

Change through chaos: using bricolage in cross-sector social partnerships

Melissa Intindola and Laurel Ofstein

*Haworth College of Business, Western Michigan University,
Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore bricolage as the missing link in understanding how cross-sector social partnerships form and operate in response to grand challenges. It is proposed that the weaving together of resources employed by members of cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs) is bricolage in action and can be linked to Gray's (1985) facilitating conditions for collaboration. While existing research examines bricolage primarily at the individual level, this research studies collective bricolage, as implemented by a cross-sector social partnership in its process to address a grand challenge.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors follow the evolution of a Midwestern initiative aimed at the grand challenge of generational poverty. The deductive case study approach identifies the mechanisms of bricolage being employed in the initiative's evolution and ties these to Gray's (1985) seminal paper on interorganizational collaboration.

Findings – This case study has implications for academics conceptually struggling to understand grand challenges and the role of entrepreneurial initiatives in the public and nonprofit sectors, as well as practitioners currently involved in collaborative efforts to address said challenges.

Originality/value – This study enriches the discussion and enhances the link between the CSSP literature and new notions of social entrepreneurship that embrace the collective as their unit of analysis. This is the first work of its kind to link bricolage to a nascent CSSP and demonstrate how the entrepreneurial concept of bricolage is an inherent part of CSSP formation and operation.

Keywords Cross-sector social partnerships, Bricolage, Incubators

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Poverty. Disease. Homelessness. Hunger. War. Illiteracy. These are common examples of “grand challenges” (hereafter, “GCs”). GCs are defined as “specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation” (George *et al.*, 2016, p. 1881; *Grand Challenges Canada*, 2011, p. iv). While the GCs represent the “problem,” research on how the problem is addressed is lacking. This was the purview of a 2016 special research symposium of the *Academy of Management Journal* that aimed to apply managerial theory to understanding how broader interaction among communities, organizations, and policy makers could occur successfully in response to GCs (George *et al.*, 2016). Such interactive efforts are commonly referred to as “cross-sector social partnerships” or “CSSPs.”

In their seminal review on using cross-sector collaboration to address GCs, Selsky and Parker (2005) deemed trisector collaborations among business, nonprofits, and government “CSSPs.” Such partnerships have two characteristics: first, they exist for the sole purpose of



addressing a particular GC; second, CSSPs rely on continued, active engagement by all parties. Furthermore, CSSPs tend to focus more on large-scale projects related to economic and/or community development, the environment, health, and social services (Selsky and Parker, 2005). This research differentiates between CSSPs and public-private partnerships, with the latter referring to formal, contractually obligating collaboration and the former referring to non-contractual collaboration freely entered into by all parties. This is consistent with previous distinctions (Bryson *et al.*, 2015).

Efforts to cull best practices from the wide-ranging operations of CSSPs are ongoing (c.f. Intindola *et al.*, 2019; Intindola *et al.*, 2016; Pittz and Intindola, 2015; Pittz *et al.*, 2019; Rueede and Kreutzer, 2015). In particular, little is known about the mechanisms of formation surrounding CSSPs or how these collective partnerships operate once formed. While a number of frameworks have been posited as useful in understanding the dynamic nature of CSSPs (c.f. Ansell and Gash, 2008; Agranoff, 2007, 2012; Bryson *et al.*, 2006, 2015; Huxham and Yangen, 2005; Ostrom, 1990; Provan and Kenis, 2008; Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Thomson and Perry, 2006), perhaps the seminal and most formative consideration of CSSPs can be seen in Gray's (1985) model of "facilitative conditions" for collaboration. However, this model has not been tested and does not account for real-time processes – a classic "black box" problem, referring to a situation in which *how* something occurs is unclear. One example is the effort to understand the human resource management – organizational performance link (Becker and Huselid, 2006). More recently, nonprofit scholars have borrowed the term to examine the role of social capital in the nonprofit organization (Schneider, 2009), as well as in the creation of new nonprofits (Andersson, 2017). Further, while the aforementioned frameworks note the necessity of assimilating multi-disciplinary research to address the ambiguous nature of CSSPs, the role of entrepreneurship in the collaborative space is still underexplored.

Entrepreneurship is generally associated with opportunity identification, innovation, and risk (Kirzner, 1979; Luke and Chu, 2013; Shane, 2003; Venkataraman and Sarasvathy, 2001). Also, entrepreneurship assumes the presentation of something new to the market (Davidson, 2006; Luke and Chu, 2013). Taken together, social entrepreneurship is the act of recognizing and acting on opportunities that will bring innovative change of a social purpose to the market (Corner and Ho, 2010; Leadbeater, 1997; Luke and Chu, 2013). TOMS shoes (<http://www.toms.com>) represents a social enterprise – "business as an instrument for social development (Dart, 2004, p. 421; Luke and Chu, 2013)" whereas CSSPs seek to fundamentally change the underlying intractable problem itself (Luke and Chu, 2013).

More specifically, Montgomery and colleagues (Montgomery *et al.*, 2012) referenced CSSPs as a type of "collective social entrepreneurship." They urged entrepreneurship scholars to expand their conceptualization of the entrepreneur beyond the individualistic "hero" model. Their study considered how CSSPs harnessed and traded resources, and posited the importance of framing, convening, and multivocality to the effectiveness of collective social entrepreneurial ventures. This focus on resources, while revolutionary in the exploration of CSSPs, still does not fully reflect the complexity associated with how resources are initially gathered and maintained within these partnerships. To that end, this research proposes the use of one specific component of social entrepreneurship – bricolage – to provide clarity in studying CSSPs. Specifically, this research asks how bricolage may be useful in understanding how CSSPs form by bringing together each partner's existing resources, use the new arrangement of resources to navigate barriers in resolving a GC, and ultimately operate as a form of collective social entrepreneurship. This work aims to answer a broad, but important, research question: *How do cross-sector collaborations use bricolage to do their work?* In so doing the contribution is twofold: (1) The study extends previous research on collective social entrepreneurship and resource management into the CSSP literature. This allows for a deeper understanding of not just why CSSPs form, but how they

do their work. Such an understanding has important implications for researchers and practitioners alike. (2) The study enriches the discussion and enhances the link between the CSSP literature and new notions of social entrepreneurship that embrace the collective as their unit of analysis. This focus on the collective is particularly important in light of new research in the social entrepreneurship field. Recent work by [Mitzinneck and Besharov \(2019\)](#) points out that extant social entrepreneurship research is too focused on formal, contractually obligated forms of organizing that pursue societal improvement via commercial venture. In reality, many forms of social entrepreneurship collectives are formed by volunteers, all of whom represent different organizations and all of whom have different “bottom line” initiatives. The binding force is the collaborative’s goal of addressing a particular grand challenge. We answer the call by [Mitzinneck and Besharov \(2019, p. 398\)](#) to study such “pluralistic institutional environments” in an effort to uncover their unique challenges and the methods used to overcome these (in our case, bricolage in response to a lack of resources needed for scalability).

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: it begins by reviewing CSSPs and bricolage more broadly. Doing so is important to understanding the backgrounds of each construct prior to discussing their integration. Next, it proposes how bricolage works in CSSPs. A deductive case study is used to follow a citywide CSSP incubator aimed at alleviating generational poverty to illustrate the conceptualization. Finally, the paper concludes with the implications of this research for theory and practice.

Literature review

Cross-sector social partnerships

Scholars note that the “complementary” partnering of different sectors hearkens back to colonial times ([Young, 1999](#)) and had such champions as Benjamin Franklin: “His [Franklin’s] political talents were never better displayed than in his ability to unite public and private support behind municipal improvements” ([Bremner, 1992, pp. 17–18](#)). In spite of this long history, CSSPs remained a neglected phenomenon in the mainstream literature. Indeed, the collaboration literature’s first “real” breakthrough in management studies could be considered to have come from [Gray \(1985\)](#). [Gray \(1985\)](#) defines collaboration as two parties working to achieve a mutually agreeable solution neither could achieve working alone. Her research suggests that there are three phases of collaboration: (1) problem-setting, which involves the selection of stakeholders (including legitimacy and power determinations) and the selection of a facilitator; (2) direction-setting, which involves the parties reaching mutual co-occurrence of goals and values; and (3) structuring, which is the ongoing sustenance of the collaboration (external mandate aside). Because these phases are returned to later, they are included as [Figure 1](#). In subsequent research, Gray and colleagues posited that “Collaboration shows promise for solving organizational and societal problems, provides some extraordinarily intriguing research settings, and is sufficiently underdeveloped as a field of study to inspire creative conceptual contributions” ([Gray and Wood, 1991, p. 4](#)).

It was another twenty years before management scholars would again take up the topic of CSSPs and create what was at the time perhaps the most thorough discussion of CSSPs in the management literature ([Selsky and Parker, 2005](#)). In accordance with their work, this research gives the “cross-sector social partnership (CSSP)” label to the collaborative efforts resulting from multi-sector collaboration. We define CSSPs as “cross-sector projects formed explicitly to address social issues and causes that actively engage the partners on an ongoing basis” (p. 850). More specifically, CSSPs are considered an “arena 4” collaboration in this study. Arena 4 CSSPs are tri-sector, including nonprofits, private businesses, and the public sector. These CSSPs typically focus on large-scale projects, including economic and community development, social services provision, the environment, and public health concerns.

Problem-setting	Direction-setting	Structuring
Recognition of interdependence	Coincidence of values	High degree of ongoing interdependence
Identification of a requisite number of stakeholders	Dispersion of power among stakeholders	External mandates
Perceptions of legitimacy among stakeholders		Redistribution of power
Legitimate/skilled convener		Influencing the contextual environment
Positive beliefs about outcomes		
Shared access power		

Figure 1.
Gray's 1985 facilitating
conditions

For purposes of this paper, it is important to differentiate CSSPs from social enterprise partnerships, social ventures, and social impact bonds. Social enterprise partnerships (SEPs) are collaborations between non-profit organizations only, with the intent of tackling a grand challenge in order to create economic value within a community (Henry, 2015). These SEPs, then, are different from CSSPs in that they only involve collaborations between two or more non-profit agencies, while CSSPs purposefully reach across sectors. Social ventures refer to organizations that seek to have a social impact via a commercial enterprise. The *logic* of social ventures is cross-sectoral in that they maintain a non-profit mission but seek commercial gain to further that mission. However, the organizations themselves are not cross-sectoral (Blundely and Lyon, 2015; Haugh, 2007; Lyon and Sepulveda, 2009). Finally, social impact bonds are contractual (Smeets, 2017), whereas CSSPs do not include formal ties via contract (see Bryson *et al.*, 2015 for a further explanation of this nuance). Essentially, CSSP participants are voluntarily “at the table”, all want to impact a particular grand challenge, and each brings a particular set of resources to the partnership. However, partners are not compelled to share these resources via contract.

In addition to this summarizing framework, Selsky and Parker (2005) also issue a number of directives for future research. First, the authors point out that future research within the CSSP context should consider the “functionally useful dimensions” of such partnerships, as these will almost certainly affect the outcomes generated by CSSPs. Second, the authors point out that future research may benefit from current literature on within-sector partnerships. In other words, attempts to apply what makes intra-organizational partnerships (e.g. teams) successful may be a first step in understanding how CSSPs are similar to or different from these “cleaner” partnerships. Third, Selsky and Parker (2005) note that typically studies within this context take a macro viewpoint, to the neglect of micro issues occurring as the CSSP members interface with one another. The review conducted by Selsky and Parker (2005) set the stage for subsequent scholars to contribute to this multidisciplinary domain by exploring different facets of boundaryless collaborative teams.

Drach-Zahavy (2011) has also pointed out the uniqueness of this type of partnering, again with examples applicable to CSSPs. Specifically, this author notes that members may have allegiance to both their individual organizations and the team's broader goal. Drach-Zahavy (2011) finds that this makes a CSSP similar to a cross-functional team, except that complexity is increased because the differentiating commitments, obligations, and identities between one's organization and one's team may actually be conflicting. This challenge is also discussed by Silvia (2018) when referring to collaboration in solving complex public problems. Individuals must reconcile their own personal opinion, the perspective of the organization they represent in the collaboration, and the view of the collaborative team

(Head, 2008). In this way, there is no one broader goal to which the team member may choose to subscribe at all times – in a given context, different goals may appear more salient. Lastly, team members from different sectors (and thus, organizations) may be required to maintain more open boundaries in order to include all appropriate external stakeholders within the team's focus (Drach-Zahavy, 2011).

A recent search in the management literature shows that the field has at least begun to take up the tasks issued by Selsky and Parker (2005), investigating everything from how to capture the social value creation of CSSPs to the leadership necessary in such collaborations. Indeed, a 2016 *Academy of Management Journal* Special Research Forum specifically requested articles on grand challenges. The resultant articles considered several aspects of grand challenges, including the interactions of for-profit, non-profit, and government interest groups (e.g. Berrone *et al.*, 2016) to address broader social ills. Further evidence of the field's efforts to better understand CSSPs as an organizing form for addressing grand challenges can even be found in the 2018 *Academy of Management* theme and corresponding call for papers (CFP) – improving lives. The CFP broadly references the role of organizations in making the world a better place. It even speaks to CSSPs in its provocation questions, asking *what forms of organizational alliances/partnerships facilitate a positive impact on health and well-being?*

Despite this progress, the most consistent critique of the literature exploring collaboration is its ambiguous, *ex post facto* nature. Instead of considering how collaborative relationships emerge in a process model, the majority of literature in this field relies on efforts to analyze and characterize *pre-existing* collaborations. Further, the majority of current research focuses on the macro underpinnings of collaboration, without proper attention to its individual participants. While the domain level is no less important, simultaneous efforts to understand how the individuals serving on such CSSPs are affected should be conducted, in part because of the immediate utility of such results to practitioners. Furthermore, the relative newness of cross-sector collaborations as a research context necessitates consideration of its members' everyday interactions in constructing the CSSP (Selsky and Parker, 2005). This point is echoed more generally by Cunliffe (2009) in her discussion of ethnography's place in understanding the intricacies and challenges of being an organizational participant in an immature field of research.

The next section explores how social entrepreneurship more broadly, and bricolage in particular, may be the key to understanding how CSSPs form and continue to operate in the face of the aforementioned ambiguous complexity.

Bricolage and social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is pursued with the intention of improving society at large for its constituents, and enhancing the community through innovation, with success measured by the ability to scale the social impact (Bacq *et al.*, 2015). The goal of a social enterprise is to scale its impact to have a meaningful influence on a significant social need (Dees, 2008). However, to scale and tackle an extensive problem such as generational poverty or world hunger, social entrepreneurs must combine any and all resources they can find to apply toward the problem at hand (Baker and Nelson, 2005). This synthesizing of new combinations of available resources to attack a social problem or opportunity is called "bricolage."

Bricolage is the creation of something new through the combination and application of existing resources to a new problem or opportunity (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Garud *et al.*, 1998; Lévi-Strauss, 1967). The resources used in bricolage can be tangible or intangible (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012), and so include the combination of resources provided through the coordination of business, government, and non-profit entities, as demonstrated in CSSPs. While these organizations may work together on discrete local initiatives, solving a GC requires a deeper level of coordination of the already-strained resources of the key

stakeholders to bring about a major social change. (For example, [Heyworth-Thomas and Jones, 2019](#) provide a discussion of cross-sector coordination to support stroke survivors and their caregivers). Bricolage can be used as an iterative problem-solving process for evaluating and addressing critical needs and challenges ([Bacq et al., 2015](#)). Examples of these include social problems like unemployment or limited access to healthcare. Using bricolage in social entrepreneurship enables the identification of innovative and valuable solutions with only existing, and often scarce, resources that bring positive social change to communities ([Gundry et al., 2011](#)). This scarcity of resources is a defining characteristic of the environment in which social ventures emerge ([Janssen et al., 2018](#)). One of the key challenges social entrepreneurs face in their efforts to have a social impact is scalability ([Dees, 2008](#)). The bricolage approach of relying on these coordinated resources will need to have the full support from all parties involved in the CSSP in order to scale to impact the GC faced in the community.

Bricolage has been applied across multiple areas of research ([Duymedjian and Ruling, 2010](#); [Hatton, 1989](#); [Hull, 1991](#); [Lanzara, 1998](#)) since its earliest appearances in the anthropology literature ([Lévi-Strauss, 1967](#)). In contrast to other methods of entrepreneurship such as causation or effectuation ([Fisher, 2012](#)), bricolage is considered to be action-orientated ([Senyard et al., 2009](#)). This orientation makes it a good fit for exploring CSSPs – partnerships that may work to carry out the actions necessary for addressing a timely and pressing GC such as generational poverty.

[Baker and Nelson \(2005\)](#) laid the foundation for bricolage within entrepreneurship. They theorize that when entrepreneurs operate within penurious environments – those with very limited resources – they face options ([Baker et al., 2003](#); [Baker and Nelson, 2005](#); [Garud and Karnøe, 2003](#); [Stinchfield et al., 2013](#)). The options for the entrepreneur(s) include: seeking external resources, avoiding new challenges altogether, or enacting bricolage by combining resources they have at hand to the problem or opportunity they face ([Baker and Nelson, 2005](#)). A recent study by [Sarkar \(2018\)](#) found that grassroots entrepreneurs operating in resource-poor environments were still able to achieve successful outcomes through bricolage. The recombining of resources goes beyond just physical resources and may also include several organizations pooling their limited human resources or technology resources to provide the necessary support for the problem at hand. For example, a business incubator may require support from government organizations such as a Small Business Development Center for business guidance and the city council for regulatory support. Participation by financial institutions such as banks for financial assistance, and universities for subject matter expertise or access to prototyping labs or equipment, may also be important elements.

In a recent study by [Fisher \(2012\)](#), entrepreneurial firms were assessed to determine how they were engaging in bricolage behaviors. In terms of exhibiting an action orientation, the entrepreneurs typically developed and tested tools before identifying a clear commercial application ([Fisher, 2012](#)). This fits in the context of a social entrepreneurial venture in that the organization may seek stakeholder commitments to address a social problem, such as a GC, before the process of *how* to do so is clearly defined. This is consistent with the bricoleur's (entrepreneur engaging in bricolage) tendency to accumulate resources at hand with the thought that they may be useful one day ([Di Domenico et al., 2010](#)), as opposed to seeing what resources are necessary for the specific project at hand and then acquiring them as needed ([Lanzara, 1998, 1999](#)). While the end goal may be determined (addressing the GC), the means by which the goal will be achieved remains undefined. The role of stakeholders, or potential external partners, co-creating a joint initiative ([Baker and Nelson, 2005](#); [Duymedjian and Ruling, 2010](#)) has been explored in bricolage. Previous studies found that collaboration can improve access to resources ([Shaw and de Bruin, 2013](#)) and help to legitimize the project ([Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013](#)). However, collective bricolage has risks in addition to the benefits presented previously. Resource sharing and collaboration can lead to goal

incongruence between stakeholders (Kwong *et al.*, 2017) and may even lead to undue influence by those in possession of the needed resources, who may seek to change the mission of the social enterprise altogether (Frooman, 1999; Kwong *et al.*, 2017).

This paper posits that bricolage is the missing component needed to explain the process by which CSSPs form and operate. Bricolage can help us to understand how CSSP contextual factors like the “facilitative conditions” noted by Gray (1985) occur in real time, while illuminating the uncertainty underlying the CSSP process. There has been only one other study that considered bricolage in cross-sector partnerships. In their study of Finnish cross-sector partnerships, the authors considered how managers in multi-national corporations relied on bricolage to help them function more effectively in the partnership (Ritvala *et al.*, 2014). While helpful in addressing how one participating CSSP entity can be successful, this research did not apply the concept of bricolage more broadly to the entire CSSP. Thus, this study is the first of its kind to suggest bricolage as the entrepreneurial linchpin in formative and operative processes of CSSPs. Additionally, Janssen *et al.* (2018) call for the processes of the interaction between social entrepreneurship and bricolage to be better documented. The next section presents a new conceptualization of how bricolage is present in collective social entrepreneurial ventures like CSSPs through an in-progress, deductive case study of a citywide incubator.

Attacking generational poverty: a CSSP study

In summer 2016, two wealthy benefactors in a midwestern United States (US) city approached city leadership with a proposition: they would donate a substantial amount of money to the city. This donation had two underlying goals. The first goal was to stabilize the city’s finances, including the provision of infrastructure improvements and filling a recurring gap in the budget to allow for a reduction in property taxes. The second goal was to create an independent foundation to allow for the tackling of several city “grand challenges,” chief among these “addressing generational poverty, promoting youth development and removing barriers to employment opportunities.” This was in response to recent data presented by local researchers indicating the percentage of those living in poverty within city limits had increased by a third since 2000 (Barrett, 2017a, b).

The city was ultimately tasked with creating a board of “stakeholder directors” who would ultimately oversee the foundation, which would act as an entity separate from the city government. In so doing, the city was essentially creating a CSSP, as it was expected to have representation from the public sector (city government), private sector (local businesses), and nonprofit sector (community education, service providers, etc.). It was decided that the best way to attack the grand challenges noted above was through the creation of a citywide incubator, to be funded in part by the aforementioned foundation. The incubator would enable entrepreneurial residents, with little to no financing or business training, to connect with community experts in the hopes of creating sustainable family businesses. These businesses would (1) invigorate struggling communities economically, and (2) develop small, family-owned businesses that could be passed from one generation to the next, easing the burden of generational poverty by enabling those with entrepreneurial intentions.

Nearly a year later, in summer 2017, the local university became a partner in the foundation’s early steps. This allowed for the researchers to be privy to the collaboration’s inner workings. As such, the sample was one of convenience. While this may call into question its generalizability (see Eisenhardt, 1989 for a thorough discussion of case study research), public administration scholars note the richness of detail and “intellectual goldmine” case studies offer when considered cumulatively (Jensen and Rodgers, 2001). Further, recent research by Newth (2018) specifically calls for the use of such qualitative methodology in understanding micro social entrepreneurship collectives like the one

investigated here. Newth (2018) points out that this type of work is focused on “. . .the interplay of human action, institutional practice, and social context and that such methodologies” are “particularly appropriate for understanding social entrepreneurship as a micro-level action embedded in broader meso-and macro-level sociostructural contexts” (p. 684). This sentiment is echoed by Silvia (2018), who outlines the challenges to effective measurement in social science research contexts, and collaborative network contexts more specifically, and concludes that, “best available” methods must be employed (p. 476). Given the newness of this research stream, this case is an important first step in an eventual culmination of case study work. Essentially, while this CSSP is nascent, discussing its activities to date and illustrating how bricolage acts on each of these allows for a deeper understanding of how CSSPs more broadly exist in real time. As such, we rely on a longitudinal, single-site, deductive case study to present the first set of findings from this CSSP’s initial activities.

The first step after receiving the donation was the city’s efforts to gain support from a broad group of potential stakeholders. This was done before the incubator concept had even been defined as the *how*. This is consistent with the actions of entrepreneurial bricolage in that they sought the input and resources of stakeholders before understanding or conceptualizing how those tools may be used. They only knew that the end goals were “addressing generational poverty, promoting youth development and removing barriers to employment opportunities.” The first two meetings were composed of a broad group of stakeholders loosely defined as any local or state organization that played a role in business development within the city of focus. This loose definition of the initial list of stakeholders is consistent with two of Gray’s (1985) problem-setting activities: “recognition of interdependence” and “identification of a requisite number of stakeholders.” Many of the identified stakeholders already work together on other city initiatives and are integral to the success of business development across the community, but typically for more traditional entrepreneurial businesses.

Early meetings discussed how best to maximize community assets including engagement from existing business support organizations (such as the Small Business Development Center, the primary community economic development organization, and existing specialized incubator programs such as food commercialization and medical technology). Fundraising support was sought from both large and small banks (those focused specifically on community development and others with specialized grant programs available). This gathering of resources and funding through unconventional methods is consistent with recent research on catalytic innovators engaged in bricolage, identifying and gathering resources through “(donations, volunteering, micro-financing, intellectual capital, etc.)” (Kickul *et al.*, 2018, p. 409). These early meetings also sought feedback on the questions of “How do we scale up?” and “What do each of you bring?” (with “you” meaning each stakeholder in attendance). These questions are consistent with a bricolage approach to forming a CSSP because, as stated earlier, there was no pre-determined assessment of the resources expected from each of the stakeholders identified. There was also no clear determination of the full set of resources that would be needed to scale up a city-wide incubator, or even what scaling up existing services to educate and support poverty-stricken entrepreneurs would look like. Consistent with Gray’s (1985) emphasis on establishing the legitimacy of the stakeholders, the initial organizing body of the CSSP (the local university and the city) has identified this group of stakeholders as legitimate. Having a large group of stakeholders committed to the initiative early on can be beneficial. Accordingly, this collective form of bricolage can lead to economies of scale for a social enterprise, allowing it to expand in scale and scope beyond which the allotted financial resources may be able to accomplish, and also help to reduce risk (Kwong *et al.*, 2017). It is important to note that in this case study, the larger group of stakeholders may be considered “low-power stakeholders” in

that they may have a “voice” in the CSSP (Hirschman, 1970), but will not necessarily be *representative* stakeholders charged with making decisions on behalf of the foundation as the project progresses. To rectify this issue of low-power stakeholders, research has shown that common resource pools (such as the one provided by the low-power stakeholders) can be regulated by institutional arrangements (Bauwens, 2005; Ostrom, 1990). In the case of the incubator, this is occurring by tasking representative stakeholders to act on the resources collected in order to fulfill the mission of the CSSP.

Next, the city sought resources and advice specifically from certain stakeholders. In December 2017, ten candidates were recommended to represent community interests on the foundation’s inaugural board of directors. Of the ten, seven spots are for individuals who will represent a specific issue or cause, and the remaining three spots will be for residents of individual neighborhoods. The represented areas include the Arts, Business/Banking, Education, Faith-based, Healthcare, Housing, Nonprofit, and the three neighborhood representatives. The process for selection included an effort to “achieve diversity across sectors, diverse perspectives, and abilities” (Barrett, 2017a, b).

The next step in moving toward creation of a citywide incubator is to conduct a feasibility study. An external consulting firm has been hired to complete the study. Originally a traditional bank had agreed to fund the feasibility study, but later backed out. Consistent with bricolage, the feasibility study was put on hold, rather than cancelled, while the city representatives sought alternative funding from other private and public outlets. After much uncertainty, the city cobbled together alternative financial resources, including a portion from the statewide Local Initiatives Support Corporation, which has the mission of supporting projects to revitalize communities and bring greater economic opportunity to residents.

The funnel graphic outlined in Figure 2 illustrates a leap from each portion of the funnel to the next, representing the uncertainty present in moving from one stage to the next. While gathering broad and representative stakeholder input was important, moving to the initial incubator execution stage was not guaranteed without the ability to successfully complete the feasibility study. Just as in social enterprises with very limited resources, the enterprise could be on the brink of collapse at many stages before realizing the organization’s intended vision. The fact that this effort is led by a CSSP, as opposed to a more traditional social enterprise led by an entrepreneur, provides more options for recovering from setbacks, such as resource constraints like the aforementioned funding setback. With partners from multiple facets of the community driving the CSSP, there is a broader network of contacts to tap into than a social enterprise may have at its disposal.

The citywide incubator feasibility study, shown in Figure 2 funnel, will allow each of the representative stakeholders to share their vision for the incubator, as well as their views on addressing the GC of generational poverty. Gray’s (1985) definition of stakeholder legitimacy states “they must possess resources and skills sufficient to justify their involvement in collaborative efforts (p. 922).” The CSSP publicly shared its methodology for selecting the board candidates. The local community foundation worked with staff from the city to determine the key elements of the process, each representative stakeholder’s role, and the information that the selection committee would gather about each candidate’s perspectives and skillsets (Barrett, 2017a, b). This public process is consistent with Gray’s (1985) problem-setting condition of having perceived legitimacy among stakeholders. The consulting firm conducting the feasibility study is acting as a “legitimate/skilled convenor,” Gray’s next required condition (Gray, 1985).

The remainder of Gray’s (1985) problem-setting conditions is not yet observable in this case study because of the CSSP being at such an early phase. However, as the remaining portions of the funnel in Figure 2 show, the initial incubator implementation will require the representative stakeholders to determine the plan for executing the incubator. The CSSP will

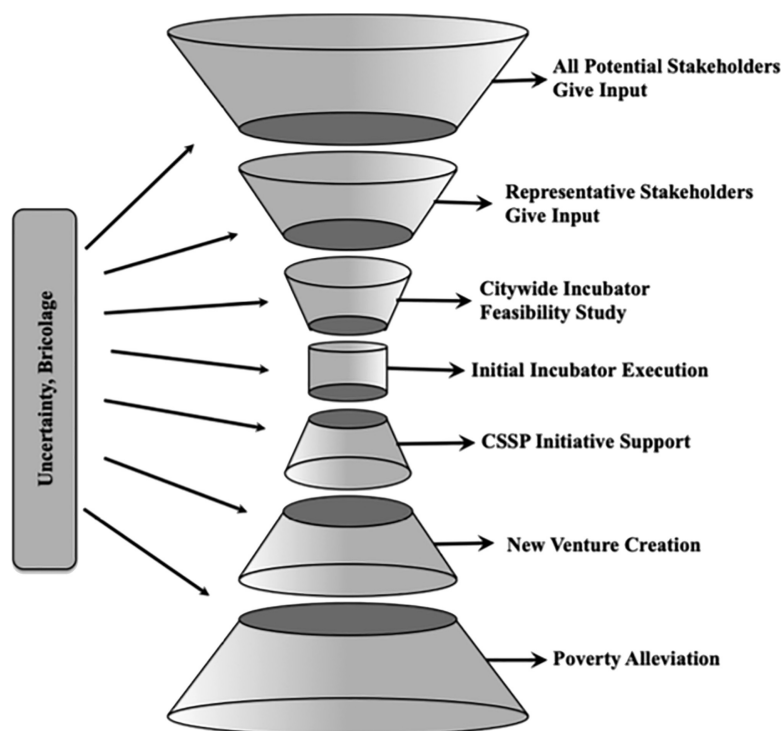


Figure 2.
Understanding the role
of bricolage in CSSPs

provide support for the incubator initiative through the collaborative contribution of community stakeholder resources and legitimization of the project in terms of the community at large (i.e. legitimization of the incubator) (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Shaw and de Bruin, 2013). The “direction-setting” conditions will be driven by the CSSP to support the ultimate “structuring efforts” of establishing new ventures with the intention of “influencing the contextual environment” from one of generational poverty to one of generational employment and self-sufficiency, consistent with Gray’s (1985) model.

The overarching factors influencing Gray’s (1985) model, and a key contribution of this research, is the inclusion of uncertainty and bricolage at every stage of the process through which the CSSP must navigate in its efforts to influence the GC. In Senyard *et al.*’s (2014) article on innovation in firms using bricolage, both positive and negative aspects of this approach to resource collection and allocation are discussed. One of the possible negative outcomes of bricolage is the potential for unpredictable outcomes, or inefficiency due to a trial-and-error approach to reaching the anticipated outcome, as opposed to a more causal plan (Ciborra, 1996; Lanzara, 1999). Using a bricolage approach is often considered closer to improvisational (where the initiative is planned and executed simultaneously as it moves forward toward the end goal), rather than moving forward methodically (Miner *et al.*, 2001). However, in the case this research is studying, the direction setting from the feasibility study for the creation of the citywide incubator may help to reduce the CSSP’s need for improvisation as it moves toward implementation.

Bricolage creates an actionable framework for Gray’s (1985) theoretical model of facilitative conditions of collaboration. By combining the action-oriented nature of bricolage (Senyard *et al.*, 2009) with Gray’s (1985) theoretical foundation, social entrepreneurs can use

this combination to implement measurable improvements toward solving GCs in their local communities. In this case study, the existing resources of the representative stakeholders in the CSSP are pooled to create new, more valuable, arrangements of resources to navigate barriers to resolving the GC. While the combination of these resources in this case study are for the instance of creating the citywide incubator, a successful outcome of this collaborative effort could lead to a new community focus on collective social entrepreneurship in tackling other GCs, and provides a model for collective social entrepreneurship in other contexts.

Conclusion

There is little argument that addressing grand challenges is well within the purview of academics, practitioners, policy makers, and community stakeholders. Recent academic research lags behind practice in understanding how CSSPs – one such organizing body aimed at these GCs – comes into existence and continues to navigate uncertain territory. While the notion of collective social entrepreneurship has embraced CSSPs as a form of enterprising behaviors with a broader social purpose, there is still little known about the process by which CSSPs form and cobble together resources in order to operate. In this paper, the entrepreneurial construct of “bricolage” is proposed as the missing piece necessary to better understand this black box problem. Bricolage was observed in several instances despite the recent nature of this CCSP. First, the city led efforts to identify any and all stakeholders that may have resources important to the collaboration. This cobbling together of stakeholders represents bricolage in its truest form, and also maps onto the first two steps [Gray \(1985\)](#) identifies in her seminal paper on interorganizational collaboration. Second, stakeholders’ efforts to raise funds via each individual partner’s network of donors, grantors, etc. is bricolage in action. Finally, the incubator demonstrates bricolage in its handling of the unexpected loss of funds earmarked for the feasibility study. Its scramble to piece the funds together is important because it demonstrates the use of bricolage to problem-solve. Although the incubator is not yet far enough along to map its progress completely onto [Gray’s \(1985\)](#) steps for collaboration, this study suggests that uncertainty is a key trademark of each step and further finds that bricolage may be the method by which CSSPs navigate that uncertainty. Altogether, this research is a first step towards understanding the “how” mechanisms in CSSP formation and function. To our knowledge, this is the first work of its kind to link bricolage to a nascent CSSP and demonstrate how the entrepreneurial concept is an inherent part of CSSP formation and operation. Future research should seek to further extend the concept of bricolage into more developed CSSPs as well as those operating within different contexts.

While there are limitations associated with case study research – namely, limited generalizability due to the limited nature of a case study and specific boundary conditions – the risk of over-generalizing is mitigated by the need for an understanding of bricolage in CSSPs. Case study exploration of new phenomenon is oftentimes a precursor to more established quantitative studies ([Eisenhardt, 1989](#)). In closing, when the topics are as dire as those associated with GCs, academics have a duty to meet practitioners where they’re at in an effort to conceptually understand the goings-on associated with tackling worldwide problems. The linking of bricolage to the formation and operation of CSSPs is an important first step in doing so.

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Corresponding author

Melissa Intindola can be contacted at: melissaintindola@gmail.com

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