



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Mark W. Wood

Will defend his dissertation

Addressing Sustainability in an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem: A Case Study of a Social Incubator in Mexico

Abstract

Over the past few decades, businesses globally have advanced in incorporating the principles of sustainability as they strive to align economic outcomes with growing and complex social and environmental demands and opportunities. This transition is conditioned by the maturity, scale, and geographical location of a business (among other factors), with particular challenges placed on small enterprises in middle- to low-income communities. Within this context, the overarching research question of this dissertation is why and how business incubation processes may foster sustainable enterprises at the middle and base of the socioeconomic pyramid (MoP/BoP).

To explore this question, in this project I used as a case study the experience of a network of social business incubators operated by Tecnológico de Monterrey (Tec), a private, non-profit, multi-campus university system in Mexico. Centering on its campus in Guadalajara and in order to understand if and how MoP/BoP businesses address sustainability, I developed a current state assessment of incubator processes, analyzing during two semesters the activities of incubated entrepreneurs and their goals, motivations, and outcomes. The general expectation at the outset of the study was that Tec's social business incubation process, in both its design and implementation, focuses on the economic outcomes of incubated projects and hence does not promote entrepreneur commitment to sustainability goals and practices.

The general approach of the research project involved a qualitative, in-depth ethnographic study of participants. Data were collected by means of the following research tools: (a) archival and documentary review, (b) participant observation, (c) pre- and post-surveys of participants (MoP/BoP entrepreneurs and advisors/mentors), and (d) semi-structured interviews of participants. Qualitative results were analyzed using the grounded theory approach.

Results of the research are reported under three general categories: (a) analysis of entrepreneur goals, motivations, and outcomes, (b) identification of economic, social, and environmental issues and opportunities, and (c) appraisal of the role of social networks and broader support structures. The results confirmed the general expectation of the study. However, based on the assessment and interaction with the entrepreneurs (and other actors), it was possible to establish that there is both interest and commitment on their part to identify and explore opportunities with a wider view of the social and environmental outcomes of their efforts. This informs the potential for a new vision for social business incubation, one that includes sustainability in its design and implementation.

Wednesday, April 16, 2014

1:00pm

WGHL L1-04

Faculty, students, and the general public are invited.

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Charles Redman, chair
Dr. Arnim Wiek, member
Dr. George Basile, member