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Social Entrepreneur as Career: Why it Attracts Youth in Malaysia?

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Abstract

Malaysian government takes seriously in empowering the social entrepreneurship activity among youth with their aim to establish 1000 social enterprise in 2018. Although this issue is important, the number of studies related to career as social entrepreneurs among youth is still scarce in this country. The main goal of this study was to explore why career as a social entrepreneur bring much interest among youth in Malaysia. This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, where interviewing methods were used for eight youth social entrepreneurs who were voluntarily engaged in this study. Data analysis revealed three themes which are i) the motivation gain from their surroundings, ii) interest in business and social activities, and iii) high desire to help and develop their community. This finding may be useful to increase the number of youth social entrepreneurs in Malaysia, in which people who are interested in social sector are encouraged to make campaigns on social entrepreneurship activities towards SME entrepreneurs. By encouraging this, hopefully a sharing session of inspirational stories from successful entrepreneurs will benefit the upcoming youth social entrepreneurs. Perhaps the sharing session will open their eyes in using or continuing using the social entrepreneurship model compared to using the CSR approach to help their community.

Keywords: Career, Social Entrepreneur, Social Entrepreneurship Activity, Youth.

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is becoming an increasingly well recognised field and practice in the world and as well as in Malaysia. However, social entrepreneurship activities in Malaysia are still at an early stage (Farok, 2011; Sarif, Ismail & Sarwar, 2013; Othman & Abd Wahid, 2014; MaGIC, 2015: 2016). According to the General Entrepreneurship Monitor (2009), Malaysia's position is the lowest when compared to China, Hong Kong and Korea, or in other words, Malaysia is still at the infant stage of the social entrepreneurial activity. Within 6 years there has been positive development of youth involvement in social entrepreneurial activities. It is quite encouraging to see that the majority or 64% of social entrepreneurs are among the youth aged 40 and below. It can be seen that youth social entrepreneurs in Malaysia have shifted from commercial business activities to social enterprises (MaGIC, 2015; 2016).

However, little is known about career as social entrepreneur among youth, particularly in Malaysia. There are a few studies done in Malaysia regarding this field more focus on social entrepreneurship and economic development (Li, 2010), the survival of social entrepreneurship (Ismail & Sarwar, 2013); the potential of social entrepreneurship (Radin, Zaidatol, Suhaida & Soaib, 2013); Muslim entrepreneurs (Sarif, Sarwar & Ismail, 2013); the involvement of students from institutes of higher learning (Hariyati, 2014); and the eradication of poverty through social entrepreneurship (Zainol, David, Abdullah & Yaacob, 2014). Hence, this study focuses on career of social entrepreneur and the growing interest among youth. This study will unveil the real story behind their success and to also inspire and motivate other youth to be involved in social entrepreneurship.

There is a need to explore among youth who choose social entrepreneur as a career. Why this career, attracts youth in Malaysia to become as a social entrepreneur. It is important to explore how they are motivated to become a social entrepreneur. Hence, this study hopes to inspire and encourage other youth to venture into social entrepreneurship activities, as Malaysian government targeted 1000 social enterprises to be established in Malaysia by 2018 (MaGIC, 2015) thus this study is timely and highly relevant.

Literature Review

Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurial activity generally is a combination of social mission and business activities for economic development and at the same time it is also focussing in creating social value (Mair & Marti, 2006). However, this activity may occur in or around the body of the non-profit, business, or the government sector (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). The concept of social entrepreneurship activity has a different meaning to everyone (Dees, 1998). For example, social entrepreneurship activity refers to a non – profit agency which is looking for initiative in finding alternative financing strategies or management in creating social value (Austin et al., 2006; Boschee, 1998). While other opinion about the activities of social entrepreneurship is it is a practice of social responsibility towards commercial business (Sagawa & Siegel, 2000; Waddock, 1988). Social entrepreneurship activity is also seen as a means to reduce social problem and the process of social transformation (Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2004; Ashoka Innovators, 2000).

For clearer understanding of social entrepreneurship activity, it comes from two different terms, namely 'entrepreneurship' and 'social'. The biggest challenge to understanding the social entrepreneurship activity is on what is meant by 'social' (Seelos & Mair, 2005). The term 'social' refers to initiatives aimed for helping others (Prabhu, 1999). Generally, social entrepreneurship activity is different from commercial business that is based on the profit motive (Cole, 1968). However, Mair and Marti (2004) argue that social entrepreneurial activity is based on of ethical and moral responsibility (Bornstein, 1998; Catford, 1998).

For the purpose of this study, researchers postulate social entrepreneurship activity as an activity where social element is use to create business activity. Where in this activity without focusing on profit for their own use but those profits will be used instead for the community. In carrying out the activities of social entrepreneurship it requires entrepreneurial skills and career experiences for social impact. Entrepreneurial skills are the most important element in the implementation of social entrepreneurship activity; this is due because entrepreneurs needs to sustain the business in order to make profit that will benefit the community continuously. Innovation refers

to not only on the technology used, but it also refers to the good ideas and creativity that is needed when an individual have to use ideas and the resources surrounding them in solving social problem. Researchers also view social entrepreneurship as an alternative for financial resources without having to depend on third parties such as NGO to meet the social objectives that can be delivered continuously to the community.

Social Entrepreneur as a Career

A start up is not created by accident it requires a lot of effort and time to build a business (Carter, Gartner, Shaver & Gatewood, 2003). An individual who is in the field of entrepreneurship tends to have the experience and knowledge based on their previous careers. Experience based on previous careers acquired by an individual is called social capital and the competence gained is known as career capital (Midlane, 2007).

Career capital means 'capital' owned by an individual which is social capital and competence. Career capital is acquired based on previous careers, which can be used as a basis for social entrepreneur. While career experience can reflects toward the ability of an individual of 'career capital accumulation'. For example, an individual who is involved in entrepreneurship will use the experience of their previous career in carrying out social enterprise. If an individual has no experience working in an organization they will likely to face more difficulty to build a network. In this regards, career experiences are an important part in the beginning of a career in entrepreneurial activity, as well as in social entrepreneurship activities.

Career of an individual can develop gradually over time as they went through working experiences collecting information, knowledge, skills, experience and networks (Bird, 1994). Competency may differ between job scope of a career and an organization with other organizations (Sullivan, Carden & Martin, 1998). However, career experience which is social capital and competency are transferable, mobile and value-generating as it may transfer to another organization or entrepreneurial activity (Terjesen, 2005). An individual who have a career capital which refer to previous career experiences has value in the formation of entrepreneurial activity.

The contribution of previous career experience is the experience develops in an organization that can be used as a stepping stone in entrepreneurship (Gib Dyer, 1994). However, career experience is needed in entrepreneurial activity as 'capital' in terms of experience, knowledge, skills and networks were gained during previous careers as a representative to succeed as an entrepreneur (Midlane, 2007). Career experience of an individual may also be associated with environmental factors. According to Wolfe & Kolb (1980), a career is developed based on pressures and constraints of the environment. That is the tie that binds an individual to give pleasure to others, for example the responsibility towards children, the elderly and also the structure of the individual situational need. An individual is considered to be an open system, which is constantly interacting with the environment, and also seek stability through continuous alteration (McIlveen & Schultheiss, 2012).

Why Social Entrepreneur Career attracts Youth?

Motivation is an important element that plays the role in development, expansion, tenacity, and success in a new startup venture (Omoredede, 2014; Carsrud & Brannback, 2011; Shane, Locke & Collins, 2003). According to Humphris (2017), there are a few studies about motivations towards

social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneur motivation is based on their self, which is self – confident and extroversion (London, 2010). As we know, social entrepreneur mostly have high confident, sometime they are call unreasonable person due to their high insight and risk taking (Elkington & Hartigan, 2008). By having personal experiences and the ability in recognizing the unmet needs in their surroundings, this attribution is a strong value in becoming a social entrepreneur (Williams & Nadin, 2012). Mostly as social entrepreneurs, they have business and social activity background to lead them in these fields. According to Dees, Emerson and Economy (2001), when a certain social issues are failed to be solved, commercial entrepreneur are called to help the government to assist in solving the issues. Aileen Boluk and Mottiar (2014) argue that, social participation is clearly to make contribution to the community. Social entrepreneurship activity has been known to be beneficial towards one’s community (Khatiwada, 2014; Volkman, Tokarski & Ernst, 2012). This is because social entrepreneur will use social entrepreneurship activity to serve the need of individual who is struggling in economic situation where they weren’t able to afford to buy product or get a better service (Muller, 2012)

The theory of planned behavior proposed by Ajzen (1991), which entails support and describe social entrepreneur in a social entrepreneurship activity (Nawi & Hamzah, 2015; Larsen, 2013). An individual who took the action to become social entrepreneur are influence by intention to start a social enterprise (Mair & Noboa, 2006). According to this theory, desire can be attributed to attitude. In social entrepreneurship studies, the theory of planned behavior has three types of element (Fayolle & Gailly, 2004; Souitaris, Zerbinati & Al-Laham, 2007; Ajzen, 1991) which is i) attitude, ii) social norms and iii) perceived behavior control. Attitude refers to an individual belief in their self-employment and social impact, this explain the extent to which an individual has good or bad judgment on his or her own work rather than working with an organization. Next, social norms, it refers to the perceived social pressure, for example the unmet needs, were they implemented or not towards that behavior, it can also be seen as motivation to comply with these pressures. Lastly, perceived behavior control is referring to acceptance whether it’s easy or difficult in conducting these behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Researchers argue that, desire is one’s motivation, and in theory it is defined as a state of mind that directs attention and action toward certain behavior. Meanwhile, behavior control is the ability seen in conducting a behavior to become a social entrepreneur.

Methodology

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to collect and analyse data to answer the research questions. In qualitative research, researcher is a main instrument for collecting and analysing data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researcher creates interview guide while conducting the interview. Researcher also uses the chance to ask during exploring career experiences among youth social entrepreneur as best as possible. The in-depth interview was recorded using voice recorder, which will help in ensuring rich data are recorded. Then, the data was transcribed, verbatim and analyzed for grouping to identify theme by the researcher.

Informants

Researchers selected informants among youth who participate in social enterprise and social business as social entrepreneurs. Researchers obtain informants’ information through a website

provided by the Malaysia Global Innovation and Creativity Centre (MaGIC), internet search, program participation and snowballing technique. The informants were selected from different type of social impact sector using purposive sampling, where specific criteria were identified.

In this study, the criteria of selecting informant includes 1) youth who runs social enterprise for at least minimum of 2 years as social entrepreneur; 2) ages in the range of between 20 – 40 years old according to *Dasar Pembangunan Belia Negara* (1997); 3) can easily be contacted; and 4) willing to participate in this study. Informants are contacted using email, Facebook, telephone and the WhatsApp application. Upon getting their consent to become an informant, the researcher set up the time, date and venue for the data collection. Before the interview start, researcher will briefly explain the purpose of the study, the procedure involved in data collecting and the need for informants to sign a consent form as an agreement to take part in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

In conducting the study, researchers have taken steps to collect data to obtain information for the research questions. Firstly, the researchers contact the informant via email, phone calls, and also through WhatsApp applications. The informant was also contacted on social media such as Instagram and Facebook to obtain the consent of the informants in the study. The researchers then set the date, time, and place of the interview session that will be conducted with the informant.

The second step in data collecting is that prior to the actual interview session, researchers met with the informants to introduce themselves as well as to build a relationships so that researchers can get some information about social entrepreneurial activities conducted by the informant (Patton, 2015; Merriam, 2016). This is done to build a sense of familiarity between the researchers and the informant as to make it easier and comfortable for the informant to share information on the actual interview sessions.

The third step taken is by having the researcher came to an agreed place for an interview. The researchers then explain the goals of the study, and how the interviews are being conducted with the informants. The researchers started an interview session by asking the informant their background information as social entrepreneur based on the interview guide. The interview uses the semi structured questions that is prepared by the researchers in the more in-depth interview session.

Each interview session was transcribed verbatim. Then, the researchers used Nvivo for the purpose of analyzing the data. After using the software, the researcher came to a conclusion that this software is just an assisting tool in managing the data, whereas the idea of determining code, category and theme is based on the researcher experience and not on the software. However, this software do help the researchers in managing the data more systematically and also help in time saving during the process of analyzing data compared when having to do it manually.

Results and Discussions

Profile of Youth Social Entrepreneur

This study involved eight youth social entrepreneurs between the ages of 26 to 42 who actively participate in social enterprise and social business. Two informants have five years of experience while the other six have experience between two to three years. The informants involved in the study come from a variety of background of social impact sectors such as health care & nutrition,

economic access & poverty eradication, education, youth development, and women's issues & health. Table 1 shows the summary of eight social entrepreneurs in this study.

Table 1: Informant Profile

Pseudonym	Age	Years as Social Entrepreneur	Social Impact Sector
Paul	26	3	Economic access & poverty eradication
Hashim	30	5	Health care & nutrition
Huda	33	3	Economic access & poverty eradication
Aina	28	4	Education
Anuar	29	2	Youth development (sport)
Asma	42	5	Women's issues & health
Husna	39	2	Youth development
Pearl	31	3	Education

Why youth Choose Career as a Social Entrepreneur?

Based on the interview session, the researcher has formed three themes to answer the research question, namely; 1) the motivation gains from their surrounding; 2) interest in business and social activities; and 3) high desire to help and develop their community.

The Motivation Gain from their Surrounding

The informants shared that they are inspired by their environment. According to **Hashim**,

"... When I was a medical student of 1st year that was my first time out of Kuala Lumpur, and living among the poor in Indonesia. So I discover how they live in poverty, and how the economies, how the system affects the health of people. And I am also quite impressed with the health of Indonesia, because even though the country is poor, they are trying to provide the best health for the people even in rural areas. ... "

According to **Pearl**, "... I felt like, at least a little bit, I kind of understood what goes on in a school. And because I taught in one of the worst schools, if they can achieve something, right? Then I'm sure we can emulate these successes in all the schools in Malaysia. ..."

Other informants also shared that they are getting inspiration from others. According to **Anuar**, "... So, when we were in MaGIC for one symposium, for three days. We were just there to observe as our Dream staff. So, we were there to observe., what they have in line lah. By MaGIC. So, they have a lineup of great speakers. It's very inspirational. ... "

According to **Huda**, "Because there is a time that I remember I think I see TV on History Channel on Dr. Mahathir. If I'm not mistaken. And that time it clicks on my mind la. He's one person but he's done a lot of changes. So, say one person, then a lot of changes. ... "

Gaining motivation from events and other individuals is pushing the youth to become social entrepreneurs and choosing it as a career. Alertness to be able to inspire actions taken from the

scanning the horizon (Kirzner, 1999; Tang, Kacmar & Bursenitz, 2009; Bailey, 2012). Scanning horizons bring a dynamic and evolving community meaning through the trend spotter's strategy and trend from the non-profit sector. Social entrepreneur who gain motivation from their surroundings are called social bricoleurs. According to Smith and Stevens (2010), social bricoleurs is an individual who tackle social issues based on their experience and dealing in their community.

Interest in Business and Social Activities

A strong interest in business and social activities can lead youth to choose the career as a social entrepreneur. According to **Paul** who mentioned, "...interest that's when you create that. You have a passion. Because if there is no interest, nothing can do ... "Asma also shared that interest bring her to this level, she said, "Just one thing that I realize I cannot work alone. That's why it's important when you have your big why, you have your passion. ... ".

Then, **Anuar** said,

"... It looks easy on paper, but what do you have to do with a prisoner? Is there a history in your family who is a prisoner whom you really want to help in prison? That's the connections. That personal touch of why do you want to help prisoners in this place. If you choose to select any person in the society, you will not have that passion. You will not have that resilience to continue to helping them... ".

Engaging in social entrepreneurial activities requires a great deal of interest in implementing social enterprises to compete with commercial businesses and at the same time to enhance them. The word interest often appears in interview session in this study, the interest that makes an individual wanting to do something whether to start a business, to create a large company or revive the community (Handy, Kassam & Renade, 2002; Roberts & Woods, 2005).

According to **Asma** who's really interested in entrepreneurial activity as a hobby since working at an oil and gas company said, "... and that's when I started to grow my interest into business. Back in 2006 where I attended like a social thing like I want to do business. But what business I want to do? Because I like to do business, like two, three months before fasting month I will go to Bandung, go to Vietnam just to buy things and then sell to my friends. Just, something like a hobby. But it just like a seasonal thing... ". Whereas according to **Anuar**, "... so, if I were not exposed in OurDream, I will not have that capacity to developed that. And also my personal passion in entrepreneurship. I have my own business with my wife. Our clothing business. ... ". While **Husna**, said "... 2007 I start doing business, I start with business franchise. The franchise is from the US, it's a women fitness center. 5 years. 2007, 2012 closed because 5 years I did not renew the contract licensing..."

Interest has been an element of entrepreneurial activity identified by Cardon, Wincent, Singh and Drnovsok (2009). They suggest that by having an interest in entrepreneurship it help to identify what is and what is done. They stated the basic concept of 1) "having an interest in entrepreneurship is consciously accessible and a feeling of positive feelings" and 2) "having an interest in entrepreneurship because of involvement in activities that give identity and seriousness to entrepreneurs".

High Desire to Help and Develop their Community

This is another recurring theme found in this study which is shared by all the informants. According to **Paul** "...Everyone have their own needs and standard goals are to human nature.

But if you are a social entrepreneur, you can impact this community. ... ". According to **Hashim** who is a medical doctor, "...public health is different from clinical doctor; we treat patients at the hospital. But there's a focus in medicine it's call public health, where when you treat the patients, you'll treat the community. ... ".

While **Husna** said, "... I think it's about time, because I've been doing business for 5 years, but I think why not I join the business, something that contributes back to the society, besides doing donations every year. Like (during) Ramadhan or *Zakat*, but something that is more sustainable.". Similarly, with **Asma**, "... I am a social entrepreneur I want to help, I mean the community. I want to help their education. ... ".

Desire to help the community (Humphris, 2017; Galera & Borzaga, 2009; Renko, 2013) is one of the reasons why youth social entrepreneurs in this study venture into this field and choose it as their career. When looking at the origins of social enterprises, it is important to see the origins of the social economy.

Recommendations

In order to achieve Malaysia's aspiration in targeting 1000 social enterprises in 2018, this finding may be useful to increase the number of youth social entrepreneurs in Malaysia, in which interested parties can make educational campaigns on social entrepreneurial activities on SME entrepreneurs. One of the ways is by having a sharing session of inspirational stories for youth social entrepreneurs. Hopefully, by having a sharing session it will open some eyes and develop ideas. Also perhaps it will help them in using or continuing using the social entrepreneurship model compared to using the CSR approach to help their community.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study and discussion, three themes have been set up to answer the question of why a career as a social entrepreneur attracts the youth in Malaysia. The themes are, i) the motivation gain from their surroundings, ii) interest in business and social activities, and iii) high desire to help and develop their community, which is researcher conclude that these themes are important element that contribute them play roles as social entrepreneurs. In this regard, career as a social entrepreneur can be seen to have created a change that has altered the social system indirectly within the last six years. Youth social entrepreneurs have contributed their role in community development, social impact and leadership skills while at the same time strengthening their own potential. The approach using the social entrepreneurship activities can be used as a medium to support the development among youth, especially to address social and environmental issues and promoting more people especially the youths to choose social entrepreneurs as a career. This is a very important step as it can improve the social and economic growth of a country. It is hope that this research will help to develop knowledge about career as a social entrepreneur. It is also hope that this research will raise awareness on social entrepreneurship activities. As by doing so, it will be able to create a bigger awareness to help social entrepreneurs implement and develop social enterprises that will contribute substantially to the society and economic growth of a country.

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