A Theoretical Model of Social Impact

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Abstract

This paper constructs a theoretical model of social impact as it applies to civil society organisations. It does so by drawing on the social ontology defined by practice theory. This approach begins with what is understood within current organisational practices. It then assesses a practice approach against the recent literature on impact and evaluation. This is followed by an exploration of the capitals, notably social, human and cultural capital and their interrelationships, as a theoretical base for the explication of social impact. A formal model of social impact is finally identified together with a set of basic propositions that may collectively be said to define social impact. Finally the implications of the model are discussed for social policy and organisational management.
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Defining the scope of the paper

While much is talked about concerning social impact, and policy papers stress its importance, there is in fact considerable confusion about what it is, and how it relates to wider issues of community cohesion and wellbeing. This paper attempts to structure a theoretical model of social impact, to construct a conceptual frame which may then be useful in determining not only what it is, but how it might then be measured within a community context.

This paper focuses specifically on grassroots, community-based nonprofits such as sporting clubs, service organisations, youth organisations, church-based clubs, community arts organisations. The question that needs answering is 'what is the social impact of these organisations on their local community, and on civil society more broadly'? The question goes beyond any particular program or project of the organisation in question, but is concerned with the impact of the whole organisation.

The paper takes a radically different starting point from that normally adopted for considering social impact. The initial starting point is a reflection on my observations of a wide set of

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community practices over many years. In doing so, I draw on practice theory. As identified by Schatzki, practice theory draws on a different social ontology, in which 'the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices' (2001, p. 12). Practices are conceived as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (2001, p. 11). They are thus collective activities which are not determined either by the individual working alone, nor by the social structures within which they are located, but rather by the social interaction of agents seeking meaning and common purposes within these constraints. Again, following Schatzki, a theory refers to a general and abstract account of a field of practices. As applied to this case, I therefore attempt to develop a general account of a field of practice relating to the social impact of the arrays of human activity located within community-based organisations. While this project draws on various aspects of the existing literature, it is not specifically derived from the literature, but rests strongly on empirical observations, both from formally constituted research and from personal observations and discussions. However the intent is to develop a conceptual model that goes beyond any specific empirical case and that may provide a more general template for future research.

The practical impetus to this project is the need, commonly expressed by policy makers and managers, to understand what kind of social impact the organisation has in society at large and for its specific constituencies. It is important to know whether the organisation as a whole is making a difference to the social life of the community, and, if so, what kind of difference. Sometimes it is important to know what kind of economic impact the organisation is making. However, more often what is required is an understanding of the social contribution made by civil society organisations. Social impact is: illusive, partly because it does not lend itself readily to a monetary analysis; qualitative rather than quantitative; long term rather than short term; diffuse and multi layered rather than specific and focused; and probably means different things in different contexts.

Therefore, a prior step in the measurement of social impact is the development of a useful conceptual framework, one that permits a clear identification of the crucial components of social impact within community-based civil society organisations. It should then be possible to construct more formal and reliable measures of social impact.

This paper therefore begins by presenting the core aspects of a proposed conceptual model as drawn from an understanding of prevailing practices within civil society organisations. The paper then goes on to explore the concept of social impact as variously used in the literature. In particular, two literatures are deemed relevant, though neither could be seen as sufficient in accounting for social impact. The first is the conventional literature on evaluation and impact. The second is the emerging literature on social capital within community-based organisations. The paper concludes with a series of propositions which may then be the basis of future empirical work.

An outline of the model

It is possible to begin by positing a number of basic principles of social impact, as drawn from my understanding of the current practices of community-based organisations. For purposes of illustration, the example of the Rural Fire Service (RFS) in NSW will be used. The epistemological justification for this approach also lies within practice theory, or at least the phenomenological branch of that theory. I seek to uncover those principles of action that organise this field of activity both temporally and spatially. As articulated by Schatzki, these arrays of human activity are centrally organised around shared practical understanding. They are socially constructed with a shared meaning around what people within a community organisation do collectively, and around what they say about what they do. It also follows, that as a social researcher engaged in some kind of ethno-methodology, I am also engaged in the intersubjective construction of meaning. I have done so through a reflexive and recursive interrogation of both informal, incidental observation such as that pertaining to the RFS, but also many thousands of conversations with community participants over many years. That process of reflexive interrogation has then led to several major research projects involving community-based organisation in Australia and around the world, again with recursive analysis of the results within teams of researchers (Onyx, Kenny and Brown 2011; Onyx and Leonard 2011; Edwards, Onyx, Maxwell and Darcy 2012). This process was at all times informed by a general interrogation of potentially relevant literature. However, the articulation of what I believe to be the central principles of action within this field is ultimately my own synthesis and goes beyond any single empirical analysis or research project. Some of the core organising principles of this developing field of knowledge can be articulated as follows:

(a) Social impact refers to wider social effects beyond the immediate program objectives of an organisation and beyond any short term effects.

(b) It refers to effects on the wider community of the organisation as a whole over an extended time period, and includes intended and unintended or spillover effects.

(c) It includes material benefits but more importantly impacts of social cohesion (or disintegration) and levels of wellbeing within the community (Productivity Commission 2010).

Social impact begins at the immediate and local level. It ultimately depends on the creation of a warm and welcoming culture within the local organisation such that new members feel valued and 'part of the family'. During the recent bush fires in Sydney [October 2013], the media was interested in why so many volunteers were willing to face danger and discomfort to battle the fires. Many volunteers responded that in joining the Rural Fire Service, they felt valued and supported, as part of a wider family. An international survey of many thousands of members of community organisations found that one of the key reasons for joining an organisation was its welcoming culture (Onyx, Kenny, and Brown, 2011). A recently completed analysis of surf life-saving organisations found the same thing (Edwards et al. 2012; Onyx et al. 2012).

To the extent that new members of an organisation feel welcomed and valued, they are likely to develop shared values and a commitment to the purpose of the organisation and to other members of the organisation. In particular they are likely to develop a sense of reciprocity, which is of giving as well as receiving the benefits that the organisation provides. To the extent that the particular organisation is embedded within a local community, then the individual members as well as the organisation as a whole will develop a commitment to supporting the whole community. This commitment may be recognised as a strong sense of citizenship.

Through the activities of the organisation, the members develop a variety of new skills. These new skills include those specific to the organisational mission, such as fire fighting. But they will also include more intangible skills such as leadership, team work, perhaps personal development skills like time management. Members will also develop new networks which provide a wider source of information, knowledge and advice. New skills and knowledge will be both received and shared with others.

Finally, to the extent that all the above is achieved through organisational practices, then there will be a wider contribution into the surrounding community. In the case of RFS, the contribution is tangible as lives and property is saved. But it also serves to knit the wider community together, especially during times of stress. The recent fires gave many examples of the whole community coming together to assist the fire fighters with food and drink, to acknowledge the fire fighters' achievements, to celebrate the communities' survival. The local fire service is invariably invited to be part of any community celebration, including for example a 'Santa Truck' at Christmas.

Social impact refers both to the impact as experienced and provided by individuals, but also that of the organisation as an organisation, independently of any single member. The strength and sustainability of the social impact of an organisation will depend in part on the extent to which it is embedded within the host community, at both individual and organisational level. This, in part also depends on the reputation accrued to the organisation and its members. Again the RFS provides a good illustration of this. In the Blue Mountains, every small community includes a bush fire brigade, and local residents regularly contribute time and resources to its maintenance. Collectively, the RFS has enormous prestige, with its members celebrated as local heroes and formally acknowledged in periodic parades and civic receptions.

Social impact is thus seen as a complex, developmental process, one that is important for both the individual and the organisation. Much of it concerns the development and enactment of social relationships, both for the overt intention of achieving the organisation's mission, but more importantly for the development and enactment of community for itself. Many of the individual and organisational benefits arise from this more subtle level of social enactment. This view is quite different from that normally provided within the literature on evaluation. It is to that literature that I now turn.

Evaluation and impact

Impact is often confused with evaluation. While evaluation has become a growing industry, there remains much confusion concerning exactly what evaluation does or should measure, and how these measures relate to impact, if at all. For example, an empirical study of some

178 community organisations in New York State, found that evaluation activities were very limited. While almost all organisations reported some form of regular evaluation, this was mostly in the form of accountability to funders and Directors, and was perceived as a form of accountability or quality control rather than actual evaluation. Very few organisations adopted any form of systematic social impact measurement tool such as "Logic models" (17%) or "balanced scorecard" (3%) (Carman 2007).

Similarly, a study of 237 nonprofits in Chicago found that while the majority of organisations could identify outcomes, including long term outcomes that they expected to achieve, only about half had any means of assessing these (Thomson 2010).

The logic model of evaluation for an organisation and its programs provides one way of distinguishing between evaluation of short term outputs or outcomes from more far reaching impact. Within the logic model of evaluation, a distinction is made between the different levels of evaluation as indicated in Figure 1 below (Arvidson 2009; Ebrahim and Rangan 2010; Maas and Liket 2011; Productivity Commission 2010).

Figure 1
The logic model of evaluation

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
What goes in, resources	What happens, program implementation	specific, immediate and countable products of the program	benefits of the program as identified in the program objectives	Sustained, significant change in effects in the wider environment beyond the immediate boundaries

According to the logic model of evaluation, there are several distinct stages of the process of the organisations programs, and therefore of the evaluation of these programs. Inputs refer to the resources provided for the program, both material and human. Activities refer to the implementation of the program. Outputs are specific, immediate and countable products of the program while Outcomes refer to the benefits of the program for the intended beneficiaries, as identified in the program objectives. These are sometimes expressed in terms of a hierarchy of outcomes moving from more specific to more general. Impacts within the logic model relate to all changes in the wider environment, the community at large, that

occur as a result of the program whether intended or unintended, positive or negative, short term and long term. Impacts usually refer to effects beyond the immediate boundaries of the organisation and its programs (Zappalà and Lyons 2009; Arvidson 2009).

Most evaluations are concerned with second generation level evaluation (Guba and Lincoln, 1986), that is, measuring performance against program objectives, without consideration of the wider ramifications of the program. The majority of evaluations are limited to measures of outputs and lower order outcomes (Thomson 2010; Ebrahim and Rangan 2010). They focus on specific programs and not the organisation as a whole. These evaluations are evidence-based attempts to assess outcomes against intended objectives of the program, without any concerns for examining the wider implications of these, even where the wider impact is the ultimate goal of the program in question.

Applying these ideas to the proposed model of social impact, the definition of social impact provided within the logic model is consistent and appropriate, that is we are concerned with understanding sustained, significant change in effects in the wider environment beyond the immediate boundaries of the organisation's programmes. However as used within program logic, impact is normally regarded as an extension of the formal objectives of the organisation's program, and is thus limited to the same parameters of objective outcomes. So for RFS, impact measures would be limited to the wider extent of lives and property saved, and perhaps to wider effects on the economy and on bush regeneration. The broader intangible social effects on members and the community are rarely considered. They are what may be termed "spill-over" effects (Productivity Commission 2010). These are effects that may be unintended, and are not specified in the statement of organisational objectives. They are effects that are produced outside the planned intervention, either directly or indirectly as a result of the intervention. In accounting terms they are externalities, and as such not measured. They may however be very important in terms of wider impact of organisational activities on the wider community, with potential positive and negative wider implications.

More recently there have been attempts to develop a framework of evaluation that can be used across the sector, that provides a clear and consistent approach and that can potentially measure effects beyond the immediate outputs (Maas and Liket 2011). Of these, the Social Return On Investment (SROI) is gaining considerable attention in the UK and Australia. It is essentially a monetising exercise, identifying a dollar value for each nominated activity or

event to put in the ratio equation of investment against return. This leaves open the question of identifying the key variables to include in the equation, and the appropriate dollar value to impute to each variable. Any variable that cannot be readily given an attributed value is simply omitted from the equation. Perhaps more seriously, the use of SROI and similar monetised evaluation frameworks reduces organisational performance to financial values at the expense of the human and mission-based values of the service provided (Zappalà and Lyons 2009; Arvidson 2009; Mook, Richmond and Quarter 2003; Ebrahim and Rangan 2010).

A second problem with techniques such as SROI lies with the identification of causality. Sustained significant social change, such as increased community wellbeing, is complex and likely to be the result of multiple and unrelated causal factors and influences. While the actions of the organisation may contribute to these benefits, it is impossible to establish how much of these benefits would have happened anyway, from other causes, for example changing economic circumstances that reduce poverty quite apart from the action of the organisation. There are good reasons for this; the further removed the effect is from the intervention, the harder it is to obtain reliable measures and the greater the likelihood that the effect will be produced by a number of other factors, outside the control of the organisation.

While evaluation methods are useful in measuring the outcomes of specific programs, they do not address wider effects beyond program objectives. Most importantly, they are invariably limited to formal and 'objective' measures of material events. They are not concerned with such immaterial practices as a welcoming organisational culture, the development of broader citizenship values, or a commitment to supporting the wider community. Thus while these formal accountability measures may be a useful form of evaluation at one level, they go nowhere near an assessment of the deeper value and therefore wider social impact of the organisation as a whole.

Social Capital and impact
A more useful literature for assessing the intangible contribution of community organisational practices concerns the use of the concept of social capital. The literature on social capital does not attempt to specifically address issues of impact except at the broadest macro level. Nonetheless there are potentially a number of important insights arising from it.

Social capital is an essential ingredient in community cohesion and well-being. Studies indicate that regions and groups measuring high in social capital also have a variety of positive outcomes, beyond economic advantage, such as improved health and well-being, reduced levels of crime and better educational outcomes (Putnam 2000; Halpern 2005; Onyx and Bullen 2000).

Social capital was defined by Putnam (1993, p. 167) as 'those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions'. For him, and others following this approach, social capital is a basic resource that is used to maintain and enhance community cohesion and collective action in promoting community-wide civic health. In other words it focuses on the productive aspect of social capital when people are able to work cooperatively and collaboratively.

Bourdieu on the other hand defined the social capital as 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 119). For Bourdieu, social capital was a core strategy in the struggle for dominance within a social field. His focus was not on collaborative action but on the struggle for power and wealth, and in particular the strategies adopted by elite groups to maintain their relative advantage.

Other scholars have adopted a middle ground, that is acknowledging the capacity of social capital to be both a productive resource, but also a strategy used by marginal groups in their struggle for economic survival and human rights (Woolcock and Narayan 2001; Halpern 2005; Onyx, Edwards and Bullen 2007).

Despite these different approaches, there is a growing consensus that social capital must be defined in terms of networks that are durable and mutual with norms and sanctions to enforce their interactions. There is also agreement that social capital is a complex multilayered concept with several components, though scholars disagree as to which other elements are core and which peripheral to its definition. In particular one point of discussion concerns the centrality of trust. For some it is critical (Fukuyama 1995; Putnam 1993; Schneider 2009), for others simply a fortunate side effect (Portes 1998; Woolcock 2001; Schuller 2001). Other scholars have emphasised different core elements of social capital, elements such as

reciprocity (Putnam 1993) and social agency (Leonard and Onyx 2004). Agency refers to the capacity to take the initiative, to be proactive.

Most discussions of social capital distinguish between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Woolcock and Narayan 2001; Putnam 2000). Bonding social capital is usually characterised as having dense, multi-functional ties and strong but localised trust. It is essential for a sense of personal identity, support and belonging. However, to the extent that it creates narrow, intolerant communities, it can be oppressive even to those who otherwise benefit. Bridging is more complex. Bridging, as the name implies, is about reaching beyond these immediate networks of family and friends. Bridging is important for personal and community development (Woolcott and Narayan 2001). Bridging can be used in at least three different ways: to cross demographic divides, notably ethnic divides; to bridge structural holes between networks; and to access information and resources outside the community in question. However as Schneider (2009) and others (eg Leonard and Onyx 2004) have argued, bridging is not simply a matter of weak or transient ties, but of more formal ties which also require the development of trust over time. Evidence is increasingly making clear that both bonding and bridging are essential resources for individual and collective wellbeing (Putnam 2000; Leonard and Onyx 2004; Edwards and Onyx 2007; Schneider 2009).

As applied to the proposed model of social impact, social capital is consistent with practice theory. Social capital in all its forms clearly refers to consistent and coherent embodied and materially mediated arrays of human activity that are centrally organised around shared practical understanding of their meaning (Schatzki 2001). Both bonding social capital and bridging are relevant and important. Bonding concerns the development of close, mutually supportive social relations within the organisation, and thus provides the basis for the development of members' commitment to the organisation. Bridging suggests the benefits gained from the development of networks beyond the individual's initial set of family and friends, first within the organisation, then beyond it.

The interaction of the capitals

One of the most significant contributions of Bourdieu was his broader sociological analysis of the role of capital. He argues that there are a number of different capitals, all of which are

linked and under some circumstances can be converted into other forms of capital. For example he argues:

> Capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital made up of social obligations (connections) which is convertible in certain conditions, into economic capital (Bourdieu 1986, p242).

Bourdieu later added the concept of 'symbolic capital' which alludes to the power of prestige or reputation when economic or cultural capital is recognised and acknowledged by others. He also defines cultural capital as having several subspecies, notably embodied cultural capital, objectified cultural capital and institutionalised cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital refers to long-lasting personal dispositions such as ethnicity, religion, family background, linguistic codes. Objectified cultural capital refers to the value and power of cultural products. Institutional cultural capital refers mainly to educational qualifications as formally recognised (Bourdieu 1986).

The importance of cultural capital in the creation of social impact has been highlighted within another discipline, that of social psychology, by Latané and his colleagues. They define culture as 'the entire set of socially transmitted beliefs, values and practices that characterize a given society at a given time' (Latané 1996, p. 13). He proposes a dynamic theory of social impact to account for how coherent cultural patterns emerge out of a self-organising complex system of individual networks.

Bourdieu in his analysis privileges economic capital as the primary source of wealth and power; other capitals are primarily useful in so far as they may be ultimately convertible into economic capital. However other scholars are more interested in the interdependencies between capitals for their own sake. Of particular relevance here is the link between social capital and human capital. Human capital resembles Bourdieu's institutional cultural capital and is defined by the OECD for example as encompassing skills, competences and qualifications (Schuller 2007). Schuller argues that the value of social capital depends in large measure on its linkage to other capitals, especially human capital, just as human capital requires access to social capital in order to actualise its potential. Both are important ends in themselves but each is enhanced by the presence of the other capital.

While the literature on social capital does not address the issue of social impact directly, it has direct relevance to the model here proposed. The implication of this discussion is that social impact must be conceptually linked to the generation of social capital, but it is likely to be more than that. In formal terms, social impact will refer to the generation of increased (or decreased) levels of social, cultural and human capital within the constituent communities in which an organisation operates. The generation of these capitals, as emphasised by Bourdieu and others, is seen as an ongoing process within the communities in question, one dependent on the complex set of relationships. That is, we are not examining an extant "stock" of capital, but an ongoing process of generation.

The individual vs the organisation

A recurring debate within the literature is the extent to which social capital adheres to the organisation or to the network. Putman sees social capital as a collective resource, located in the social networks which are potentially open to all. Bourdieu was concerned with the advantages individuals gain from social capital resources, but he nonetheless recognised that social capital was generated within durable social networks. More recently, some economists have attempted to identify social capital as an individual possession, to be accumulated and used like any other form of capital, regardless of what other people may do (Glaeser, Laibson, & Sacerdote 2002). I would argue that, by definition, social capital adheres to the connections between people that are a quality of the social rather than the individual. However, as Putnam (2000) and others have noted, the individual may access the resources available in the collective, and may do so to their personal advantage. For example, individuals in organisations are able to use their networks to gain new employment opportunities. But, to the extent that the individual continues to draw from the collective social capital resource without contributing to it, that resource will ultimately be drained of its dynamic renewal. This raises the problem of the "free rider". As Ostrom explains:

> Whenever one person cannot be excluded from the benefits that others provide, each person is motivated not to contribute to the joint effort, but to free-ride on the efforts of others. If all participants choose to free-ride, the collective benefit will not be produced. (1990, p. 6)

If social capital resides in the social connections between people, then logically, the best measure of it also requires measures of the collective. In fact most attempts to measure social

capital make use of individual, survey type instruments (eg Onyx and Bullen, 2000) in which individual scores are aggregated to provide a picture of the larger collective.

As a consequence of this approach, there has been little effort to apply social capital to the organisation as a whole, that is, to the organisation separate from the individuals who make it up. Schneider on the other hand defines organisational social capital as 'established, trust-based networks among organisations or communities supporting a particular non-profit, that an organisation can use to further its goals' (2009, p. 644). She provides considerable evidence of the role of organisational social capital which is independent of the people involved and which is based on that organisation's history and reputation. So, even as key individuals move on, the organisation can continue to draw on its organisational networks as important resources. Just as with individual networks, the organisational network ties are reciprocal, enforceable and durable. Schneider further makes use of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to explain how subcultural differences within and between organisations help to define social capital networks. Thus, organisations are likely to form social capital networks with those other organisations within the same field which have one or more core values or cultural attributes in common. Resources are more likely to be shared and collaborative action developed between alliances within this organisational network.

In terms of social impact, the implications are clear. Social impact, like social capital, occurs at both the individual and the organisational level. The two are related but not synonymous. Any analysis of social impact must therefore consider both the impacts for the individuals concerned and also the independent effects of the organisation.

The Proposed Model of Social Impact
It is now possible to return to the proposed new conceptual model of social impact, drawing on both the literature and observed practices of community-based organisations, this time identifying in formal terms a number of testable propositions. It is suggested that the social impact of an organisation can be defined by the collective result of these propositions. The propositions provide a synthesis of insights from the literature and from both formal and informal empirical observations of community action and discourse, without being specifically derivative from any of these. At this stage it is premature to attempt further

explication of the likely causal links between and within these principles. That is a task for future research.

Proposition One: The generation of social impact is an ongoing process within the communities in question, one dependent on a complex set of relationships and practices. It includes importantly the development of core values and networks.

Proposition Two: Social impact is not an all or none affair, but involves several distinct aspects or phases which are causally related. Social impact begins with the organisation itself, and the extent to which the organisation provides a welcoming climate for individual members and thus the extent to which those members feel included, with a sense of personal belonging (Onyx et al. 2011; Edwards et al. 2012). Bonding social capital is a necessary precondition for the generation of further effects (Edwards and Onyx 2007). To the extent that this occurs, then wider impacts become possible, extending out from the immediate local organisation into the wider community, in a manner not dissimilar to the ripple effect of a stone dropped in still water.

Proposition Three: An important aspect to the generation of social impact is the development of social and citizenship values developed by members as a direct consequence of the organisational practices. These values will vary, but are likely to include a sense of community and the importance of community service. This may reflect what Latané described as the emergence of cultural capital (Latané 1996).

Proposition Four: Organisational practices enable the development of personal skills and knowledge (human capital), and the development of wider social networks, both within and beyond the organisation (bridging social capital). There is an interdependent development of both social and human capital (Schuller 2007).

Proposition Five: A wider contribution to the local community in which the organisation is embedded occurs as a direct consequence of organisational practices. This may involve the creation of broader networks and volunteer action outside the immediate organisation. In part this wider contribution occurs as a result of active networks within the community involving the organisation and its members. Much depends on the wider reputation that the organisation

has within the community, as developed over time (Onyx and Leonard 2011). Bourdieu's symbolic capital plays an important part.

Proposition Six: Impact occurs BOTH at the level of the individual member AND at the level of the organisation. Impact depends both on the culture of the local organisation, as Schneider (2009) suggests, but also on the response of the individual members. The networks that are formed relate to organisational networks as well as individual networks. Contributions to the wider community are made by the organisation as an organisation as well as by individual members. What the organisation espouses as an organisation can have a direct and separate effect on other outcomes, quite distinct from that of the individual members. In other words organisational policy counts, but not completely.

Proposition Seven: To the extent that the organisation is embedded within the local community (and probably ONLY to the extent that it is so embedded) then the social impact will continue to strengthen, and indeed may reverberate back into the organisation, thus strengthening its internal impact in an iterative fashion. That is, to the extent that the organisation is able to contribute to a stronger community, then the community will support and strengthen the organisation. As suggested from some sport development projects organisational practices will only provide wider, long term impact to the extent that the communities in question take ownership of them (Schulenkorf, Thomson and Schlenker 2011).

Discussion of Implications of the Model

The model of social impact here developed makes it clear that social impact is a complex, developmental process, one that is important for both the individual and the organisation. The implications are important for policy makers and organisational management alike.

This conceptual model does not in itself provide a measure of social impact, but it does provide the necessary basis for formulating appropriate qualitative and quantitative measures of social impact. Indeed the application of the specific propositions to a single large community-based organisation, Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA), would suggest that such an application for the measurement of social impact is entirely possible and relevant (Edwards et al. 2012; Onyx et al. 2012).

The organisations as well as government funding bodies need to know what the social impact (positive and negative) of the organisation is within its host community. This is not a question of faith or conjecture. Nor is it a question of the adequacy of any specific program. It is a question of what difference the organisation makes as a whole, over time, within the local community. But then, how can we know? To answer that question, requires comprehensive measurement tools. But the measurement is only useful to the extent that it is able to capture the essence of the social impact in its complexity. The measure must be about the measure of all capitals involved, especially the social, cultural, human....and only indirectly relevant is the economic capital. The conceptual model presented here potentially provides the basis for the development of such measures.

Governments at State and Commonwealth level have come to accept the vital role played by organisations of civil society in providing essential services to the community, but also in developing wider social cohesion and basic democratic engagement of its citizens. Ultimately, of course, the implications of social impact and its measurement are profoundly important for our intellectual and practical understanding of the nature of social impact, its role in maintaining a healthy, cohesive society, and the continued role of civil society.

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