

# Social Innovation and Social Enterprise in the Classroom: Frances Westley on Bringing Clarity and Rigor to Program Design

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*With articles on organizational learning, the middle manager, and leadership appearing in Organization Science and SMJ alongside coauthors such as Henry Mintzberg and Karl Weick, and with over 2,500 citations on the first page of a Google Scholar search of her name, Frances Westley's vita has all the trappings of a traditional, accomplished management scholar. However, her CV is also replete with publications in journals such as Ecosystems and Ecology and Society, and peppered with a best-seller for social innovators (Getting to Maybe) and awards for which most business school scholars would not be considered ("The Ulysses S. Seal Award for Innovation in Conservation"). She has trained scientists engaged in saving endangered species, directed a groundbreaking Master's program for nonprofit leaders, led an environmental research institute, and spent the last decade thinking, writing, and teaching about social innovation and social enterprise. Frances holds the J.W. McConnell Chair in Social Innovation at the University of Waterloo where she also leads the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR) and is the lead designer of the new Graduate Diploma in Social Innovation. This interview explores the distinctions and considerations Westley thinks scholars must weigh when designing curricula to advance the cause of social innovation.*

"Social innovation" is a hot topic these days. Elite universities are publishing periodicals on the topic (e.g., *Stanford Social Innovation Review*), billionaires are putting their names and resources behind related efforts (e.g., Jeffrey Skoll), paragons of management thinking are trying to reframe and redirect capitalism and corporate strategy (e.g., Michael Porter), and governments are creating departments to advance related efforts (e.g., Office of

the Third Sector in the United Kingdom and the White House Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation in the United States). It is not surprising, then, that universities in general, and business schools in particular, have begun to formalize courses, curricular streams, and whole programs meant to tap into this energy and constellation of activity.

Long before social innovation was "hot," Frances Westley was thinking about what it takes to transform complex social systems for collective benefit. Beyond system dynamics, Frances has been particularly interested in institutional entrepreneurs in social systems—those who seem to effectively navigate and exert some level of agency in the process of transformation for socially desirable ends. In her thinking, these institutional entrepreneurs have unique characteristics that mark them as belonging to a category distinct from "social

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entrepreneurs," and relatedly, she makes distinctions between "social innovation" and "social enterprise." These differences are important, she argues, to the process of thinking clearly about university curricula and programs designed to enable both kinds of activities. From her point of view, lumping everything that looks or feels socially motivated into one category is analytically problematic for an emerging field or category of scholarly inquiry and training. Westley was a pioneer in this space, and particularly in the enterprise of translating scholarship and theory about social innovation and social enterprise into effective classroom experiences for MBA students and practicing leaders alike. It is helpful to know a little bit about her background to contextualize her arguments and to better understand the depth of related experience upon which they are built.

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Westley's doctoral studies were in sociology. Among the earliest signs of what would become a career-long fascination with social transformations—particularly abrupt and sudden transformations—was her study of new religious movements. For her, that study was embedded in her introduction to general systems theory. What was it, she wanted to understand, that led to and supported the experience of transformation for individuals associating with new religious movements that were unique to particular moments in time and particular social circumstances? After her dissertation, she focused her preoccupation with cross-scale dynamics on broader themes of human development and change.

Shortly after taking her first academic post at the University of Western Ontario, Frances had the opportunity to bridge into the world of business and management through a unique postdoctoral fellowship offered by the Canadian government at the time. She returned to her alma mater, McGill University, where she worked closely with Henry Mintzberg, went on to join the faculty, and eventually assumed a chaired full professorship in strategy (the James McGill Professor of Strategy). Once in the business school world, her interest in the transformational potential of agency continued with work on visionary leadership. This led to examinations of the enabling conditions for such

transformations—the role of middle management in facilitating or inhibiting organizational innovation, for example. Her interests then expanded beyond intraorganizational dynamics to the role of visionary leadership in solving problems of interorganizational collaborations. From there it was a short intellectual distance to thinking, theorizing, and researching broader and more holistic system dynamics. Westley's move into the business school environment was energizing for her because of its emphasis on the application of social science to the world of practice, and the willingness of people in such places to push their ideas into the real world despite the risks that always entails for scholars.

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A growing interest in the codevelopment of application and scholarship, new interest in interorganizational dynamics, and a general concern for the environment launched some of Frances' early efforts in the development and design of social innovation education programs. The fates and a bit of nerve led to personal connections with "Buzz" Holling and Ulysses S. Seal—both serious environmental scientists who were struggling with a sense that their respective enterprises had gone as far as they could without innovation in the "people" and "management" spheres. Frances felt she could offer what they wanted and needed to a set of causes that mattered (and still matter) deeply to her. In the process, a decade-long, intensive set of collaborations was born. She traveled extensively with Holling and Seal, designing programs for their people, and simultaneously designing joint research. They pushed her thinking to places management scholars did not generally go (e.g., how Holling's adaptive cycle might inform social system thinking), and she helped them implement and execute.

After a decade, the intensity of these activities was starting to cool down when Frances received a call out of the blue from Tim Brodhead, then-president of the J. W. McConnell Family Founda-

tion. McConnell was encountering a recurring set of problems with its grantees—problems that seemed to demand a high-level, executive-style degree program to build nonprofit leadership capacity in the country. They had put out a call for proposals and found the results disheartening and disappointing: executive MBAs with a “thin coat of voluntary-sector paint.” Tim Brodhead subsequently found himself bemoaning this to David Cooperrider at a conference in Budapest; David directed Tim to Frances at McGill. At the time, Tim didn’t know Frances, and Frances didn’t know Tim, but the McConnell offices were across the street from the Faculty of Management in Montreal, and when Tim’s call came in, Frances offered to stroll across that street for a chat. The result was a multimillion dollar philanthropic investment in a highly designed, innovative program that trained promising nonprofit leaders from across the country—the McGill-McConnell program for Voluntary Sector Leaders. To this day, the “McGill-McConnell” community of alumni, faculty, and funders remains highly active (cf. Bird & Westley, 2011), and the program is a source of pride for those involved.

This work and a book on bridging the social and the scientific domains in the interest of environmental conservation (Westley & Miller, 2003) led to an invitation to head the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin. Like most of her recent work, the institute was fertile ground for cross-disciplinary collaboration with a social purpose. However, after a few short years, the McConnell Foundation came calling again with a new “social innovation program” design challenge for Frances. She was invited to design a program to address McConnell’s new conviction: that durable positive system-level social change necessitated cross-sectoral collaboration among the nonprofit, government and for-profit/corporate sectors. Now housed at the University of Waterloo, Frances has spent the last few years working on that challenge—thinking about how to design and deliver a program that brings complexity science, the social sciences and management scholarship, resilience thinking, and cross-sectoral collaboration together to equip a new generation of purpose-driven leaders with the potential to be institutional entrepreneurs. The resulting program—the Graduate Diploma in Social Innovation—launched this past year. That enterprise, alongside design work for a new social innovation fellowship program for the Rockefeller Foundation, has Frances thinking daily about what works, what doesn’t, and what’s important to social innovation education. This interview touches on some

of the themes that are foremost in her mind currently—the importance of clear definitions, purpose-built program design, understanding the “markets” for social innovation and social enterprise, and how to adapt existing forms to serve social ends.

***This special issue’s call for papers characterized social entrepreneurship as “social innovation plus business” and I know this is inconsistent with how you would describe the relationship between social entrepreneurship and social innovation. I think you would see them as more distinct, and that such distinctions matter quite a lot. Am I right, and does that matter for educators in this space?***

For me, social innovation is a broader umbrella concept that includes ideas of social entrepreneurship as well as social enterprise, another term that’s used quite often. I would say that *social enterprise* is “social entrepreneurship plus business.” It is an enterprise with a social goal that also seeks to make a profit. I think “social entrepreneur” is a descriptor for the kind of person who would operate such a business. *Social innovation*, however, is really about the broader change in society to which the particular social enterprise, or the social entrepreneur, may contribute. Over the years that I have been working with and teaching people who are interested in social innovation, I have come to feel that social innovation and social entrepreneurship are two distinct sets of activities, and educators would do well to think of them as such.

*Social entrepreneurship* is about creating a new product or process which serves an existing market or an existing structure, often with the laudable implicit or explicit goal of greater social resilience. So, for example, you may have a social entrepreneur who is interested in trying to help the homeless and, as one entrepreneur I know did, develops high-tech portable homes that could provide low-cost shelter for the homeless, while maintaining their independence. However this activity actually makes it easier for the existing system to continue to produce homeless people, because in fact being homeless is less painful. There’s nothing wrong with that: No one wants the homeless to be in pain. This is a good thing, a very positive good, but it doesn’t actually address the broader system dynamics that created the problem in the first place. Bushmen in the Kalahari do not have roofs over their heads; nor are they “homeless.” Homelessness is a by-product of a built environment to which ownership confers access. To really elimi-

nate homelessness, the broader system arrangements would need to shift.

Further, while this entrepreneur may create a great and inexpensive portable home, there are very few homeless people who can afford even that, so you then are in a situation where your real customer is someone—a foundation or a government—who is prepared to buy these to donate to the homeless, or it could be a membership organization that raises money within its own membership. So the social entrepreneur is catering not to the end customer, as would the regular entrepreneur, but to an intermediary who may or may not have a sense of the real needs of the end customer and may or may not have an interest in changing the institutional arrangements that created the problem in the first place. Building a better mousetrap doesn't do you much good if the mice are the only ones with resources to buy your product.

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*Let me interject there, Frances, because one of the things that I have heard you say before that I think is interesting is that one thing that distinguishes the social entrepreneur from more traditional entrepreneurs is the nature of the markets that they sell into and who the market actors are. That strikes me as relevant to how we educate social entrepreneurs.*

Yes. A traditional entrepreneur may develop a highly innovative technology—an iPad for example—and the appeal of the product creates demand in the marketplace where it is purchased by those who are meant to use it and benefit from it. However when you are talking about a lot of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise, it's really addressed around not so much material needs, but social needs.

For example, you, as a potential social entrepreneur, know there are old people who might benefit from a technology that would help them live more independently. Or perhaps you have an idea of how to form and deliver circles of support to isolated seniors. The problem is that most isolated seniors have little financial wealth to purchase either your device or your service. So you may have a wonderful idea, but you are not going to be able to go out and sell it to end users in the same way,

so who do you sell it to? You sell it to foundations or you sell it to governments, and governments and foundations are working with their own priorities and their own ways of viewing issues and problems.

The true customers, then, are often foundations and governments, who themselves may have limited contact with ultimate consumers of the products of much social entrepreneurship. So you may in your entrepreneurial wisdom have diagnosed pretty well what you think the client needs are, but your customer might have a different notion. If you are going to secure the money to be able to do that you actually have to sell to the foundation or the government, so it makes it a much more complex issue.

***From your point of view, then, one of the most important things to address in educating social entrepreneurs successfully is a paucity of emphasis on government and foundations in standard teaching about market analysis and strategy?***

There's much that a traditional entrepreneurship program in a business school can teach a social entrepreneur. I mean, they do have to develop business plans, they do have to think through the process of organizing to produce whatever it is they are doing, to understand the dynamics of that, to understand how to work with people, how to manage finances, how to manage human resource problems. A social entrepreneur needs to learn all those things too. But social entrepreneurs also have to understand and navigate a different kind of market for resources. And to that end, they need to be taught about the emerging field of social finance.

Social finance is very concerned with how you get resources to move differently than you can in a normal for-profit. Most traditional sources of capital—banks, venture capitalists, and so on—will struggle with how to quantify, define, and manage risk in the social marketplace. And when you go to governments or foundations, they have their own definitions of risk, very different from those that a normal entrepreneur would have to deal with. In the field of social finance people have begun to talk about different kinds of instruments that can be created, but it's very early days yet. Understanding such emerging issues, tools, and financial instruments would clearly benefit the social entrepreneurs we train.

Social entrepreneurs face great challenges in selling early-stage innovation. We like to think that there are social venture philanthropists who

are just like private-sector venture capitalists, in that they are prepared to assume a lot of (calculated) risk, because they see the potential for a really high payoff. In fact, the only actors that come close to that are some foundations, but even among foundations, most are much more conservative. Government is totally intolerant of that kind of risk, and there's only a handful of organizations that actually have gone into the business of trying to provide that capital. Private venture capitalists will take many calculated risks with the hope that one or two will pay off in a big way, and they have a clear understanding that failure of part of their portfolio of investments is likely. Neither government nor foundations have anything like that acceptance of the probability of failure.

So it's a real challenge, but still most of that operates within the same kind of classroom discourse that you would have in any good business school about the evaluation of risk and return. None of this strikes me as demanding a new paradigm; it just means adding additional dimensions—a course here, a module there.

***That brings us back to the distinction you started to make between social entrepreneurs and social innovators at the beginning of our interview. To train social entrepreneurs—those engaged in business with social purpose—it sounds like you think minor adjustments around the edges of traditional business school curricula are probably adequate to have a significant material impact. But what about the social innovators you study—those who strive to accomplish positive system-level change? Understanding and teaching successful social innovators—institutional entrepreneurs in the social sphere—has been a rather singular preoccupation of yours for a number of years now.***

Yes, I came by my interest in social innovators laterally from my work running the McGill-McConnell master's program for not-for-profit leaders 10 years ago.<sup>1</sup> There was a subset of our participants who were what we might call social entrepreneurs today, who were really trying to create very innovative solutions. Most of them weren't really social enterprises at that point, but they were really trying to build up their resource base

and were very focused on novel solutions. For many of those entrepreneurial individuals, after some time struggling to sell their solutions, they began to recognize that unless the system changed, they weren't going to get anywhere addressing the problems they were passionate about solving.

I think of something like "Jump" with John Mighton.<sup>2</sup> John developed this radically different view of how you could teach children math and have a profound impact on numeracy. It seems very effective. He himself was a mathematician; he was devoted to doing this; he was passionate, a classic entrepreneur. Went at it full bore. Very visionary, very insistent. He tried to introduce the program in schools. After years of effort, he finally came to the point of view that you were never going to be able to introduce this without changing the school system, because his approach was radical enough that it simply wasn't like an app on an existing system. He realized he had to change the "operating system" for his app to be understood, accepted, and used. When social entrepreneurs reach that point, they're facing a very different activity, and one for which traditional business school approaches are not nearly as well-suited.

Now I do think business schools, even traditional business schools, do have some pockets of knowledge that are very, very useful to institutional entrepreneurs—social innovators—working to achieve system change. For example, in the field of strategy I would argue that the whole school of process strategy that you know I played a part in when I was at McGill working with Henry [Mintzberg] offers some helpful insights. Henry was one of the first people who coined the term "emergent strategies," and argued that most of what happens actually emerges in a kind of iterative dialogue between idea and opportunity. It isn't planned out and done deliberately.

Once you understand the importance of the emergent nature of strategy and change in complex social systems, people in business schools can very quickly identify a huge, rich body of relevant scholarship. The work of scholars like Henry [Mintzberg], like Jane Dutton, Brian Quinn, Robert Burgelman, Richard Pascal, Nonaka . . . I think the complex and emergent dynamics in large organizations are not that different in terms of their complexity than are those encountered by people working at a broad social system level.

When I work with people engaged in social innovation efforts around the world, a number of

<sup>1</sup> The McGill-McConnell program was a partnership between McGill University and the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, one of Canada's most prominent private foundations, whose mission is "funding programs to foster a more innovative, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient Canada." [www.mcconnellfoundation.ca](http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca)

<sup>2</sup> See [www.jumpmath1.org](http://www.jumpmath1.org) for more information.

management classics including Nonaka's (1994) work on "management up down," Burgelman's (1983) work on moving innovation through systems, Dutton et al.'s work on issue selling (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001), and Henry's work on patterns of emergence (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985)—these all resonate and ring bells for those working to accomplish system change. These are the kinds of concepts that help institutional entrepreneurs to understand what they are doing better, and to develop new approaches that have promise.

***So one of the things you think we can do to better equip potential social innovators is ensure a real dialogue in our classes between org. theory and org. strategy?***

Yes, and choose our teaching cases accordingly—choose cases that do not presume the ability of a brilliant strategist to plan everything out and foresee and understand all the dynamics at play. When I taught strategy at McGill, I always used Richard Pascale's Honda case (1996), because there was a lovely alternative case by The Boston Consulting Group, which laid out Honda's strategy for small bikes that became so popular, and made it look like this brilliant analysis of the market led to choosing the perfect strategy. Then Richard Pascale went and interviewed the people who had actually been involved in that and they were just two guys with absolutely no money at all working out of a room in San Francisco trying to sell the same big high-end motorcycles as everyone else. But because they had so little money they themselves drove around San Francisco on these little scooters and everybody would stop them all the time and say, you know, "what are you driving? I would like one of those!" So it was emergent, but the important thing was that with Honda, although it was a hierarchical organization, the salesmen were able to get their message into the system, so they were able to sell it "up," and top management paid attention. Those in leadership and in MBA programs need to know who the people are who are able to see such patterns as they emerge and then listen to them very, very carefully.

Within the whole field of innovation, which is almost entirely informed by process strategy ideas, there is a lot of rich stuff which is very useful to institutional entrepreneurs. But it isn't so much the pieces that tell them how to come up with a new idea, develop the business plan, and market it. More it's the stuff about how to move ideas through systems, how to find champions, how to recognize windows of opportunity, how to figure out the kind of social and intellectual capital

needed. And of course, as with social entrepreneurs, how to acquire the necessary financial capital. The potential social innovator has to understand policy and broader economic frameworks so that when opportunities arise they are able to capitalize on them.

***Frances, when you talked about the emergence of your interest in social innovators, you used examples of social entrepreneurs of a sort who, facing the limitations of the social enterprise model they were pursuing, became interested in system change. Is that a common developmental pattern? Social entrepreneur becomes social innovator when faced with frustration and social complexity?***

Yes, it does seem to happen that way quite often. However, "social entrepreneur" isn't necessarily a developmental stage on the road to social innovator. I have known wonderful, wonderful social entrepreneurs who really only want to work at the local level. We have a local example in the community where I live—The Working Centre. It is an elaborate and remarkable operation with a soup kitchen, community gardens, support for newcomers, counseling . . . They just keep adding things, and they have a very interesting and successful model that takes complexity into account and works on a really innovative capture of good ideas as they emerge. But the social entrepreneurs at the heart of the enterprise have no desire to change things beyond the local conditions they are trying to address for our community's vulnerable populations.

***That's an interesting example, Frances. Is it possible they haven't moved on to larger system efforts in part because they have been so successful locally? In other words, they haven't come up against the limits to their efforts in the same way as others you describe have?***

In part, yes, but also it depends on the nature of their goals. Joe and Stephanie Mancini, founders of the Working Centre, see their work as inspired by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Workers Movement.<sup>3</sup> They are part of a community, and their life and work is to infuse that community with new possibility. It is where they live, both figuratively and literally, and their goal is to light many candles, to make that "dwelling place" a better, more humane place.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.theworkingcentre.org](http://www.theworkingcentre.org) for more information.

But for others, those I would identify as institutional entrepreneurs, that isn't enough. Al Et-manski and Vickie Cammack started Plan Institute in an effort to create a safe and secure future for children with disabilities, including their own.<sup>4</sup> Their idea was to create a facilitated network of friends for each disabled child, a network that would outlast the child's parents and secure that safe future. The idea was wildly popular and there was demand from communities across Canada.

But as they explored the dimensions of what safety and security meant, their goals began to change. The most successful networks were not just supplying safety and security, they were rich and satisfying exchanges, where the disabled individual gave as well as received. They and other involved parents realized that they wanted more for their children—a "good life" that allowed them to contribute and participate, to the best of their ability, as citizens of Canada, not just be recipients of social services. Al realized that supporting the creation of many groups in communities across Canada would not create the conditions for this good life—to do that, the political, legal, and economic institutions that shaped Canada would need to change. The Plan approach, as he put it, "would need to get into the water supply."

In order to accomplish this, Al had to switch gears. It wasn't enough to have innovative ideas. He needed to understand the political system, how to penetrate it, and how to get the right political support at the right moment. He needed to understand the legal system that governed tax law and disability payments in this country and figure out how to leverage change within that system. He needed to get to the thought leaders of the country and inspire them to support a different approach to disabilities. This is creative problem solving of a different order than that involved in creating the Plan Institute in the first place. It had to do with building system-level strategies, leveraging political opportunity, constantly scanning for windows of opportunity in which to forward his cause, deliberate networking and building of social capital. These are things rarely or superficially taught in MBA programs, even programs in entrepreneurship.

***Here we are talking about business school curriculum for social entrepreneurs and social innovators, which makes sense since you taught at a top business school for two decades where***

***you were a tenured full professor, but for the last decade you chose to pursue your social innovation agenda outside of business schools, first at the Nelson Institute and now in the Social Innovation group of the Environment Faculty at University of Waterloo. Why? Most business school people can't imagine why you might leave the mother ship with all its resources and status.***

I've chosen the institutions and opportunities that seemed most likely to be conducive to my work at different points in time. In the early nineties I started teaching strategies for sustainable development, and at the same time I started working with environmental scientists who were actually trying to do it, they were addressing endangered species, or spaces, or they were talking about how environmental services could collapse and its effects on social order. These were "value-driven" scientists, deeply concerned with the future of the planet, but unable to solve the problem of how to move organized systems in the right direction. Coming from a background in sociology, one of the things that had impressed me about people working in business schools is that they had applied this social science: They knew how to design processes and organizations to accomplish certain ends. I thought, "why not export this knowledge into the conservation world? Why not help those wishing to design processes that would have conservation outcomes?" But they couldn't break out of the world of science to have an impact on people.

I began to work with value-driven scientists and began to figure out how you could create the kind of dialogues among multiple sectors that would allow for breakthrough strategies for things like managing endangered species, and I wrote a book coming out of that which brought a fair amount of attention (Westley & Miller, 2003). It, and the work I had been doing with ecologists and conservation biologists, attracted the attention of University of Wisconsin (Madison) who was looking to find a new director for the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, one of the oldest interdisciplinary environmental institutes in the United States. It seemed a natural extension of the route I had been pursuing: finding a way to bring the insights I had gained within the business school about process skills, design skills, and interdisciplinary and interorganizational collaboration, to young scientists anxious to solve intractable environmental problems as well as to research them.

While I was in Wisconsin, *Getting to Maybe* was published (Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2006). This book drew on what I had learned about social

<sup>4</sup> See [www.institute.plan.ca](http://www.institute.plan.ca) for more information.

entrepreneurs and social innovators from designing and running the McGill–McConnell Program for National Voluntary Sector Leaders, and it used a complexity theory framework to argue that these individuals could only be understood in context. Theirs was not deliberate strategy or the tactics of social movement activists, but a special combination of understanding systems, identifying patterns of possibility, identifying and acting on fleeting windows of opportunity, building networks of allies, and operating at multiple scales. There was no illusion of control, but there was great skill involved.

When the McConnell Foundation asked me to come back to Canada to develop a program to teach these skills, knowledge sets, and frameworks to people in government, the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, I welcomed the opportunity. In fact, we are just now launching that program ([www.gradsi.ca](http://www.gradsi.ca)), and I have a lot of optimism about what it can accomplish and the resources we may ultimately be able to make available to other scholars and teachers trying to accomplish similar things.

*Frances, my guess is that lots of the people who read this interview are, like you, business school academics passionate about making the world a better place. Like you, they probably have the skills to leave the academy and go to the field to work on these problems themselves. Were you ever tempted?*

I haven't left the university, though as you say, I could have decided I was going to go out there and do it myself. However, I have actually felt that I could reach more people this way and that if we, as management scholars, collectively designed the right kinds of curricula we could help our brilliant students develop a capability for nurturing system change in the same way we help them to build other kinds of capabilities.

And it seems to me actually that business schools—and innovative hybrid forms, like the School of Environment Enterprise and Development [SEED] of which I am a part at the University of Waterloo—are the places to do it, because honestly you know, in the traditional social science world there is such a resistance to the messy application of knowledge. Business schools are, thankfully, not as reticent as their cognate disciplines about taking a risk and telling people how to make things work better based on the current state of knowledge.

In the emerging field of social innovation, we need experimentation. We need to give social and

institutional entrepreneurs practical skills as well as analytic frameworks. As David Cooperrider, of the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University said many years ago, we have the resources and the technology to solve the big intractable problems that threaten the future of humanity: food security, climate change, epidemics, energy depletion. What we need is the knowledge of how to manage the human dimension (cf., Bilimoria, Cooperrider, Kaczmarek, Khalsa, Srivastava & Upadhyaya, 1995). And the best knowledge about management? It resides in business schools. We only need to be imaginative about how to marshal it for those who wish to solve social as well as business problems.

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*Thank you, Frances. I think that is a fitting place to stop for now, with an optimistic challenge to those who work to teach and design programs in this domain: We have worthwhile skills and frameworks, but we need to be clear-headed, disciplined and creative in our experimental efforts to apply them to educate not only social entrepreneurs, but social innovators as well.*

#### **DEFINITIONS, ADAPTATIONS, INNOVATION-ENCOURAGING PARTNERSHIPS**

Frances Westley's narrative and interview comments highlight at least three broad issues for consideration by those of us who design and deliver educational programs intended to further the causes of social entrepreneurship and social innovation: (1) the importance of clear definitions in emerging areas of inquiry and programming; (2) the (sometimes nonobvious) nature of necessary adaptations to existing forms that you are trying to co-opt or repurpose; (3) the importance of unusual partnerships in making innovative things happen.

## Definitions

Scanning the emerging “social entrepreneurship” and “social innovation” programs and articles popping up all over the world makes it quite clear that there is sometimes limited agreement among them as to what they mean by their use of these terms—beyond the idea that they’re making the world a better place, that is. Westley clearly considers this a problem, and I think she’s right. It is not a surprising problem as a field of activity and inquiry emerges, but it is a problem nonetheless. Like taxonomists in other fields, Westley argues that you can’t think or act with clarity unless you are clear what you mean.

Social entrepreneurship is important to Westley. So is social innovation. But they are not the same thing and should, therefore, not be treated as if they are. *Social innovation*, her keener interest these days, is about shifting systems and reconfiguring institutional relationships—not selling socially friendly products—and *social innovators* are the institutional entrepreneurs acting to make that happen. There is interplay and tension here: Social entrepreneurs can be agents in a social innovation process, and they may, therefore, also be social innovators. Perhaps that is one reason the terminology and agreed-upon meanings are for now muddy at times. In the programs she is currently designing, Westley isn’t really interested in teaching people to be social entrepreneurs, but she is very interested in teaching them to be social innovators. The design of the Graduate Diploma in Social Innovation reflects that emphasis; it is *not* a social *entrepreneurship* curriculum, as Westley has defined social entrepreneurship; therefore, as she has argued, clarity of thinking, in this respect, leads to greater clarity in program design.

Though there is clearly something real and important to the distinction Westley makes between social entrepreneurs and social innovators, there is also some ambiguity present at the border between these categories—and I understand why, in its subtleties and complexities and matters of degree, it is a distinction that has been slower to find broad traction than Westley might like. Many social entrepreneurs think of themselves as social innovators, no matter how incremental their contribution to system or institutional change. And many of those engaged in social innovation efforts publicly self-identify as social entrepreneurs because of the *caché* attributed to all things entrepreneurial these days. For that matter, as noted in the interview, social entrepreneurship can be a critical aspect, or stage, of social innovation efforts. For scholars, it may not help that the broader

sociological category to which Westley’s social innovators belong is that of “institutional *entrepreneurs*.” One of the challenges that always faces people doing system-related work is where to draw (and defend) the boundaries of “the system,” and this semantic boundary may be equally challenging (and important). It will be interesting to see how both the marketplace of ideas and the marketplace for postsecondary programs treats the distinction Westley is working to define, establish, and defend.

## Adaptations

Westley’s observations about the market as it relates to social enterprise—with foundations and governments playing central roles—is a reminder that adapting powerful and enduring forms such as the MBA, takes care and thought. Too often when schools launch “social entrepreneurship” programs or “green MBAs,” they simply lacquer a thin coat of “social” or “green” onto their existing models. It can be a marketing boon, but it does a disservice both to students who are passionate about their pursuits, and to the cause itself. Having said that, as Westley would no doubt agree, because the MBA is a powerful and enduring form that carries great status and influence, it can also be a powerful vehicle for change if thoughtfully adapted.

The same is true for adapting theoretical frameworks from one field to another. Some aspects of innovation theory, both that which deals with the creation of innovation and that which deals with defusing and scaling up innovation are directly transferable from technical to social spheres; other elements are not. While the attempt to move frameworks from one discipline or applied problem domain to another has characterized Westley’s work throughout her career, distinguishing between a good metaphor and a truly illuminating application of theory requires thought and caution (Westley et al., 2011).

## Unusual Partnerships for Innovation

Westley’s story and her reflections highlight the generative impact of unusual partnerships in the development of new programs that meet unique needs—particularly in the social innovation and social entrepreneurship areas. Arthur (2009), in his seminal book on technological innovation and how it happens, notes that innovation rarely if ever involves the creation of entirely new things; it almost always emerges from changing the relationships between existing component parts. For Westley, this theme emerges time and again: Sociologist meets

Mintzberg; management scholar meets value-driven environmental scientists; value-driven scholar and business school meet creative charitable foundation; management scholar with expanded vision and sense of the possible meets interdisciplinary environmental institute; director of environmental institute designs and offers business-school-like program in a Faculty of Environment that strives to connect people across multiple sectors.

Again and again, the most interesting programmatic innovations that stretched Westley's thinking and yielded innovative results emerged from the combination of rarely interacting parts and parties. Had she taught her whole career in the core MBA program at McGill, she would no doubt have made many worthwhile contributions and adjustments to the program, but significant programmatic innovations of the kind she ultimately pursued would have been unlikely. This poses an interesting challenge. From a system-thinking perspective, as academics and academic program designers, we are often held in place by a myriad of interacting constraints: incentive systems, existing taxonomies, time limitations, institutional approval procedures, publication pressures, tradition, regulators, resource shortfalls, teaching-load definitions, finite attention, and client or student expectations, among others. In truth, like many successful people after the experience of success, I suspect Westley's comments here significantly understate the degree of resistance and the height of obstacles that innovative ideas and programs—including her own—must necessarily face.

New programs and programming in this domain involve, in part, social entrepreneurship; and as Westley notes, there are few true venture capitalists or philanthropists in this space willing to assume significant risks. The relationships, resources, and risks necessary to find and change the relationships that can lead to worthwhile innovation require some combination of luck, courage, and creativity. The first of these we do not control; the latter two we will need to seek in ourselves and encourage in our sponsors and institutions to engender the experimentation that might yield robust alternative models for training the social innovators and social entrepreneurs of the future.

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