

Early-Stage Business Model Development in a Social Enterprise: The Case of “Light Of Hope Philippines”

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Abstract

A social enterprise succeeds when its business model enables both social impact and financial viability. Responding to recent calls for more research on social enterprise business models, this study examines how the founder of the social enterprise Light of Hope Philippines (LOHP) developed a suitable business model for his enterprise. LOHP provides solar-powered devices and services to off-grid island communities in the Philippines, improving lives in an environmentally sustainable way. The study is based on a semi-structured in-depth interview with LOHP’s founder. Although not statistically generalizable, the findings suggest that: (1) Business model development in early-stage social enterprises begins before an enterprise is founded and typically continues for a few years after the founding. (2) This process is shaped by factors such as founder motivation, beneficiary needs, market conditions, support systems, and external influences. (3) To succeed, founders must continuously adapt and refine their business models. A practical implication is that social enterprise founders should work to improve their business models both before and after launching their ventures. This study provides a description of multiple factors impacting the early-stage business model development process in a recently-established social enterprise in the Philippines.

Keywords: Social Enterprise, Business Model Development, Entrepreneurship, Business Models, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurship Experience

Introduction

During the last few decades, an increasing number of social enterprises have been established in many parts of the world (Basri et al., 2025). Social enterprises are “businesses that seek to achieve social and/or environmental impact through the trading of goods and services” (Tan et al., 2018). Social enterprises also typically engage in *social innovation*, which is “a process of developing and implementing novel solutions to social problems and needs, often involving a combination of creativity, collaboration, and resourcefulness” (Sampaio & Sebastião, 2024). A considerable amount of research on social enterprises has been carried out in recent years. However, several recent studies suggest that more research is needed regarding business models employed by social enterprises (Gupta et al., 2020; Klarin & Suseno, 2023; Lorenzo-Afable et al., 2023). This case study attempts to expand our knowledge of business models

employed by social enterprises by examining the early-stage business model development of a social enterprise called Light of Hope Philippines (LOHP) which is based in the Philippines.

According to several studies, the social enterprise sector in the Philippines is quite large, and it has been growing during the last couple of decades. A report from 2017 estimated that there were over 164,000 social enterprises in the Philippines in 2017 (European Union, British Council, & ESCAP, 2017). The report also stated that over 75% of the Filipino social enterprises surveyed had been established during the previous decade. A report published in 2025 stated that there is no more recent data available regarding the number of social enterprises in the Philippines than the 164,000 enterprises reported in 2017 (Herpacio & Bore, 2025). Hence, we do not really know the size of the Filipino social enterprise sector today. However, the fact that research from 2017 described the social enterprise sector in the Philippines as large and growing indicates that the sector is most likely still quite large, and that many of the social enterprises that exist in the Philippines today have been established during the last few years.

When it comes to the social missions of the social enterprises in the Philippines, the study published in 2017 stated that the top objectives of SEs in the Philippines were to generate employment, to alleviate poverty, to improve local communities, and to empower marginalised groups (European Union, British Council, & ESCAP, 2017). In 2015, 20% of Filipinos were considered poor, 6% of the labour force was unemployed, and 20% of the labour force was underemployed – and these statistics show the need for social enterprises that focus on employment generation and poverty alleviation (European Union, British Council, & ESCAP, 2017). When it comes to challenges that SEs in the Philippines face, the study published in 2025 described the following challenges: Capital and financial management, talent acquisition and retention, impact measurement, the sustainability and scalability of its operation, and resilience against economic crises (Herpacio & Bore, 2025).

Light of Hope Philippines (LOHP) was founded by Mr. Jovie Gil Montajes, a native Filipino. It was first established as an advocacy group in 2017, when the founder was 31 years old. And in 2022, Light of Hope Philippines was officially registered as a business in the Philippines. The mission of this social enterprise is to “provide light and hope to the off-grid communities in the Philippines”. They do this by providing solar systems to off-grid communities on smaller islands in the Philippines. The solar systems can be used to power LED lamps and charge mobile phones, and the latest version of the systems can also power television sets. LOHP is also currently developing a new version of its product which will include a feature enabling people in off-grid communities to communicate digitally with emergency services. The mission of the social enterprise also includes an environmental aspect, as the solar-powered LED lamps usually replace kerosine lamps that pollute the air and pose fire and health hazards. The enterprise makes money by providing the solar systems on a subscription base to its beneficiaries. The beneficiaries pay a low, monthly fee, and the enterprise is responsible for installing and maintain the solar systems, and for discarding and replacing any broken parts. As of April 2025, the company had three full-time employees, including the founder, and four part-time employees.

LOHP has been awarded several grants, including a grant from BAYER AG's Helping Cents Program in 2022, a grant from the BIMP-EAGA-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund in 2023 (“Portable Solar Kits,” n.d.) and a grant from the AirAsia Foundation in 2024 (“Light of Hope

PH,” n.d.). And in 2025, the founder of LOHP, Mr. Jovie Gil Montajes, was listed as one of Asia Pacific’s most impactful changemakers on the Sustainability Leadership A-List published by business intelligence and advisory platform Eco-Business.com (“Sustainability Leadership A-List 2025,” n.d.). As of 2025, LOHP is not fully financially self-sustainable yet, and is still partially dependent on grant money. However, they expect to become fully financially self-sustainable at some point in the future when the number of subscribers to their services increases from the current 1000 households to 5000 households. This article seeks to answer the following questions: How did the founder of LOHP develop its current business model, which factors have impacted the development of LOHP’s business model, and how has the business model evolved since LOHP was founded?

Literature Review

This section reviews relevant literature on hybrid organizations, the role of social enterprises, business models employed by social enterprises, factors that impact business model development among social enterprises, and the social enterprise sector in the Philippines.

Social Enterprises as Hybrid Organizations

Social enterprises can be considered hybrid organization (Basri et al., 2025) since they “run commercial operations with the goal of addressing a societal problem” (Santos et al., 2015, p. 37) – and, as such, have the dual goal of achieving a social mission and achieving financial sustainability. For social enterprises to succeed, they need to develop business models that enable them to simultaneously achieve their social mission and reach their financial goals (Santos et al., 2015).

Even though all social enterprises can be considered hybrid enterprises in the sense that they all have the dual goal of achieving a social mission and achieving financial sustainability (Santos et al., 2015), to what degree social enterprises focus on these two goals varies from one social enterprise to another. Some social enterprises are more mission-oriented, whereas other social enterprises are more business-oriented. Alter (2007) has developed what is called the hybrid spectrum. This spectrum ranges from more mission-oriented enterprises in the one end of the spectrum, to more business-oriented enterprises in the other end of the spectrum. And social enterprises can be located at any location along the hybrid spectrum (Alter, 2007; Chahine, 2022, p. 14).

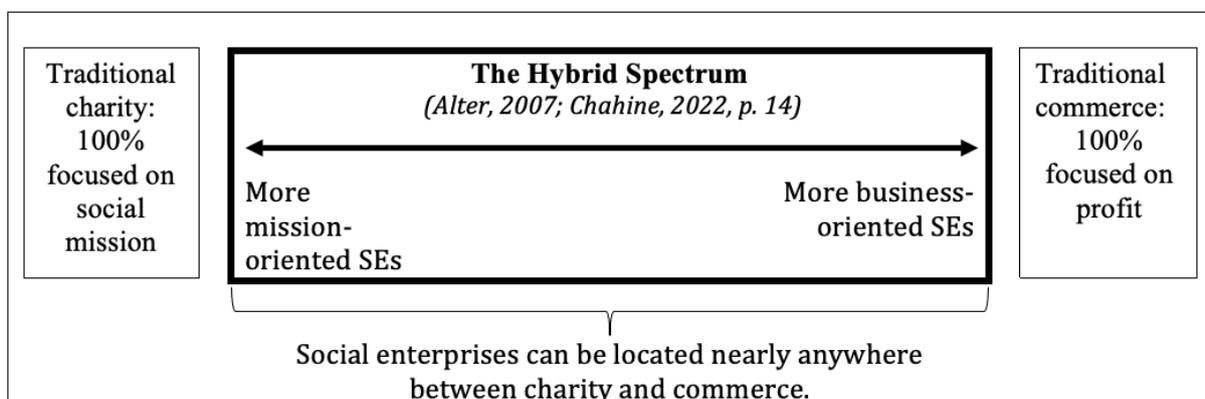


Figure 1: The Hybrid Spectrum (Alter, 2007; Chahine, 2022, p. 14)

Santos et al. (2015) have developed a *Typology of Social Business Hybrids*. This typology divides social enterprises into four categories based on how easily transactions made between the social enterprise and its clients cause positive value spillovers that will enable the social enterprise to achieve its mission, and whether or not the clients of the social enterprise are the same people as the people who benefit from the enterprise's social mission. In which of the four categories the social enterprise's business model fits will influence how likely mission drift is to happen, and how likely the social enterprise is to succeed (Santos et al., 2015).

Here are the four different hybrid models that are described by Santos et al. (Santos et al., 2015):

- **Market hybrid:** These enterprises are designed in such a way that the beneficiaries are clients who pay for the services they receive, and no additional interventions are needed for the social mission to be achieved.
- **Blending hybrid:** These enterprises serve clients that are also the beneficiaries of their social mission. However, with this model, the enterprises need to supplement their commercial activities with additional interventions to achieve their social mission.
- **Bridging hybrid:** These enterprises attend to clients and beneficiaries who are from different groups, and they therefore need to bridge the needs and resources of both groups.
- **Coupling hybrid:** These enterprises attend to clients and beneficiaries who are from different groups, and in addition, the enterprises need to supplement their commercial activities with additional intervention to achieve their social mission (Santos et al., 2015).

Among these four hybrid models, the market hybrid is the model that is most likely to produce a successful social enterprise which both achieves its social mission and reaches its financial goals. The coupling hybrid, on the other hand, is the model that is most likely to cause the social enterprise to end up drifting away from its mission (Santos et al., 2015).

The Role of Social Enterprises

According to classical economics, a free market will create a situation where everyone – even though they are pursuing their self-interests – together, without intending to do so, create a positive outcome for the whole economy. Each person who is offering a product or service will, out of his or her own self-interest, strive to produce products or services of the greatest value. And the forces of supply and demand will, like an “invisible hand”, direct each self-interested person to act in such a way that it benefits the economy as a whole (Lockert & Suarez, 2022; Smith, 1776). So, if a free market, consisting of numerous for-profit businesses, automatically produces benefits for the economy as a whole, why are social enterprises still needed? Various theoreticians have answered this question with the concept of market failure.

A market failure occurs “whenever the production or allocation of goods or services by a market is suboptimal (Phills et al., 2008)”. For example, when some people lack access to food, pure drinking water, housing, medical care or education, this may be the result of some kind of market failure. Even though the free market creates numerous benefits for many people, there are some people who are not able to take part in these benefits, because of

some sort of market failure. When this happens, government intervention can be used to correct the market failures. NGOs also frequently engage in activities to help people who don't get their basic needs met through the free market. And in the last few decades, social entrepreneurs – who use entrepreneurial skills, leverage market principles and emphasize social returns rather than financial returns – have increasingly set out to tackle the problem of market failure (Phills et al., 2008). And many of these social entrepreneurs have established social enterprises that have a social mission and engage in commercial activities to achieve their social mission.

The idea that social enterprises tackle problems of market failure presents an apparent contradiction: How can social enterprises leverage market principles to tackle market failure, if they use the market-based strategies that led to that failure? A study from 2021 resolved this apparent contradiction by explaining that social enterprises tackle market failure through two different responses, which the study terms market reallocation and market mending (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021). Market reallocation is done when a social enterprise earns income in a healthy market and then expends that income to address a failed market. For example, a social enterprise may sell a product or service to wealthy clients, and then spend some of the money it earns on helping a group of marginalized people in one way or another. (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021). Market mending, on the other hand, “involves creating new products and business models that give beneficiaries access to goods and services through market transactions” (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021).

Social enterprises that engage in market mending attempt to alter the status-quo of the market failure. There are four different ways in which social enterprises may engage in market mending (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021): Void mending is an approach which involves “mending a market by creating new products or services to complement existing markets” (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021). Bridging mending is an approach which involves “mending a market by facilitating market transactions between previously disconnected suppliers and consumers” (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021). Last mile mending is an approach which involves “mending a market by increasing access to that market” (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021). And inclusive mending is an approach which involves “mending a market by including more buyers in that market” (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021).

Social Enterprise Business Models

A business model “describes an architecture for how a firm creates and delivers value to customers and the mechanisms employed to capture a share of that value.” (Teece, 2018) The business model also “provides a pathway by which technological innovation and knowhow combined with the utilization of tangible and intangible assets are converted into a stream of profits” (Teece, 2018). In order to succeed, an enterprise needs to develop and make use of a business model which helps the enterprise achieve its goals.

An important theoretical framework for the study of business models is the Business Model Canvas (BMC), developed by Alexander Osterwalder (Nielsen & Lund, 2018; Osterwalder, 2013; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The BMC is a visual overview of the following nine key areas that are related to how a business can create successful business models: Key partnerships, key activities, key resources, value propositions, customer relationships, channels, customer segments, cost structure and revenue streams. The BMC shows that a

business model is a quite broad concept which includes every essential part of the business and its operations. The BMC can be used both to describe a company's current business model, and to create new business models. Different businesses make different decisions regarding what to include in each of these nine areas, and therefore develop quite different business models. For example, the area which is called cost structure will be handled quite differently in a cost-driven business model, compared to how it is handled in a value-driven business model. Cost-driven business models, such as the business models employed by low-cost airlines, focus on minimizing costs whenever possible. Value-driven business models, such as the business models employed by luxury hotels, are on the other hand less focused on minimizing costs, as these business models focus more on delivering premium products for which it can charge wealthy customers a premium price (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010, pp. 40–41). In this way, the business model canvas can be used to explore and develop various kinds of business models.

When it comes to social enterprises, however, conventional theories about business models – such as the business model canvas described above – are not sufficient. The organizational performance of a social enterprise is typically measured by a combination of its social and economic performance dimensions (Musinguzi et al., 2025), and a social enterprise therefore needs to develop a business model which enables it to combine social mission achievement with financial sustainability. Conventional business model theories only describe the business side of social enterprises, and not the social mission side. And whereas social enterprises certainly can benefit from insights gained through conventional business model theories, social enterprises need to develop integrated business models that enable them to both reach their financial goals and achieve their social missions. Chahine (2022) suggests that successful business models for social enterprises must include the following three parts: An impact model, a revenue model and an operational model. The impact model describes how the social enterprise will achieve its social mission, the revenue model describes how the social enterprise will reach its financial goals, and the operational model describes organizational structures, distribution channels, etc. that need to be in place if the social enterprise is going to reach its goals (Chahine, 2022, pp. 9–10). This is described in the figure below.

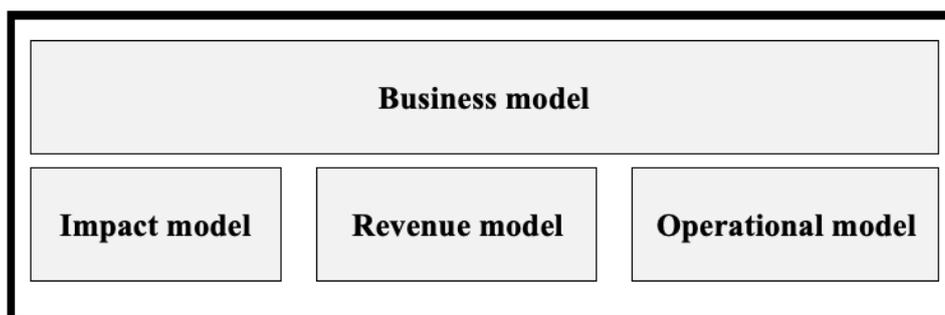


Figure 2: Social enterprise business model, adapted from (Chahine, 2022, p. 10).

Another approach to describing business models employed by social enterprises is a modified version of the BMC. To better be able to describe the dual value creation of social enterprises, a number of social-related categories have been added to the business model canvas. The result is called the SBMC – the socially extended business model canvas. Various versions of the SBMC have been developed, but the SBMCs typically include additional categories like

social impact, social impact measurement, social value proposition, non-targeted stakeholders, beneficiaries, and the allocation of surpluses (Harangozo et al., 2025).

Alter (2007) has developed an overview of nine different business models that are employed by social enterprises: Entrepreneur Support Model, Market Intermediary Model, Employment Model, Fee-for-Service Model, Low-Income Client as Market, Cooperative Model, Market Linkage Model, Service Subsidization Model, and Organizational Support Model. Some social enterprises may employ more than one of these models, and there might also be some SEs that employ business models that are not included in this list of nine models (Alter, 2007; Wolfgang Grassl, 2012). The nine business models nevertheless provide a good overview of business models frequently employed by social enterprises, and the nine models will be briefly described in the following paragraphs. In the following paragraphs, the term beneficiary will be used about people from the target population which the SEs are aiming to help.

Entrepreneur Support Model: SEs that employ this model sell business support and financial services to its beneficiaries, which are self-employed individuals or firms. The clients of these SEs then sell their products and/or services on the open market. An example of SEs that employ this model, is SEs that offer microfinance services to poor clients, enabling the clients to start a small business that will generate an income for the clients (Alter, 2007).

Market Intermediary Model: In this model, an SE acts as an intermediary, providing services to individuals, firms or cooperatives, in order to help them access markets. The SE may help these beneficiaries with product-development, production and marketing, and may provide credit for the beneficiaries. The SE which acts as a market intermediary then sells the products in high margin markets at a mark-up (Alter, 2007).

Employment Model: SEs employing this model provide employment for their beneficiaries. The beneficiaries get employed by the SE to produce products/services which are then sold in the open market. Beneficiaries are typically marginalized people who face various kinds of barriers to employment (Alter, 2007).

Fee-for-Service Model: SEs employing this business model commercialize their social services, and then either sell them directly to their beneficiaries, or to a third-party payer. The SE may for example provide healthcare or educational services, and the SE achieves financial sustainability through charging a fee for the services it provides. (Alter, 2007).

Low-Income Client as Market: This model is a variation of the fee-for-service model. SEs employing this model provide poor and low-income beneficiaries access to products and services that they otherwise wouldn't have had access to. The products provided may for example be products that increase the beneficiaries' health, education, quality of life, and opportunities. The fact that the beneficiaries are low-income clients typically makes achieving financial viability a challenge. Hence, the SEs have to develop creative distribution systems, work to lower production and marketing costs, and strive to achieve high operating efficiencies. The SEs may also employ cross-subsidization, using profits generated from services sold to wealthy clients to subsidize similar services sold to poor clients. (Alter, 2007).

Cooperative Model: SEs employing this model provide direct benefits to its beneficiaries, through member services, such as for example collective bargaining power, economies of bulk purchase, access to products and services, access to external markets for member-produced products and services, etc. The members typically consist of small-scale producers in the same product group, or a community with common needs. The members are the primary stakeholders in the cooperative, and they both contribute to the cooperative and receive benefits from it. (Alter, 2007).

Market Linkage Model: SEs employing this model facilitate trade relationships between the beneficiaries and external markets. The beneficiaries are typically small producers, local firms and cooperatives, and the SE functions as a broker connecting buyers and producers and charging a fee for this service. This type of SE does not market or sell the beneficiaries' products, but instead focuses on connecting the beneficiaries to markets. (Alter, 2007).

Service Subsidization Model: SEs employing this model sell products or services to an external market and use the income it generates to fund its social programs. Typically, SEs employing this model will leverage either their tangible or intangible assets as the basis for their commercial activities. For example, the SE may rent out its buildings or equipment to generate an income, or the SE may sell its expertise as a service to clients that can afford to buy these services. (Alter, 2007).

Organizational Support Model: SEs employing this model sell products and services to external markets, businesses or the general public. In some cases, the beneficiaries are the clients. In this model, the business activities are usually separate from the social programs. The business activities generate a profit which is then used to fund the social programs of the SE or its parent organization. (Alter, 2007).

Factors Impacting Social Enterprise Business Model Development

Founders of social enterprises and other businesses typically develop a business model for their enterprise before the enterprise is founded and implement this business model when the enterprise is launched. However, both before and after the enterprise has been launched, the founders need to be receptive enough to modify their business model based on available data, and they need to learn from feedback they get from their customers about changes they may need to make to their businesses (Acumen Academy, n.d., p. 3). And the ability to adapt to changes produced by the dynamic environment in which a start-up operates, is considered crucial for a start-up to succeed (Sevilla-Bernardo et al., 2022). Hence, business model development for social enterprise start-ups and other start-ups is typically a process which starts before the enterprise has been established and continues during the first few years after the business has been launched.

When studying how social entrepreneurs develop viable business models for their social enterprise start-ups, it is essential to consider various factors that may impact the business model development process. One of the most important factors in this regard is probably the motivation of the social entrepreneur. For someone to become a social entrepreneur who establishes a social enterprise, that person needs to have what some researchers refer to as social entrepreneurship intentions (SEI) (Hockerts, 2017; Mair & Noboa, 2005). And having social entrepreneurship intentions means that someone both has a desire to become a social

entrepreneur and has the impression that it will be possible for him/her to set up a successful social venture (Mair & Noboa, 2005). The motivation of the founder of a social enterprise is both what drives the founder to establish the social enterprise and to do all the work that is needed to develop a successful business model for the social enterprise.

Another important factor which impacts early-stage business model development in social enterprises is the beneficiaries which the social enterprise is intending to help, and their needs. Many social enterprises have a social mission of helping a community or a group of marginalized people, other social enterprises have an environmental mission – and many social enterprises combine a social and an environmental mission (Chahine, 2022, Chapter 1). The beneficiaries of a social enterprise, and the needs of the beneficiaries, will impact the business model development process – no matter if the beneficiaries are people or the planet or both. The social enterprise will need to develop a business model which actually makes sure that it is able to meet the needs of the beneficiaries it is attempting to help.

Business model development in early-stage social enterprises will also be impacted by the market in which the enterprise intends to sell its products or services. A social enterprise sells products or services in markets, not with the intention of maximizing the financial gain for its owners, but rather to become financially sustainable so that it can achieve its social mission (Defourny & Nyssens, 2006; Saebi et al., 2019). Hence, when developing a business model, the founder of a social enterprise needs to be able to adapt its offering to meet the needs of its customers and clients.

Finally, business model development in early-stage social enterprises will also be impacted by various factors external to the social enterprise. These factors include the economic and socio-cultural environments of the country or region where the enterprise is based (Lorenzo-Afable et al., 2023; Puumalainen et al., 2015) and the relevant legal framework of the country where the enterprise is located (Wilkinson et al., 2015; Wronka-Pośpiech, 2018). External factors may also include any kind of support structures, such as incubators, accelerators, training, grants and other types of funding, that may be available for the social enterprise and its founder (Chahine, 2022, Chapters 6–7). In order to develop a suitable business model, the founder of a social enterprise needs to be aware of these factors and be able to manage the impact that these external factors may have on the enterprise in a good way.

Social Enterprises in the Philippines

In the Philippines, where LOHP is located, there is a significant social enterprise sector. In 2017, it was estimated that there were approximately 164,000 social enterprises in this nation, (European Union, British Council, & ESCAP, 2017; Tan et al., 2018; Wong & Ace, 2021), and there is unfortunately no more recent data available regarding this issue (Herpacio & Bore, 2025). Typical objectives of social enterprises in the Philippines include to generate employment, to alleviate poverty, to improve local communities, and to empower marginalised groups (European Union, British Council, & ESCAP, 2017).

However, although the social enterprise sector is quite large, the sector faces various challenges. In 2020, a study estimated that only a little more than half of the SEs, 56%, made a profit or a surplus (European Union, British Council, & ESCAP, 2017). And a study from 2025 concluded that common challenges faced by social enterprises in the Philippines included

capital and financial management, talent acquisition and retention, impact measurement, the sustainability and scalability of its operation, and resilience against economic crises (Herpacio & Bore, 2025). In the Philippines, social enterprises are not legally recognized as a distinct type of business entity. Instead, social enterprises either have to be registered as “regular” for-profit businesses or as some sort of non-profit organization (European Union, British Council, & ESCAP, 2017).

Methodology

In the following paragraphs, the methodology which was employed in this study is described.

Methodological Choice

This study is an explorative study, focusing on how the founder of LOHP developed a suitable business model for this social enterprise during the first few years of the enterprise’s existence. For this study, the qualitative method has been chosen, utilizing a single case study research design. The qualitative method has been chosen because this is an explorative study. Qualitative research has the potential to provide detailed insights and contextual explanations for various challenges faced in contemporary management practice (Lanka et al., 2021), and as such, the qualitative method is suitable for this explorative study. Qualitative research is not focused on the numerical measurement of a phenomenon, but instead focuses on providing a description of a phenomenon by capturing the experience of the participants of the study (Lanka et al., 2021). Since the purpose of this study is to capture the experience of the founder of LOHP regarding the development of the business model for LHOP, the qualitative method is suitable.

Research Approach

Qualitative research is an umbrella term which covers a rather diverse array of techniques and methods for doing research on phenomena that occur in our world (Birkinshaw et al., 2011) (Cassell et al., 2018). From among the various qualitative approaches that are available, the case study method has been chosen for this study. Since the purpose of this study is to gain insights from a social entrepreneur who has been involved in establishing a relatively successful social enterprise, the case study method has been chosen.

From among the various qualitative techniques that are available for primary data collection, an in-depth interview was selected as the method to be used. In an in-depth interview, the researcher conducts an interview with an individual, and the researcher and interviewee explore an issue together through a conversation (Sreejesh et al., 2014, 47). Since this study intended to explore how the social entrepreneur behind LOHP himself perceived the business model development process to have taken place, an individual in-depth interview was considered a suitable technique to be utilized for data collection.

The in-depth interview with the founder of LOHP was carried out as a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews provide a balance between the need to generate systematic data and the flexibility to ask interviewees follow-up questions to gain additional information about important issues (Sreejesh et al., 2014, p. 48-49), and has therefore been deemed the most appropriate data collection method for this study. The semi-structured interview made it possible for the interviewer to keep the interview focused on the issues

that this study intended to explore, while providing the opportunity to ask additional follow-up questions about interesting issues that surfaced during the interview.

Data Analysis

The interview was recorded, and the interview was then transcribed into written text. Afterwards, the collected data was analysed. For analysing the data collected through the semi-structured interview, thematic analysis was chosen as the method to be employed. Thematic analysis is a method for “identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set” (Nowell et al., 2017). Since the purpose of this study was to gain insights from a social entrepreneur, the founder of LOHP, thematic analysis was chosen as data analysis method. Through the thematic analysis, the data which had been collected could be identified, analysed, organized and described, and themes found within the data set could be reported (Nowell et al., 2017).

The thematic analysis was carried out in several steps. As part of the thematic analysis, a number of codes were generated by identifying important sections of text and attaching labels to index them as they related to themes or issues in the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Then, a search for themes in the data was carried out. A theme can be defined as “an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). Finally, themes were identified and named (Nowell et al., 2017). The findings are reported in the next section.

Results and Findings

Overview of Themes and Sub-Themes

Through the process of analysing the data, the following themes and sub-themes were discovered:

Table 1

Themes and sub-themes discovered through thematic analysis.

Theme:	Sub-Theme:
Personal Factors Impacting the Social Entrepreneur	Motivation stirred through significant life event
	Willingness to make financial sacrifices
	Utilizing previous experience and skills
	Acquiring new knowledge and skills
Receiving Support	Receiving financial support from family and friends
	Receiving grants from organizations supporting SEs
	Receiving training/coaching through accelerator programs
Adjusting and Expanding the Business Model	From donations to subscriptions
	From dependencies to empowerment
	From waste creation to waste management
	From financial uncertainty to (future) financial stability
	Adding new revenue streams (cooperating with corporations)

Each of these themes are described below.

Personal Factors Impacting the Social Entrepreneur

The founder of LOHP shared a number of different insights regarding personal factors that have impacted the development of LOHP and its business model. One of the personal issues

which Mr. Montajes shared about was the motivation behind his involvement with social entrepreneurship. In the interview, he did not share a lot about what originally motivated him to establish LOHP as an advocacy group back in 2017. However, he did share more about what motivated him to quit his previous job and start working full-time for LOHP. In 2018, he was in a situation which he describes as “a life and death situation”. In this situation, he realised that if he died, someone else could easily, and probably within just one week, replace him in the position he had at that time. And after his death, he might easily have been forgotten. This situation impacted him in such a way that he decided to quit his stable position at a multinational company and start working full-time for LOHP. Since he survived the life and death situation, he felt that he had been given a second chance, and he decided to do something more meaningful with his life, and to work full-time bringing light and hope to off-grid communities through LOHP.

Another personal factor which Mr. Montajes shared about in the interview, was his willingness to make personal financial sacrifices. Even though he had a well-paying job, he quit his job in 2018 in order to pursue the development of LOHP. And from 2018 and until LOHP received its first grant in 2022, he did not receive any salary from LOHP. And when developing the first prototype of the solar power device, he spent his own savings. Today, he takes out a salary from LOHP, but even though he is the CEO of LOHP, he does not receive a salary at a typical executive level. He has also designed the business model of LOHP in such a way that the owners of the enterprise will not receive dividends, but all the revenue that is generated goes back into LOHP to help it achieve its social mission.

Another personal factor which may have contributed to the success LOHP has experienced so far, is the way Mr. Montajes dealt with the skills, knowledge and experience he needed to be able to establish LOHP. From the information disclosed in the interview, it appears that he combined making use of the skills and expertise he already possessed, with getting additional training to acquire additional skills or knowledge that he needed to further develop LOHP. Mr. Montajes holds a Bachelor of Science degree in electronics and communications engineering. And before he started working full-time with LOHP, he worked as a high-level technician for a US-based company, at their branch in the Philippines. His job included receiving requests about technical issues from customers around the world and resolving those issues. As the founder and CEO of LOHP, Mr. Montajes is using his technical skills to develop solar-powered equipment for the off-grid communities – so in this way, he is using skills and expertise that he possessed before establishing LOHP. However, Mr. Montajes has also seen the need to further develop his knowledge and skills, and he has therefore participated in several incubation and acceleration programmes. And it was through one of these programmes that he was exposed to subscription-based business models and got the idea to offer LOHP’s services through subscriptions.

Some of the findings regarding personal factors impacting the founder of LOHP correspond with concepts described in recent scholarly sources. One recent study describes motivation as being particularly important for people engaged in social entrepreneurship (Ramdan et al., 2025). Another recent study described personal factors such as motivation, capability and willingness to leave one’s comfort zone as factors that may contribute to someone becoming an entrepreneur (Asiedu & Khosa, 2025). This appears to correspond with how the founder

of LOHP was motivated to establish LOHP, and how he was willing to leave his comfort zone by making personal sacrifices.

Another recent study has shown how founders of social enterprises leverage their professional experience when establishing a social enterprise (Vidal et al., 2025). The same study also described how founders of social enterprises enhance their skills through the participation in various kinds of training programs that are available (Vidal et al., 2025). This corresponds with how the founder of LOHP combined making use of the skills and expertise he already possessed, with getting additional training to be able to further develop his enterprise.

Receiving Support

In the interview, Mr. Montajes also talked about how he had received help and support from people and organizations that provide various kinds of support for social enterprises. During the first few years, LOHP faced financial challenges since they had not yet received any grants, and since they were not making enough money to keep the business going. However, at this point, some of his friends and family, who believed in the work he was doing, donated some money so that he could keep developing LOHP. And without this financial support that he received from friends and family, he said that there would have been a possibility that LOHP would not have existed today.

LOHP has also participated in various competitions to receive grants. And in 2022, LOHP received its first grant. And Mr. Montajes stated that having received a grant from one organization made it easier to receive grants from other organizations. Hence, they have participated in several competitions for grants and have received grants from several different organizations. As of 2025, LOHP is still partly dependent on the grants, as the 1000 households that subscribe to their services don't provide a high enough income to make LOHP fully financially self-sustainable. However, they hope that when they reach 5000 subscribers, at some point in the future, the business will generate enough income for it to be financially self-sustainable without grants.

The support LOHP and its founder has received has not, however, only been monetary. They have also benefited from participating in various incubation and acceleration programs offered by various organizations that support social entrepreneurs. As stated above, it was through the participation in one of the acceleration programs that Mr. Montajes decided to adopt the subscription model. And as of 2025, they are participating in an acceleration program in which they explore the option of cooperating with corporations about their CSR programmes.

Some of the findings regarding the support that the founder of LOHP received, correspond with concepts described in recent scholarly sources. One study mentioned positive feedback which founders received from people in the local community as significant during the phase when the social enterprises had not yet become profitable (Vidal et al., 2025). Another recently published article also mentioned the positive impact grants received during the early stages of social ventures may have on social enterprises (Singh et al., 2025). And another recently published study emphasised how incubators can help entrepreneurs develop suitable business models for their enterprises (Breu & Kanbach, 2025). Together, these

studies correspond with the findings about the importance of the various forms of support that the founder of LOHP received during the early stages of his social enterprise.

Adjusting and Expanding the Business Model

Through the interview, Mr. Montajes also described various ways in which LOHP has adjusted and adapted its business model at various points of time during the last few years. First of all, LOHP has evolved from merely donating solar equipment to beneficiaries in the very beginning, to providing the solar equipment as a service through a subscription-based business model. This change has been beneficial in several different ways. First of all, it has provided a continuous income-stream from the subscribers, which has made LOHP more financially stable. However, the change to a subscription-based model was also made because of the positive environmental and social impact this change could have. If the solar-powered devices had just been donated or sold to the beneficiaries, they might have ended up as trash on the off-grid islands, where there is no proper system for garbage collection, if the devices malfunctioned or reached the end of their lifespan. However, now that the solar-powered devices are offered as a service through a subscription, LOHP is in charge of maintaining and repairing the equipment, and takes care of discarding equipment which cannot be repaired in proper ways. In this way, LOHP makes sure that they are not contributing to the waste disposal problems of the off-grid island communities.

The switch from donating the equipment to offering the equipment through a subscription also is intended to contribute to a change of mindset in the poor communities that LOHP is serving. Mr. Montajes stated that if the people in the poor communities continuously receive money or various kinds of items through donations, it will create dependencies between the givers and the receivers. And the mindset of the poor people might then be that they are supposed to keep receiving money and aid for free. However, by offering their service as a subscription, at a rate which people in the poor communities can afford, LOHP hopes to change the dependency mindset that some of the beneficiaries might have. In this way, a sense of dependency may be replaced with a sense of empowerment.

When it comes to the monthly fee that the beneficiaries pay for the service LOHP provides, Mr. Montajes described that they went through a process of trying to find the best price for this service. And after testing different prices, they ended up setting the price at US\$6 per month. That they were testing different prices shows that they were willing to research and act upon the market conditions.

LOHP has also at various points had to change the way in which they are funded. Originally, Mr. Montajes used his own money to fund LOHP. However, when his own money ran out, he was then able to receive some financial support from his family and friends. Later, LOHP was able to obtain grants from various organizations that offer grants. And in the future, LOHP aims at becoming fully financially self-sustainable through the revenue generated from its clients. This process shows that the founder of LOHP has been willing to keep seeking new sources of income for his social enterprise.

LOHP has also kept developing the devices that it is offering to its beneficiaries, to make them even more useful for the beneficiaries. Early versions of the solar-powered devices they offer their clients can give power to a LED lamp and can be used to charge a mobile phone. The

latest version of the device can also be used to power a television. And currently, LOHP is working on further developing its devices, so that in the future, they may also be used for emergency communication between off-grid island communities and the emergency services.

Mr. Montajes has also been willing to explore new income streams for LOHP. Currently, they are exploring if it is possible for corporations to pay for some of the devices that they are distributing to their beneficiaries. In return, the corporations may have their company logos printed on the devices. And the corporations may use some of the money that they have set aside for their CSR programmes to pay for the devices. This is another example of how LOHP is working to continuously improve its business model.

Some of the findings regarding the adjustment and expansion of LOHP correspond with findings described in recent scholarly sources. One recent study suggests that in order to improve business performance, an enterprise needs to have a solid business idea as its foundation, while simultaneously identifying and selecting the right business opportunities. This will enhance business performance as it will make the business more flexible and able to adapt to external changes (Matotola, 2025). This corresponds with how the founder of LOHP has combined having an initial business idea with responding to various opportunities, such as the opportunity to establish a subscription-based service for LOHP's beneficiaries and the potential opportunity to cooperate with the CSR programmes of various corporations.

A recent study also mentioned a social enterprise based in another part of the world which employed a business model which had certain similarities with LOHP's current business model. Locavore is a social enterprise based in Scotland which provides consumers with local and sustainably produced foods. Through a paid subscription, consumers receive food delivered to their homes on a regular basis (Fathi et al., 2025). Just like in the case of LOHP, the example of Locavore shows that providing products or services through subscriptions can be a suitable business model for some social enterprises.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the following paragraphs, we will first look at how the business model employed by LOHP fits with current theories about social enterprises. We will then consider some theoretical, practical and social implications of the findings in this study. Finally, we will look at the limitations of this research and some suggestions for future research.

LOHP and Existing Theories

As of 2025, LOHP appears to clearly fit within the definition of a social enterprise, as it is a business which seeks to achieve social and environmental impact through the trading of services (Tan et al., 2018). When LOHP was first established as an advocacy group back in 2017, it would probably not have been correct to define it as a social enterprise, since it in the beginning was merely donating solar equipment to its beneficiaries and was not really operating as a business. In its early stages, LOHP was a mission-oriented organization, located on the fringe of the mission-oriented end of the hybrid spectrum. However, during the last few years, LOHP has evolved into a social enterprise which is now located somewhere in the middle of the hybrid spectrum, as it has become a social enterprise which seeks to achieve its social and environmental mission through its business activities.

When it comes to how LOHP tackles market failure, the social enterprise clearly employs what Beaton & Dowin Kennedy (2021) refer to as market mending. By providing solar power equipment to off-grid communities, LOHP alters the status-quo of the market failure by creating a business model and new products that give beneficiaries access to goods and services through market transactions (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021). When it comes to the four different types of market mending that are described by Beaton & Dowin Kennedy (2021), LOHP first of all engages in what is called last mile mending. Through LOHP's subscription-based business model, LOHP is building a distribution network to ensure that existing products can reach more potential customers – which in the case of LOHP is people living in off-grid communities – allowing these products to improve the lives of the beneficiaries, which also are the customers of LOHP (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021). LOHP also appears to engage in what is called void mending, as they develop new products – such as a new version of its solar-powered device that will enable people in off-grid communities to communicate digitally with emergency services. In this way, LOHP is developing new products that has the potential to improve the lives of the beneficiaries (Beaton & Dowin Kennedy, 2021).

If we attempt to place LOHP within the typology of hybrid business models developed by Santos et al. (2015), LHOP appears to be what this typology describes as a market hybrid, since it is an enterprise designed in such a way that the beneficiaries are clients that pay for the services they receive (Santos et al., 2015). One advantage of the market hybrid, compared to other hybrid business models, is that the model is designed in such a way that the more products are sold, the more social impact is generated. Hence, enterprises employing this kind of business model can focus on perfecting and scaling their business activities, and enterprises employing this kind of business model have low risks of drifting away from their social missions (Santos et al., 2015).

Finally, if we look at the nine different business models for social enterprises described by Alter (2007), LOHP appears to be employing the business model which is called low-income client as market. SEs employing this model provide poor and low-income beneficiaries access to products and services that they otherwise wouldn't have had access to. Since the clients are low-income, the SE needs to be able to provide the services at a low cost. LOHP does this through a lean organization, by keeping the salary of the CEO low, and by – potentially – having corporations pay for some of the equipment LOHP provides to its clients. Since the margins typically are low when an SE employs the low-income client as market business model, LOHP needs to have a relatively high volume of clients for it to become financially self-sustainable, and LOHP aims to reach this goal at some point in the future (Alter, 2007).

Theoretical Implications

As a case study of one social enterprise in one country, this study is not statistically representative of social enterprises in general. Hence, it is not possible to derive theories from this study that necessarily will be representative of other social enterprises. However, several findings from this study may be used to tentatively outline some propositions regarding early-stage business model development in social enterprises. These propositions may, if they are corroborated through further research, in the future be included in a more complete theory of early-stage business model development in social enterprises. Keeping these reservations in mind, we would like to suggest the following three propositions: (1) Business model

development in early-stage social enterprises is typically a process which begins before the social enterprise is founded and continues for several years after the founding of the enterprise. (2) The business model development process in social enterprise start-ups will typically be impacted by a number of different factors, including personal factors of the founder(s) (their motivation, skills and experience), the needs of the beneficiaries which the enterprise is aiming to help, the market in which the social enterprise aims to sell its products/services, internal factors of the social enterprise (social mission, financial goals, and values/culture), the support system for social enterprises that is available in some regions (such as incubators, accelerators, grants, and various types of funding), and external factors (the economic and socio-cultural environments and the legislative framework of the country where the social enterprise is located). (3) In order to succeed, founders of social enterprises need to develop business models which enable the social enterprises to simultaneously achieve their social mission and reach their financial goals, and to achieve this, the founders need to make efforts to continuously adapt, adjust and improve their business models during the early stages of a social enterprise.

Practical and Social Implications

Although not statistically representative of all social enterprises and social entrepreneurs, this study provides numerous insights that may be useful for current and future social entrepreneurs. Firstly, this study suggests that the motivation of the founders of social enterprises is important. In order to succeed, the founder of a social enterprise needs to have a strong desire to make a difference. This study also highlights the importance for social entrepreneurs to leverage their existing skills and experience while actively acquiring new competencies and knowledge essential for achieving success in their ventures. Hence, founders of social enterprises should make sure that they have the right motivation to do the work they are doing, and they need to be willing to seek to increase their skills and knowledge when necessary.

Furthermore, this study shows how important receiving support from various organizations that support social enterprises can be for social entrepreneurs. Hence, founders of social enterprises should consider participating in incubators, accelerators and other kinds of training and development programmes that might be available for them. The founders of social enterprises should also consider applying for grants that can help them get their enterprises off the ground during the early stages of their enterprises.

Finally, this study suggests the importance of continuously adapting, adjusting and optimizing an enterprise's business model during the early stages of the enterprise. Hence, both before and after a social enterprise has been founded, the founders of the enterprise need to interact with their beneficiaries and customers/clients to try to find ways in which their social mission and business model can be improved. And they need to be willing to adjust, adapt, expand and continuously seek to optimise their business model in order to achieve their social mission and reach their financial goals.

This study also provides some suggestions for policymakers, as it emphasizes how important incubators and accelerators, and the access to grants and other sources of funding, is for at least some social start-ups. This should inspire policymakers to support the development of incubator and accelerator programs for social entrepreneurs. And it should inspire

policymakers to seek to implement policies that will make it easier for social entrepreneurs to secure the funding they need for their start-ups.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The main limitation of this study is that it is a case study focusing on only one social enterprise. As such, the findings of this study are not statistically representative neither of all social enterprises in the world, nor of all social enterprises in the Philippines. The findings from this study could, however, inspire more research into how social entrepreneurs develop suitable business models for their social enterprises, during the early stages of their enterprises. Some of the findings from this study could be used to develop a quantitative study in which a large number of founders of social entrepreneurs would participate. The purpose of this quantitative study would be to examine to what degree the experiences of other social entrepreneurs correspond with the experiences of the founder of LOHP. Such a quantitative study should be designed to be statistically representative and could therefore be used to develop a more complete theory of business model development in early-stage social enterprises.

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