong teams are the main necessities for the project to achieve their mission. However, this necessity for funds must not be mistaken for a core value. Research supports the idea that without a strong connection with the people involved; the project's success could never be guaranteed.

Moreover, objectives are equally important but not in the way one may think. Normally, objectives are used to measure whether what was expected was obtained. With social innovation, due to the complexity of social problems, (4) objectives should be used less as a measure and more as a learning mechanism. Thus, instead of creating boundaries, objectives can be used to understand the outcomes and where to go from there.

Lastly, (5) information and knowledge, as discussed in chapter 5, is not in need of being reviewed, but does need to be added to. The problem does not lie in the decay of information; even if not current, it serves as a base that can be added to with new information that will help develop the project.

Ultimately, this paper illustrates the difficulties of establishing a theory on social innovation and its implementation. These explain why many projects tend to improvise. As a result of the diversity in candidates' answers, it also raises the question of how successful each project will be in comparison to each other, which would emphasize what ideas worked best at the outcomes. However, the research was able to provide five key ideas that should be implemented to suit each social innovation project.

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[i] Secondary data: data that has already been collected (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

[ii] Primary data: new data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

[iii] Structured interviews: Interviews with a standardized structure that ask all candidate the same predetermined questions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

[iv] Investigative questions: questions that need to be asked to address the research question and achieve the objectives. In some instances subdivision can help provide better answers (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

[v] Meaning "People cooking with sense"

[vi] Meaning "People cultivating your wellbeing"

[vii] CANVAS business model is a tool used to explore sustainability orientated innovation businesses. (Joyce & Paquin, 2016)