

# THE SHIFTING PARADIGM OF INNOVATION AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN COVID-19 TIMES: A PERSPECTIVE

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## Abstract

Different institutions, whether public, private or third sector, play a vital role in society. Institutions, in this respect, are the bedrock that shapes a society for the better. The recent coronavirus outbreak has tested society to the limit, and tested the ways in which different institutions respond to the pandemic. One aspect that has played a key role in the global health crisis is social enterprise. Social enterprise organizations are acting as crucial cornerstones in the state government activities in many countries across the world. These social enterprises are making real social impact in different government sectors, such as education, employment and public health. In this paper, the authors critically explore the great benefits of social enterprise during the current pandemic. By presenting qualitative evidence from a recent, funded social enterprise project, the authors argue for more intense support and usage of social enterprise organisations in community development.

**Keywords:** Coaching, community, COVID-19, social enterprise, social innovation

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## Introduction

COVID-19 has caused major disruption across the globe; its ramifications are varied and uneven across communities. People living in acute poverty globally are more adversely impacted by the pandemic, which is further exacerbating and stretching their already limited access to steady earnings, clean water, food and nutrition, and public services like healthcare, etc. Furthermore, their ability to practice social distancing is diminished, as many live in slum clusters that lack basic amenities, making them even more vulnerable to the very contagious COVID-19. Circumstances like poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion are not themselves products of COVID-19, but this pandemic has magnified existing inequities and inequalities, and brought disproportionate economic growth to the forefront. Musa (2020) has noted, “according to recent World Bank estimates, the pandemic is causing a major economic shock that could unravel decades of progress on poverty alleviation, and push more than 80 million people into extreme poverty.” To make the situation much worse, specialists envisage multiple resurgences of COVID-19, reducing the constructive effects of the ongoing response. Multiple waves of widespread infection are expected to cause more volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), and how we should adapt and prepare our response to these recurring outbreaks is still unclear. Globally, resources are severely strained and economies are slowing down, with some even experiencing negative growth.

COVID-19 has equally underscored the importance of precision policies that offer a comprehensive agenda, and mentorship to build resilience in the vulnerable communities. As the global community braces to take on the massive consequences of the current pandemic, the systems and structures of the world need to get ready for the paradigm shift. Unless we promptly counter this crisis with more inclusive and sustainable policy mechanisms, it could jeopardize decades of development and progress.

In current times of uncertainty, social innovation and enterprise has become all the more important. They can help in providing essential services and support the poor and marginalised section of the society. It is strongly advocated that social enterprise and social innovation have immense potential to avert the direct or indirect impacts of COVID-19 for the people at the bottom of the pyramid. Social enterprises are already stepping in and lending support to migrants, the poor, and to health and social care services at the frontlines. Social enterprises have successfully showcased the best of what they do during the COVID-19 crisis and have differentiated

themselves from mainstream business in both their ethos and mission. Furthermore, Musa (2020) has stated the pandemic has highlighted clearly the critical significance “of strengthening systems and building resilience across communities” – principally among those living in severe adversity and who are most at danger during these foremost disruptions.

### Structure of the Paper

The aim of this paper is to provide a thematic narrative on the importance of social innovation and social enterprise and what they can offer in the current global health crisis. The paper has five sections. The first section provides a critical reflection on social enterprise and its inter-relationship with social innovation. Moving on from this, the authors examine the changing perspective of institutions and how mentorship has become a vital tool in societal problems today in the second section. The third section will provide a brief overview of how the research was undertaken, and then the fourth section will present the key findings from the qualitative research. Finally, the last section will provide a summary of the paper and suggest ways forward in this research.

### Situating Social Innovation and Social Enterprise in COVID-19 Times

Global attention towards social innovation and social enterprise has already grown considerably since the 2008 financial crisis, encouraging many institutions, governments, corporates, philanthropic and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to connect with various emerging concerns. Governments everywhere are grappling with multiple societal issues that are thwarting them from achieving sustainable economic growth and are impinging upon the welfare of their populace. The crisis is not only economic, but one related to a fundamental architecture being pursued in the era of liberalization, privatization and globalization. The global challenges differ between countries to some extent, but the problems still remain for all. Unemployment, health, poverty, lack of housing and climate change are globally recognized problems, mentioned as important targets to be achieved set by the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Addressing many of these complex challenges, therefore, entails a necessary paradigm shift and attitudinal transformation.

Social challenges, by their innate design, tend to be more

complicated and defy linear, top-down policy approaches. Social innovation and social enterprise area response to these challenges that offer substantial promise. A social innovation approach puts competence to harness innovation at the heart of community problem solving; it necessitates a distributed and dispersed arrangement where innovation and social enterprise connect through networks.

The significance of social innovation and enterprise in tackling the requirements of the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised, and in creating shared value for society as a whole, has been extensively recognised. Social enterprise is celebrated currently as “one of the most alluring terms on the problem-solving landscape today” (Light, 2008: 21). The traditionalist, rigid, institutionalised assumption of a two-sector economic model is giving way to emerging faith in social enterprise as a conduit to deal with big social and economic problems (Halsall et al. 2020).

Social enterprises are perceived as change agents; they offer innovative solutions, the latest methodologies, and novel conceptual frameworks. Social enterprises attend to social issues and support the communities at the margins by innovative methods to resolve difficult issues. Many understand social enterprise as a transformational trend in the progression towards making standard for-profit enterprises which change themselves for generating social value. Seelos and Mair (2007) hold the view that, in a local community context, social enterprises create opportunities and can have a real impact in the geographical area (e.g. in tackling poverty, and in employment, education, and environmental issues).

Becchetti and Borzaga (2010) highlight on the constructive aspect of social enterprise to explain their rise. He believes that the increase of advocacy movements and the rising consciousness of the negative impact of globalization, together with the increase in voluntary actions have created favourable environment for them. Social enterprises are primarily concerned with value creation and not value capture. Actually, social enterprises aim for dual bottom line of creating social value and trying to be sustainable. Another feature is that the ideas for social enterprise evolve through the community participatory co-designs.

It is becoming widely acknowledged that conventional business models are not suitable for the complex nature of social challenges. The traditional model of public management was developed in the era of mass production and draws on a machine-based mental model. It is a centralized bureaucratic command and control arrangement, the function of which is to bring standardisation and effectiveness

in order to increase the volume of outputs with little concern for the larger stakeholder and society. Yunus (2007: 23) explicitly states, “unfettered markets in their current form are not meant to solve social problems and surely capitalism is amenable to improvements”.

Social innovation re-conceptualizes public administration as contemporary problem involving state-of-the-art innovations and collective initiatives. This has ushered in the need for an experimental approach to public management and the rise of collaborative governance. Social innovation and social enterprise work on bottom-up, grassroots concerns and local-oriented approaches. The conventional institutionalized suppositions of economic model based on state-owned or private-owned models are giving way to support for social enterprises. Anticipating the crises of private and public sectors, Etzioni (1973) suggested that an innovative form of organization would be required to provide the much-needed development of the people. The third sector, which amalgamates the operating procedures of public and private sectors and bands together the competence of the market and the welfare orientation of the state, would have to take the centre stage (Oberoi et al. 2021). Social enterprises are boundary spanners or hybrid organisations using both cutting edge technology and frugal innovation to propel change in the society. Furthermore, Evers and Laville (2004) note that social enterprises are organizations that fit between the private and public sectors in a global civil society.

Hybrid ventures necessitate a rearrangement of main concerns versus a conformist entrepreneurial undertaking (Oberoi et al. 2021). As an outcome, novel approach on social value creation is beginning to emerge and garner a lot of support. Porter and Kramer (2011) propagate the concept of “shared value” to indicate value formation that tackles multiple needs of the community and then proposes value chains that generates economic value also. Porter and Kramer have observed that “not all profit is equal”, as “profits involving a social purpose represent a higher form of capitalism focused on addressing the immense human needs yet to be met by governments, NGOs and philanthropy” (2011: 5).

The world’s biggest and best innovations have come during times of disruption. By nature, entrepreneurs swiftly respond to economic changes, and much innovation comes out of periods of large-scale shifts. The ability of social enterprise to be the viaduct – bridging the gap between state and market – is becoming more significant during the present COVID-19 pandemic. During the current global health, different social enterprise organisations have been forced to

rethink how to deal with the pandemic. This rethinking has required social enterprises to change priorities and redesign operations. COVID-19 has thrown the global economy into disorder, and start-ups, predominantly those with a social bent, have felt its impact more severely. Since its outbreak, venture-backed start-ups have laid off thousands of workers.

While the start-ups around the world are facing the grave repercussions of COVID-19, social enterprises and social entrepreneurs face even higher stakes. It is not just their bottom line that is at risk, but their very social missions or foundations are in jeopardy. For innovators with core capabilities and services or products that did not immediately meet the shifting demands of consumers during COVID-19 lockdown, a swift turnaround is anticipated; however, for the social entrepreneurs, particularly those working with the most vulnerable communities, the margin for error has only gotten narrower. Under these unprecedented circumstances, how they do work, and what products/services they supply, have to develop promptly. New products need to be added to the existing inventory for local communities, like masks, gloves, sanitizers and more. Since many social enterprises operate on narrow margins of profit, the effects of COVID-19 have been extensive. Many social enterprises have been forced to shut down, or are on the brink of doing so. Many others have been on the frontline of the response in an attempt to make critical community support available. Still others have branched out and added new products and services, which has enabled them to survive during these challenging times.

Despite these survival concerns, social enterprises have played a commendable role during the pandemic (Social Enterprise UK, 2020). For example, social enterprises have provided support to prevent the spreading of the COVID-19, such as basic amenities like food, water, and shelter, along with face-masks and sanitizers; more importantly, these types of organisations have been creating mobile community tracing initiatives. Social enterprises have reached out to the sections of society that the market and governments were unable to address. A recent report by World Economic Forum, 40 global organisations such as IKEA, SAP, and Salesforce have promised monetary funding for social entrepreneurs in 190 countries. In other cases, governments, such as the United Kingdom, are supporting social enterprises. Recently, the UK government revealed an ambitious £100-million programme of loans and investment (Big Society Capital 2020); this injection of investment is to help the third sector and small businesses in disadvantaged social groups that

have been affected by the pandemic. Furthermore, the Big Society Capital's Chief Investment Officer, Jeremy Rogers has noted:

“Charities and social enterprises are facing huge challenges as a result of the pandemic. Many are racing to adapt service delivery and facing an uncertain future. While many require emergency grants, others tell us they need loans and investment to continue to deliver crucial services to those most in need. We are, therefore, doing everything we can to adapt our existing funding agreements so that no organisation is making payments it can't afford and to find new routes to create a level playing field for social enterprises and charities to access the investment best suited to them at this critical time” (Big Society Capital 2020).

With the altered framework of the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 90 per cent of NGOs and social enterprises have pivoted swiftly to respond to diverse and supplementary requirements of local communities. About 67 per cent of establishments were able to activate capitals to deliver relief measures. “Social enterprises like Ecoexist, Green India Initiative Pvt Ltd, Child Health Foundation, Unity Group, Srujna Charitable Trust, Renovate India, Need Vikas Sanstha, Mann, CCDT The Aangan Trust and Childline provided foodstuffs and hygiene kits to individuals staying on roads, daily wage earners and immigrants” (Galliaro 2020). According to EASPD, social enterprises are helping to fight the pandemic in multiple ways. In Belgium, for example Maatwerk has started many facilities for the surgical masks production (*The Times of India* 2020).

In Asia, social enterprises turned to manufacturing face shields and protective suits for doctors, and connecting those who have lost their works to vocations in sustainable fields. For example, several reputable social ventures, “like Hasiru Dala, Goonj and Aajeevika Bureau that were previously engaged in the space of relief and with migratory casual workers, ramped up their energies to meet this challenge. Another case is of Haqdarshak, that supports legal rights of the unorganised sector workforces, set up a crusade to track and offer assistance to the migratory and casual sector labours” (Rao 25 October 2020).

Similarly, Sustainable Green Initiative shaped an inventiveness to offer livelihoods to rural households by delivering them saplings of fruit-bearing trees (Rao 2020). Prashant P Godiwala, creator of the Sneha Karma Foundation held, a lot of the individuals struggling, they just don't have the chance. The Sneha Karma Foundation is a non-profit dedicated to authorising girls and women that fit to vulnerable groups. This organization was formed to address this glaring void (Olassa, 5 December 2020) ConveGenius, is one of

“India’s leading EdTech social enterprises working to lessen the current learning and skill gap through reasonable means of tech-enabled schooling and education, has launched a pan-India crusade the social enterprise will provide high-quality education and essential resources to the 100 million students at the bottom of the education funnel” (Soulunii 28 July 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaped the way social enterprises work significantly. Recent work carried out by Weaver (2020) notes that there needs to be a closer scrutiny of social enterprise in three distinct areas:

1. Financial performance, challenges, and opportunities faced by social enterprises during and after the pandemic.
2. The influence of geographic location on social enterprise opportunities and obstacles.
3. Resilience strategies that social enterprises employ and how they implement innovations that address problems caused or exacerbated by COVID-19.”

(Weaver 2020: 7)

These three observations from Weaver (2020) provide a true reflection of what social enterprises are facing at this moment in time. Moreover, Joffre (2020) has pointed out that social enterprises globally have shown themselves to be flexible and innovative in response to COVID-19. It is estimated that only 1 per cent of social enterprise organizations permanently have closed permanently (Joffre, 2020). Hence, a report carried out by the British Council, Social Enterprise UK and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2020) has found that two thirds of social enterprise organisations are functioning differently since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. A clear example of this change is the way social enterprises are embracing the internet more aggressively in their provision of goods and services. On the ground, there is clear evidence that social enterprises are making a real difference in these difficult times. Back in September 2020, the World Economic Forum positively highlighted the true impact that social enterprises are having in their communities. As the World Economic Forum (2020) stated: “In this crisis, social innovators and entrepreneurs have once again shown their capacity to act as first responders, bringing affordable healthcare to those in need, protecting jobs and providing emergency relief swiftly”. In their reflections, the World Economic Forum (2020) highlighted three



showcase examples of where social entrepreneurs were making a real difference:

1. “Jan Sahas in India, a 20-year-old community organization that has responded to the crisis by providing food to over 420,000 migrants, as well as 11,000 PPE kits and emergency transportation to 17,000 migrants and their families.
2. The Instituto Muda in Brazil that stepped in to provide recycling cooperatives that employ people living below the poverty line with financial help to pay their workers to support their families. They also ensured that these workers were supplied with masks, equipment and disinfectant gel.
3. Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, which pivoted its call centres to scale up the capacity of South Africa’s Unemployment Insurance Fund to handle over 1.2 million calls within a span of two months in the wake of economic shutdowns.”

(World Economic Forum 2020)

ASHA health workers in India are working in close collaboration with social enterprises like SEWA to spread alertness of COVID-19. Rangsustra, another social enterprise in Bikaner, also making Covid-19 masks; Oscar Foundation is providing food to migrants who have lost their jobs due to the lockdown. Furthermore, the Vardhishnu, Social Research & Development Society is helping poor families with necessary groceries. Organizations such as Numer 8, Krishi Hub, and Satsure have fashioned an accessible programme that allows people who work in the agricultural sector to advertise their commodities inventories, thus allowing access to a “new value chain online” (UnLtd India 2020). François Bonnici, Head of the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, claims:

“Social entrepreneurs and their community partners have been working for years to solve market failures and demonstrate more sustainable and inclusive models. These front-line organisations now face bankruptcy and severe constraints while they also innovate and respond to this global pandemic. Through this Alliance, members are committing support for social entrepreneurs to protect decades of work in the impact sector. Most definitely the COVID-19 epidemic has provided an opportunity for deep reflection about the nature of the economy and society that we would like to see in the future” (*The Times of India* 2020).

It has, therefore, become evident that social enterprises are not just temporary arrangement. They have been able to showcase

their social mission and have visible social impact on the lives of marginalised communities. So, providing for social good is emerging as a valuable strategy.

### Changing Institutions: Mentoring for Success

An important driver to support social enterprise and social entrepreneurs to achieve social good is successful mentorship (Oberoi, et al., 2020; Social Enterprise UK, 2020). It is widely accepted that Mentoring is a multifaceted and complex a “term that is used interchangeably and inconsistently within practice, professions, and across different disciplines” (Snowden and Halsall 2017: 297). However, it is generally accepted that the act of mentoring is “an intervention that supports those individuals with less experience within any given context in their personal, social and professional development” (Snowden and Halsall 2017: 297). Consequently, mentoring can be described as a process that “enables the mentee to access the inside knowledge that the mentor has developed over their life course; distinctly, the mentor is able to translate reality, and help the mentee inhabit their own patterns of reasoning, insight and the application of knowledge and skill” (Snowden 2019: 123).

This process of mentoring “enables the mentee to make best use of the resources available by accessing the “inside knowledge’ that the mentor possesses” (Snowden and Hardy 2012: 90), which improves performance, reduces stress and anxiety, enhances engagement and adds value. Mentorship, as a strategy to promote success, is acknowledged in a variety of different contexts as a desirable strategy for all organisations; for example, education, medicine, nursing, dentistry, business, social enterprise and law — all recognize the impact that the role of a mentor has on personal development, well-being and the progress of practice and organisations (MIND 2020; ILM 2019; Oberoi et al. 2019; McSherry and Snowden 2019; Garvey, Stokes and Megginson 2017; Mann 2016; Baranik, Roling and Eby 2010).

In today’s world, organizations in different sectors have acknowledged the advantages of mentoring, and there has been real momentum in coaching and mentoring over the last five years. Current evidence suggests that mentoring enhances people’s skills and improves knowledge and performance (Mann, 2016; Cole, 2015; HSCB, 2014; BIS, 2013). A survey presented within the Ridler Report (2016), supported by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM 2019) emphasizes the benefits of mentorship

in the workplace. Research performed by the ILM reveals that 84 per cent of employers believe mentoring should form part of every organization's leadership and management development strategy. However, despite the overwhelming advantages of mentoring, a recent survey of 3000 professional mentor-mentee relationships by the Olivet Nazarene University (2019) found that whilst 76 per cent of respondents identified the importance of the mentor, only 37 per cent of people currently had one. Clearly, the mentor's role in enhancing value and success needs to be highlighted.

The importance of mentorship cannot be overstated, as demonstrated in the context of the current COVID-19 emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic is having a dramatic effect on every aspect of life, our community and the economy. We know that social enterprises are at the heart of the fight against coronavirus, and that they will be vital for the successful global, social and economic recovery from this crisis. There are two facets to this success: mentoring can contribute to organisational success on a macro scale, but can also contribute to the well-being of individual entrepreneurs and their partners on a micro scale.

According to an article by Smith and Johnson (2020) published in the *Harvard Business Review*, "mentors play a pivotal role in safeguarding retention and building organizational commitment, particularly in times of crisis". Moreover, mentorship and sponsorship are vital factors that can create long-standing achievements. This is reinforced by a recent article published by the United States Naval Undersea Warfare Centre (NUWC); staff are discovering that mentoring is decisive as they direct the COVID-19 pandemic and associated work-related stressors. The NUWC emphasizes that mentors play an essential function in safeguarding proficiency, the workforce, and the organization, especially in times of crisis. This view is reinforced by Social Investment Scotland (SIS), who plan to offer professional mentorship that will be matched against each organisation's needs. These needs will encompass advice on marketing, leadership and management, pitching for new investment, growing the organisation and workplace wellbeing and coaching. Alastair Davis, CEO of Social Investment Scotland, comments: "There is a fantastic opportunity for social enterprises to play a much more central role in our economies worldwide" (*Scottish Financial News*, 2020). As the new workplace begins to be re-defined, so too are the professional relationships that inspire mutual learning, practice and development. Organizations creating new opportunities in mentorship will inevitably make the institution more professional and have a social advantage for society.

The SIS strategy recognizes the micro role of the mentor in promoting health and well-being. In the UK, the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) (2020) reports that in March, 62 per cent of a surveyed population reported that they had felt anxious or apprehensive within a two-week period due to the pandemic. Whilst this figure had reduced to 49 per cent in June, the MHF reports there are still millions of individuals around the UK who are struggling with the stress of the pandemic. Disturbingly, “one in ten people in the UK reported having had suicidal thoughts or feelings” at the end of June, with even higher proportions in certain disadvantaged groups (MHF 2020).

Depression and anxiety are increasing globally, and the United Nations (2020) reports a significant increase in symptoms of depression and anxiety in several countries as a result of the pandemic. For example, Ethiopia reported a three-fold increase in the prevalence of the symptoms of depression associated with the pandemic in April 2020. In China, healthcare employees have stated extreme rates of depression (50%), anxiety (45%), and insomnia (34%) during the pandemic, whilst in Canada, 47% of healthcare staff have stated a requirement for psychological provision (UN, 2020). Meanwhile in a commissioned report by the UK’s Department of Education, Day et al. (2020) identifies the importance of mentoring and peer support in the development of resolution strategies aimed at promoting mental health and well-being. Petosa and Smith (2014) and Grant, Curtayne and Burton (2009) further assert the essential role that a mentor can play in promoting well-being. The reasons for this are far from clear; however, it may be linked to the notion of trust. An essential feature of the mentor-mentee relationship is trust and honesty (McSherry and Snowden 2019; Garvey, Stokes, and Megginson 2017), and consequently, mentorship is personal. Employees are more likely to share their actual state of mind and concerns, etc. with their mentor, who is viewed as more agreeable than their manager. Having a mentor in the COVID-19 era can be the determiner of success – that which makes the difference between an employee that is well and working to their capability, or unwell and not fulfilling their capability. Prioritising a commitment to mentorship builds longevity and sustainability within an organization.

Oberoi et al. (2020) assert that organizations must showcase the benefits of mentoring in different sectors more, as well as highlighting the advantages mentorship brings within different local, regional, national and global networks. Whilst there is some suggestion that some organizations are reluctant to embrace mentoring, it is essential

to harness the potential that mentoring has to promote health and well-being.

### Methodology of the Research

This research project has applied a qualitative approach and used two geographical case studies: the United Kingdom and India. Before beginning the data collection, the authors of this research undertook an extensive, in-depth academic literature review. At the beginning of the process, the research team refreshed their literature review skills by examining the work of Hart (2001), who advocates a systematic approach. Hence, the authors examined the issues and debates in the topic area, using different terms such as: coronavirus, COVID-19, disease, health crisis, higher education, innovation, social enterprise and pandemic. One of the drawbacks of the search was that there is, as yet, limited material in the academic literature specific to COVID-19, as the global health world attempts to understand this new infectious disease.

Following the literature review, the authors designed the qualitative methods for this research using three distinct data collection strategies: (1) documentary data sources, (2) focus group meetings, and (3) semi-structured interviews. The documentary data sources method was used specifically to deal with coronavirus theme of the research. The authors examined documentary data sources such as newspaper articles, policy reports and websites. The focus group meetings and semi-structured interviews held in the UK and India dealt with the social enterprise aspect of the research, where experts and practitioners attended to give their particular viewpoints. To recruit these participants, a social network strategy was applied by a series of gatekeepers who have strong links in the social enterprise sector.

When the data collection methods were complete, a thematic analysis strategy was applied using the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). A six-stage data analysis approach was used to analyse the qualitative data: (1) familiarization of the data; (2) set out codes from the data; (3) examined patterns in the data; (4) re-examination of the themes; (5) definition and labelling of the themes, and (6) the writing of qualitative data analysis report. Strict ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the research processes.

This article so far has argued for the greater involvement in social enterprise organizations at government and state levels. The people who work for and run these organizations are social entrepreneurs. They are people who have a clear instinct for innovative ideas. Innovation is at the heart of what a social enterprise organization actually does (Guerrero 2019). The term that is used frequently today in a public policy shift is “social innovation”, which has been defined as “a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, or just than existing solutions and for which the value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than private individuals” (Phills et al. 2008: 39 in Phillips, et al., 2019: 315). Moreover, Phillips et al., have noted, “social innovation offers novel ways of addressing unmet social needs, often through the rise of new organisational forms such as social enterprises” (2019: 315). Among the participants who were involved in this research, social innovation was a key theme. One respondent who was responsible for providing support and training for social entrepreneurs at a university level stated: “Social enterprise is at the centre of the economic model. Our job here [University] is to find business support which is backed by government bodies. Innovation is key to a social entrepreneur’s success” (Participant, Interview 1, 2018).

Before innovation can happen, extensive academic training is required. In this sense, higher education is a key element of success in creating innovative ideas. A recent edited book by Weber and Duderstadt (2014) details that, more than ever before, universities at a global level create deep, powerful knowledge exchange solutions in terms of academic research and teaching. Furthermore, Duderstadt notes: “our world has entered a period of rapid and profound economic, social and political transformation driven by knowledge and innovation. Educated people, the knowledge they produce and the innovation entrepreneurial skills they possess have become the keys to economic prosperity, public health, national security and social well-being. It has become apparent that the economic strength, prosperity and social welfare in a global knowledge economy will demand a highly educated citizenry. It will also require institutions with the ability to discover new knowledge, to apply these discoveries and transfer them to the marketplace through entrepreneurial activities” (2014: 73).

Therefore, the university sector needs, as it always does, to keep moving forward with social enterprise innovation. Training must help students to develop and give them confidence, and must also interlock with personal professional development. Interestingly,

a recent research essay by Euan Blair, the son of the former New Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, calls for a rethink on skills and how graduates are trained at university level; he claims specific skills are required around “data analytics, software engineering, business operations, and project management” (Blair 2020: 37). In this research project, it was found that students who decide to go down the social enterprise route in their degree need constant training. In one of the interviews, a head of a social enterprise at a university affirmed the view that: “Training is crucial. When students come to us, they don’t have hands on experience. Students ask questions which I can’t believe” (Participant, Interview 3, 2018).

This student skills narrative gives the view that extra training is required; however, there is also a demand for academic staff to possess the appropriate skills to train students in social enterprise. Many staff, who work in interdisciplinary areas of the social sciences, may not be totally familiar with social enterprise. In a recent Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) document for higher education providers, the organisation recognizes the need for a review of how social enterprise is taught in university sectors within an international policy context:

“On the international stage, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development developed an International Policy Toolkit. Noting that policy makers around the globe had adopted a narrow perspective of entrepreneurship that only focused on business, they proposed an ‘ecosystem’ approach that had education as its third pillar. Calls in the policy included the mainstreaming of entrepreneurial types of education, promoting experiential approaches and training teachers, recognising leadership through an increased level of professorial recognition and supporting networks of educators. The work was supported by the European Union (EU)” (QAA 2018: 6).

As it stands, the university sectors in India and the UK do an incredible job in providing social enterprise opportunities for students and staff. The institutions examined in this research demonstrated a very strong emphasis on social enterprise, with supporting units at a university, and departmental and senior managers (e.g., Head of Department, Director of an Institute, Associated Dean) who took on responsibilities in this area. Without these structures it would be hard for social enterprise to establish itself in diverse curriculums, but more importantly, gaining support from students who wish to engage with social enterprise would be very difficult. Again, in the qualitative research, it was another not participant in a senior position at the university who highlighted that: “The key job for us

[the university] is to evaluate the product. We have created a quality assessment model which is massively helpful” (Participant, Interview 2, 2018).

Hence, a social enterprise structure at university level is crucial, as it is the starting point whereby a student can develop their idea and see if there is a marketplace for the innovative product they want to develop. Del Giudicea et al. (2019) have reminded the university sector that being a social entrepreneur is about innovation and thus developing a revolutionary business idea that seeks to improve the current solution.

### Conclusion

This paper concerns with the importance of social enterprise in the new era of COVID-19. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has demanded that public policy-makers reassess how a country’s national state functions and interacts in a global context. To begin with, this paper explored the key debates on social enterprise and innovation. As illustrated, these key concepts of social enterprise and innovation are catalysts in civil society development. Social enterprises have become invaluable across the world, especially during this pandemic, as these types of organizations have reached sections of society that other parts of governments could not. It is the people who work in various organizations that are at the heart of the reaction to this global health crisis. In this research paper, the authors have championed mentorship in difficult times, as mentorship enables staff to reflect and take advice at various points. Consequently, the authors have presented findings from their qualitative research, which found that social enterprise in higher education is key, as it acts as the linchpin between the community and the state. Hence, the authors of this research recommend the following:

1. Further research is required into the great importance of social enterprises in a crisis situation. This would enable social scientists and policymakers to examine the innovations of social entrepreneurs when faced with a global crisis like COVID-19.
2. Institutions enhance strategies in coaching and mentoring. This could be achieved by the provision of acute coaching and mentoring training in the higher education sector.



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