Between Commercial and Nonprofit: Communicating Social Business

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Social businesses uniquely communicate their organizational purpose as a balance between a social mission and revenue generation.

- While commercial enterprises seek to generate revenue and nonprofit organizations exist to address social needs and demands, social businesses navigate the tension to fulfill both purposes.

- Social businesses are broadly defined as organizations which seek to realize a social mission through business means, and they have the potential to change the landscape of social impact and social services.

The data includes 5 in-depth interviews with social business leaders in Utah.

- Relevant themes arose naturally from the data.
- The selected businesses varied in size, length of operation, cause, and industry.
- We focused on the stories these leaders told about their businesses and how they communicated their unique structure.

Social business as personally rewarding work.

- “But for me…you know out of all the businesses I’ve participated in this probably has been one of the most fulfilling.”

Managing tension between market demands and social mission

- “Yes, we’re a business. Yes, we function, we have to be profitable, but every little activity that we do here at the office, there is a greater purpose, there’s a greater meaning.”

Business as a driving societal force with fewer limits than traditional social impact work.

- “…where we have our own, like structure our own business, we get to say, “hey, this is our money, this is what we’re going to do with it.”

Social businesses communicate their identity in dynamic ways, which motivates increased public engagement with their social missions. Personal and public rewards generated by social business encourage workers and consumers to give back in meaningful ways. Incentivizing these organizations would encourage the formation of more of these powerful, new actors.