

## World Wisdom in Action

### Everyone a Changemaker

#### Social Entrepreneurship's Ultimate Goal

William Drayton



Muhammad Yunus, left. William Drayton, right.

Rodrigo Baggio grew up in Rio de Janeiro loving computers. As he matured into an extraordinarily tall, thin man with a hugely wide smile, he became a computer consultant. However, from early on, he was one of the few in his generation who noticed—with concern—that the young people growing up in the favelas on the hills overlooking his middle-class neighborhood had no access to this digital world.

Because he has the great entrepreneur's tenacity of observation and thought as well as action, he decided he had to take on the digital divide—well before the phrase came into currency—and he has been pursuing this vision relentlessly ever since. While beginning to work toward this dream as a teenager, he learned just how motivated and capable of learning the young people in the favelas were. And also how competent the favela community was in organizing. This respect underlies the central insight that has allowed Rodrigo to have a growing multi-continental impact.

Rodrigo provides only what the community cannot: typically computers, software, and training. The community does the organizing, finding space, recruiting the students and faculty, and providing ongoing administration. The result is a uniquely economical

model, and also one which, because the investment strengthens the broader community, is self-sustaining and a foundation for other initiatives long into the future.

Rodrigo's chain of hundreds of community-based computer training schools now serves hundreds of slums across Latin America and Asia. These schools now have 700,000 graduates.

I got a sense of Rodrigo's power when he came to Washington shortly after being elected an Ashoka Fellow. Somehow he convinced the Inter-American Development Bank to give him its used (but highly valuable) computers. Somehow he convinced the Brazilian Air Force first to warehouse and then to fly these computers home. And then he somehow managed to persuade the Brazilian customs authority to allow all these computers in at a time when Brazil was trying to block computer imports.

Several years later, I got a further sense of how his mind worked when I asked him why he was starting his work in Asia in Japan. Japan, he said, was the only large Asian source of computers where he could imagine getting people to give them to him. Therefore, as his first step, he had to demonstrate the value of his program to the Japanese in several of their own slums.

That is how entrepreneurs work. Having decided that the world must change in some important way, they simply find and build highways that lead inexorably to that result. Where others see barriers, they delight in finding solutions and in turning them into society's new and concrete patterns.

That much is easy to observe. However, there is more to it. Somehow, an unknown, young, lanky Rodrigo, the head of a new and unknown citizen organization, persuaded the managers of one after another of society's big

institutions to do things they never would have imagined. He knew they were the right and logical things to do. Somehow they sensed that inner confidence and found it surprisingly persuasive.

What were they sensing? Rodrigo's words and arguments no doubt helped, but few people are willing to step out beyond the safely conventional merely on the basis of good arguments.

Rodrigo was persuasive because his listeners sensed something deeper.

What Rodrigo was proposing was not just an idea, but the central logic of his life—as it is for every great entrepreneur. He mastered and came to love the new digital world from the time he was a young boy. More important, his values from early on drove him to care about the poverty and inequality he could see on the hillsides rising behind the middle-class Rio in which he was growing up. His values and his temperament had him taking on the digital divide before the term was invented.

As a result, when Rodrigo sat across the table from the much older, powerful officials he needed to move, they were confronting not just a good idea, but deeply rooted and life-defining values: non-egoistic, kindly determination and commitment.

This values-based faith is the ultimate power of the first-class entrepreneur. It is a quality others sense and trust, whether or not they really fully grasp the idea intellectually. Even though they would not normally want to step out in front of the crowd, a quiet voice tells them to trust Rodrigo and go with his vision.

Any assessment of Rodrigo's impact that stopped with his idea, let alone his business plan, would not have penetrated to the core of his power. Our field has been impover-

ished by too many assessments that never get to the essence.

Nor is Rodrigo's most important impact his schools or the life-changing independence and mastery he provides his students. Consider the impact Rodrigo has on a community when he introduces his program. It is not a school created by the government or outsiders. It is a school created by, funded by, managed by, and staffed by people in the community. The students are responsible for learning and then making their way. Think how many patterns and stereotypes are crumpled by these simple and very obvious facts. The psychological impact is a bit like India emerging from 50 years of falling behind to suddenly being recognized as the new challenger at the cutting edge of the most advanced part of the world's economy.

Accompanying this disruption of old patterns of action and perception is another contribution, and I believe it is the greatest one of Rodrigo and every entrepreneur: the idea of catalyzing new local changemakers into being. Unless the entrepreneur can get someone in one community after another to step forward and seize his or her idea, the entrepreneur will never achieve the spread that is essential to his or her life success. Consequently, the entrepreneur presents his or her idea to the local community in the most enticing, safe, understandable, and user-friendly ways possible.

Of course, the entrepreneur's own life story is in itself a beacon encouraging hundreds of others to care and to take initiative. This also increases the number of local changemakers.

Moreover, when these local champions then build the teams they need to launch the idea they have adopted, they are providing not only encouragement but also training to potential next-generation local changemakers.

As the field of social entrepreneurship has grown and multiplied and wired itself together across the globe over the last 25 years, the rate of this plowing and seeding at the local level has accelerated dramatically. Ten years ago, the probability of an idea from Bangladesh affecting a community in Brazil, Poland, or the U.S. was very limited. Now it is common (the best-known example being

Muhammad Yunus' impact on the global spread of microcredit) and becoming more common every year.

As the number of leading pattern-changing social entrepreneurs has been increasing everywhere, and as the geographic reach of their ideas has been expanding ever more rapidly, the rate of plowing and seeding therefore has multiplied. As have the number of local changemakers.

This whole process is enormously contagious. As the number of large-scale entrepreneurs and local changemakers multiplies, so does the number of support institutions; and all of these make the next generation of entrepre-  
neuring and changemaking easier. Not only do people not resist, but in fact, they respond readily to this change. Who wants to be an object when they could be changemakers, when they could live lives far more creative and contributory and therefore respected and valued?

As important as Rodrigo's impact is on the digital divide and on the lives and communities he serves, I believe this second dimension of his impact is far more important—especially at this transitional moment in history.

The most important contribution any of us can make now is not to solve any particular problem, no matter how urgent energy or environment or financial regulation is. What we must do now is increase the proportion of humans who know that they can cause change. And who, like smart white blood cells coursing through society, will stop with pleasure when they see that something is stuck or that an opportunity is ripe to be seized. Multiplying society's capacity to adapt and change intelligently and constructively and building the necessary underlying collaborative architecture is the world's most critical opportunity now. Pattern-changing leading social entrepreneurs are the most critical single factor in catalyzing and engineering this transformation.

### Everyone a Changemaker

The agricultural revolution produced only a small surplus, so only a small elite could move into the towns to create culture and

conscious history. This pattern has persisted ever since: only a few have held the monopoly on initiative because they alone have had the social tools.

That is one reason that per capita income in the West remained flat from the fall of the Roman Empire until about 1700.

By 1700, however, a new, more open architecture was beginning to develop in northern Europe: entrepreneurial/competitive business facilitated by more tolerant, open politics. The new business model rewarded people who would step up with better ideas and implement them, igniting a relentlessly expanding cycle of entrepreneurial innovation leading to productivity gains, leading to ever more entrepreneurs, successful innovation, and productivity gains.



Tandiar Samir teaching healthcare in Egypt

One result: the West broke out from 1200 years of stagnation and soon soared past anything the world had seen before. Average per capita income rose 20 percent in the 1700s, 200 percent in the 1800s, and 740 percent in the last century.

The press reported the wars and other follies, but for the last 300 years this profound innovation in how humans organize themselves has been the defining, decisive historical force at work.

However, until 1980, this transformation bypassed the social half of the world's operations. Society taxed the new wealth created by business to pay for its roads and canals, schools and welfare systems. There was no need to change. Moreover, no monopoly,

## Ashoka Fellows at Work



1. Rodrigo Baggio students in a Brazilian Favela. 2. Harini Kakkeri gathers women to address reproductive health options in India. 3. Street improvements in the Aqua Fria settlement. 4. Alemberg de Souza, Brazil offers alternatives to exploitive labor through new communications and tourism. 5. Vera Cordeiro, Ashoka Fellow, Brazil.

public or private, welcomes competition because it is very likely to lose. Thus, the social sector had little felt need to change and had a paymaster that actively discouraged it.

Hence the squalor of the social sector. Relative performance declining at an accelerating rate. And consequent low repute, dismal pay, and poor self-esteem and élan.

By the nineteenth century, a few modern social entrepreneurs began to appear. The anti-slavery leagues and Florence Nightingale are outstanding examples. But they remained islands.

It was only around 1980 that the ice began to crack, and the social arena as a whole made the structural leap to this new entrepreneur-

ial competitive architecture.

However, once the ice broke, catch-up change came in a rush. And it did so pretty much all across the world, the chief exceptions being areas where governments were afraid.

Because it has the advantage of not having to be the pioneer but rather of following business, this second great transformation has been able steadily to compound productivity growth at a very fast rate. In this it resembles successful developing countries like Thailand.

Ashoka's best estimate is that the citizen sector is halving the gap between its productivity level and that of business every 10 to 12 years. This rapidly rising productivity means that

the cost of the goods and services produced by the citizen sector is falling relative to those produced by business—reversing the pricing pattern of the last centuries that led to the much-criticized 'consumer' culture.

As a result, as resources flow into the citizen sector, it is growing explosively. It is generating jobs two and a half to three times as fast as business. There are now millions of modern, competing citizen groups, including big, sophisticated second-generation organizations, in each of the four main areas where the field has emerged most vigorously: Brazil-focused South America; Mexico/U.S./Canada; Europe; and South and Southeast Asia. (The field is also growing vigorously in Africa, the Middle East, East Asia, and Australia/New Zealand, but these are much

smaller clusters.) All this, of course, has dramatically altered the field's élan and attractiveness. This is where the job growth is, not to mention the most challenging, value-rooted, and increasingly even well-paid jobs. Just listen to today's 'business' school students.

Given the results-based power of this transformation of the citizen sector, more and more local changemakers are emerging. Some of these learn and later expand the pool of leading social entrepreneurs. To the degree they succeed locally, they give wings to the entrepreneur whose idea they have taken up, they encourage neighbors also to become changemakers, and they cumulatively build the institutions and attitudes that make local changemaking progressively easier and more respected. All of which eases the tasks facing the next generation of primary pattern-change entrepreneurs.

This virtuous cycle catalyzed by leading social entrepreneurs and local changemakers is the chief engine now moving the world toward an 'everyone a changemaker' future.

No matter how powerful this dynamic is, however, several other changes are necessary if society is to navigate this transition successfully.

- Most important, society cannot significantly increase the proportion of adults who are, and know they are, changemakers and who have mastered the necessary and complex underlying social skills until it changes the way all young people live.
- Although it is normal for support areas like finance to lag behind change in the operating areas they serve, the emergent citizen sector is now at significant risk unless it can quickly engineer major structural changes in both its institutional finance sector and the broad grassroots sources of support in its post-breakeven zone.

### Transforming the Youth Years

The children of elite families grow up at home and usually in school, being expected to take initiative and being rewarded for doing so. This confident ability to master new situations and initiate whatever changes or actions are needed is in essence what defines the elite. Entering adult life with confidence and mastery of empathy/

teamwork/leadership skills is what ultimately has given this small group control of the initiative and therefore of power and resources for millennia.

However, the other 97 percent grow up getting very little such experience with taking initiative. Adults control the classroom, work setting, and even sports and extra-curricular activities. And this situation, coupled with society's attitudes, drums home the message to this majority: "You're not competent or perhaps even responsible. Please don't try to start things; we can do it far better." Teachers, social workers and others are comfortably in control; and, in fact, most school and other youth cultures are not competent and do not train and support and respect initiative-taking. Instead, the peer group culture, not surprisingly, is resentful and in the worst cultures, quite negative.

Do these inarticulate, frustrated youth cultures bring analogous prior situations to mind? Over the last century, many other groups—including women, African Americans, those with disabilities, even colonial peoples—had to make their way from debilitating stereotypes and little prior practice in taking the initiative to becoming fully accepted, capable contributors. These groups, although very different from one another, had to travel strongly similar human and community transformation paths.

Young people are the last big group to set out on this journey. They are also different; but, in the underlying psychological and organizational transitions ahead, they can learn a great deal from the experience of these other groups.

Building on the history of these earlier movements and also on the accumulated experience of hundreds of leading social entrepreneurs working with young people, Ashoka and many partners have prototyped and are beginning to launch at scale the equivalent of a women's or older person's movement for young people.

Although this movement must ultimately change how everyone thinks about and relates to young people, it is young people and their peer communities who will have to change most and who have the most to gain.

Therefore, as with all the earlier similar transformations, it is essential that they be central actors—both in actually shifting to the new pattern (because the best learning comes from action) and in championing the change (because people in any class are most likely to hear and trust peers).

Note: This article is excerpted from a longer article that includes Drayton's partnership with Youth Ventures and innovative ideas for social financing. © Tagore LLC innovations/winter 2006. <http://mitpress.mit.edu>

William Drayton, pioneer of the social entrepreneur movement, is currently the Chairman and CEO of Ashoka: Innovators for the Public. He is a graduate of Harvard, Oxford University and Yale Law School. He served during the Carter Administration at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Selected as one of America's Best Leaders by *U.S. News & World Report* and Harvard's Center for Public Leadership (2005), he was the recipient of the Yale Law School Award of Merit (2005), the Duke University Social Entrepreneurship Award (2007) and the University of Pennsylvania Law School's Honorary Fellow Award (2007).

### ABOUT ASHOKA

#### Ashoka: Innovators for the Public

Ashoka is the global association of the world's leading social entrepreneurs—men and women with system-changing solutions that address the world's most urgent social challenges. Since its founding in 1980, Ashoka has launched and provided key long-term support to more than 1750 leading social entrepreneurs in over 60 countries. It provides these 'Ashoka Fellows' start-up stipends, professional services, and a powerful global network of top social and business entrepreneurs. It also helps them spread their innovations globally.

Working with these social entrepreneurs, Ashoka builds communities of innovators who work together to transform society and design new ways for the citizen sector to become more entrepreneurial, productive and globally integrated. Ashoka's modest investments consistently yield extraordinary returns in every area of human need—from human rights to the environment, from economic development to youth empowerment. Five years after start-up launch, over 90 percent of Ashoka Fellows have seen independent

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developments in academia should not be surprising. There is much 'second-order' creativity or smart mental permutation of already known ideas, but very little 'first-order' creativity or organic, multidimensional emergence of truly innovative developments. Given the innumerable 'abortions' of the creative process that these dynamics cause in the Western educational process almost from day one, it is understandable (perhaps inevitable) that so many students develop a lack of confidence in their own creative potential.

We strongly suspect that this deeply masculinized pedagogical container may also be behind the intense (and also masculinized) reactivity of the feminine sensibility (of both men and women) that faculty and students often witness in the classroom, even in those courses where the 'feminine' is honored and included in content and/or more superficial process (e.g., inclusion of a feminine ritual in a masculinized pedagogical process). The true feminine is understandably in a state of paralyzing despair that can easily burst into anger because it cannot understand why it still feels profoundly dishonored when it is apparently attended to and even explicitly championed.

In future years, it is likely that integral education will gradually restructure the pedagogical process in ways that truly and deeply integrate the 'masculine' and 'feminine' dimensions of the inquiry process. This may involve the facilitation of spaces not only for the intellectual discussion and production of knowledge but for the vital germination and gestation of the creative seeds of the individual.

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and Ramon V. Albareda, Directors of ESTEL School of Integral Studies in Barcelona, Spain, founded Integral Holism, a new approach to human growth and healing characterized by a vision that is both holistic (global) and ecological (of interactive system).

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brains fires new neural pathways when it encounters fresh meaning and new insight.

Our consciousness is most deeply perceptive and lucid when it is spiritually immersed and compassionately involved in the unfolding of the full range of experience—in other words, when it is paradoxically both detached and engaged. This detachment is not a separating or uncaring stance; as many of the traditions point out, it is a deep surrendering and a releasing of the struggle of the small will, so that it is not confined by the logic of narrow self-interest. In this kind of surrender, we experience a profound trust that, below the surface of the visible world, there is a vitality, an inspiring aliveness, and even a source of greater guidance. As detachment nurtures our sense of mysterious connection to a story so much larger and so much more multifaceted and dimensional than our little local identity, we are freed to engage in serving the world with a greater sense of being representatives of that great story, rather than missionary partisans for some narrow aspect of it. Our ability to develop an inclusive compassion is greater now than it has ever been. Of course, we have far to go, but we see global responses to natural catastrophes and diseases; we see a rise in philanthropic ventures and hundreds of thousands of organizations promoting rights, ecology, and poverty alleviation and as many celebrating arts and culture.

James O'Dea, president of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, was formerly the director of Amnesty International, Washington D.C. and its representative to the U.S. White House and Congress and the World Conference on Human Rights. As executive director of Seva, he worked with international health and development issues in Latin America, Asia, and on American Indian reservations. He is a member of the World Wisdom Council.

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institutions replicate their innovations, and over 50 percent have already changed national policy.

Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize Winner in 2006, has had significant collaboration with Ashoka Fellows as a founding member of Ashoka's Global Academy in 2001.

### What is a Social Entrepreneur?

Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change.

Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps.

Social entrepreneurs often seem to be possessed by their ideas, committing their lives to changing the direction of their field. They are both visionaries and ultimate realists, concerned with the practical implementation of their vision above all else.

Each social entrepreneur presents ideas that are user-friendly, understandable, ethical, and engage widespread support in order to maximize the number of local people who will stand up, seize their idea, and implement it. In other words, every leading social entrepreneur is a mass recruiter of local changemakers—a role model proving that citizens who channel their passion into action can do almost anything.

Over the past two decades, the citizen sector has discovered what the business sector learned long ago: there is nothing as powerful as a new idea in the hands of a first-class entrepreneur.

### Why 'Social' Entrepreneur?

Just as entrepreneurs change the face of business, social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions to change society for the better. While a business entrepreneur might create entirely new industries, a social entrepreneur comes up with new solutions to social problems and then implements them on a large scale.

Learn more at [www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org)

