

**THE EFFECTS OF RESOURCE DEPENDENCE AND RESOURCE-BASED THEORIES ON BRICOLAGE IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This conceptual paper defines and discusses a number of new constructs in the field of entrepreneurship. While following a paper written by Desa and Basu (2013), the paper, citing from several later papers, clarifies resource mobilization, bricolage, optimization and social entrepreneurship. The two resource theories, Resource Dependence Theory and Resource-based View, are brought into an analytical framework that shows the effects of organizational prominence and environmental munificence as antecedent conditions on whether social enterprises would bricolage as opposed to optimizing.

A number of realistic examples from prior literature and a few in the current Botswana environment are highlighted to assist in our conceptualization. The concept of social bricolage is also highlighted through a process, which provides an opportunity to bring several other practical examples. The paper's major purpose is to open vistas into developing entrepreneurship theories that are not part of the current debate in Botswana. It is recommended that local researchers pick up the thread and enrich the discussion through empirical research.

**KEYWORDS:** Resource Dependence, Resource-based, theory, bricolage, optimization, social entrepreneurship.

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to conceptually explore emerging concepts in entrepreneurship. The paper will put into context bricolage, optimization, the Resource Dependence Theory, the Resource-based view and their role in social entrepreneurship.

Resources and their mobilization are at the heart of the success of all types of enterprises. An enterprise that fails to mobilize resources is prone to fail. This includes enterprises for profit, for non-profit, private or public enterprises, even governments and countries.

Resources are scarce. This is self-evident, not only for certain types of organizations, but for all organizations and all people. Hence, scarcity of resources is contingent on the attitude and reaction of the person or organization affected. There is nothing absolute about the scarcity of resources, rather it is relative both in the conceptual sense and practical sense. This is why resource theories are important. They try to explain, not only relationships among variables affecting and being affected by resources, but also major players' attitudes, aspirations and behaviours.

The objectives of the paper are as follows:

1. To explain the concepts of resource mobilization, bricolage, optimization, and social entrepreneurship;
2. To demonstrate the roles played by the two theories Resource Dependence and Resource Based in social entrepreneurship;
3. Introduce antecedent conditions into the discussion;
4. Cite examples in area of social entrepreneurship; and make useful conclusions and recommendations for future research.

### **RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

Literature distinguishes two methods of resource mobilization: optimization and bricolage. Where standard resources, with proven capability for a specific application for which the resources are intended, are acquired, literature classifies this as optimization (Garud and Karnoe, 2003). High quality resources enable firms and other organizations to enhance their operating and organizing efficiencies and realize desired ends (Venkataraman, 2000). Firms that engage in optimization have a clear idea of the goals they want to accomplish and the quality of the resources they need to achieve these goals. Most people and organizations engage in optimization, and it is considered normal not to embark on a project if the quantity and quality of resources deemed necessary are not available. A University can only launch a new programme if there are properly-trained lecturers, and preferably experienced professors.

There are, however, other firms and individuals who “make do by applying combinations of resources already at hand” (Baker and Nelson, 2005:33). These firms and individuals are said to use bricolage. This is a concept popularized by Levi-Strauss – making do with what is at hand (Levi-Strauss, 1967). Whereas optimization focuses on goal-directed resource acquisition, bricolage focuses on addressing opportunities and problems with existing undervalued, slack, or discarded resources that are often available for free or cheaply.

Bricolage has started to assume various forms. At the broader level, there is what is called “necessity-based” bricolage where firms and individuals engage in bricolage out of necessity because they cannot afford the costs of the more standard resources. We see this happening in the private universities using graduates on internship as lecturers. This is assuming that these universities cannot afford to pay qualified lecturers, which might not be true. There is also what is termed “ideational bricolage” (Carstensen, 2011) where bricolage may result in pioneering capabilities (Gundry, Kickul, Griffiths and Bacq, 2011). Firms and individuals following ideational bricolage may recognize potential in discarded undervalued resources which might be combined in novel ways to create value (Seelos, Mair, Batlilana & Dacin, 2010). Surely, all of us are encouraged to undertake ideational bricolage.

Optimization and bricolage are not mutually exclusive processes, but complementary. Hence social ventures usually use both processes. A non-Governmental organization can use optimization when it is munificent and take on bricolage when resources are scarcer.

To demonstrate the breadth of resources and the extent to which bricolage can be taken, Baker and Nelson (2005:333) provide a list of illustrative examples of characteristics of bricolage. Only a few of them are listed below:

Resources at hand

- Social myths and fragments of myths as material at hand for construction of new ideologies (Chao, 1999);
- Existing social network contacts as resources for building technology businesses (Baker, Miner and Eesley, 2003);
- Constitutional and legal fragments used to construct new laws and constitutions (Hull, 1991; Tushnet, 1999);
- Elements of prior musical recordings as materials for creating hip-hop music and elements of current African American and Latino urban culture for creating Indian youth subculture in New York (Maira, 1999);
- Prior and existing institutions and elements of failed institutions as the building material for new institutions (Stark, 1996:995); institutions built “not on the ruins but with the ruins” of the old regime.

Re-combinations of resources for new purposes

- For the development of the Danish wind turbine industry, many different resources were reused, combined, and deployed by constellations of different players, with the entire bricolage process supporting and demonstrating “distributed agency” (Garud and Karnoe, 2003), rather than “heroic” individually-driven entrepreneurship.
- Biological evolution “makes a wing from a leg or a part of an ear from a piece of a jaw. “...” It is always a matter of using the same elements, of adjusting them, of altering here and there, of arranging various combinations to produce new objects of increasing complexity. It is always a matter of tinkering” (Jacob, 1977:1164-1165).

Making do

- “In broadly diffused engineering ideology, bricolage is usually associated with second-best solutions, maladaptation, imperfection, inefficiency, incompleteness, slowness, but as a matter of fact in many design situations it is the only thing that we can reasonably do when we are engaged in action. The outcomes of it are hybrid, imperfect, transient artefacts, which perhaps do not look very elegant, have lots of bugs and gaps, frictions and unusable components, but they do their job and can be improved” (Lanzara, 1999:347).
- Participants in the Danish wind turbine industry who relied on bricolage prevailed competitively over their U.S. competitors who sought “breakthrough” solutions that did not rely on prior approaches and artefacts (Garud and Karnoe, 2003).
- Regarding twentieth-century American legal scholars: “None of these men developed brilliant original theories... Pound and Llewellyn, jurisprudential bricoleurs were able to jam-crack their storehouse of handy ideas in a brilliant fashion to create something innovative if no inventive” (Hull, 1991:000).

Negative Illustrations

- In human embryonic development, a process developed through bricolage, “about 50% of all conceptions are estimated to result in spontaneous abortion.... This reveals the imperfections of a mechanism that is at the very core of any living system and has been refined over millions of years” (Jacob, 1977:1165).
- Use of bricolage by Australian primary school teachers results in lack of academic success by children (Hatton, 1989; Dent and Hatton, 1996).
- A shaman’s attempts to use bricolage by incorporating Maoist, Chinese nationalist, and shamanic elements into a ritual to help a community deal with an insane resident resulted in failure and the community’s rejection of the shaman (Chao, 1999).

**SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

Social Enterprises are organizations that pursue social missions to create social value, rather than maximize profits (Austin, Stevenson and Wei-Skillern, 2006). Serious discussions and debates on social entrepreneurship emerged during the last two to three decades even though the concept, like bricolage, always existed (Dacin, Dacin and Tracey, 2011). Zahra, Gedajlovic Neubaum and Shulman (2009) distinguish three types of social entrepreneurs:

- a) The social bricoleur who tackles small-scale and local social needs;
- b) The social constructionist who tackles underserved needs to introduce reforms and innovation to the broader social system; and
- c) The social engineer who addresses social problems in existing structures in order to introduce revolutionary changes (Zahra et al., 2009).

Di Domenico, Haugh and Tracey (2010) define “social bricolage” as a set of six processes:

- a. The making do;
- b. The refusal to be constrained by limitations;
- c. The improvisation;
- d. The social value creation;
- e. The stakeholder participation; and
- f. The persuasion of significant actors (Di Domenico et al., 2010).

These processes are related and most of them seem to feed on each other. Traditional entrepreneurship places ‘limitations’ in the form of scarcity of resources to an extent that an entrepreneur might have to seek resources as an activity, or abandon the initial opportunity (Baker and Nelson, 2005). The alternative is to refuse to be constrained by the ‘limitations’ (Di Domenico et al., 2010). This implies that one will have to ‘make do’ with what is in existence, or improvise. Senyard, Baker, Steffens and Davidsson (2014) utilized the old adage “necessity is the mother of invention” as apt to describe bricolage. If the bricoleur does not have the resources, they are not shy to approach those that can help – the stakeholders and other significant actors. The innovation where a manufacturer utilizes customers as salespeople is an interesting example of this. For social entrepreneurs, social value creation is the result of all these bricolage processes.

## **THEORY**

Two Theories are pertinent to the discussion of bricolage in social enterprises: Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) and the Resource-based view (Penrose, 1959; Barney, 1991). Desa and Basu (2013) explain both theories and discuss how they affect behaviour of social bricoleurs.

### **Resource Dependence Theory (RDT)**

In some organizations, performance becomes inextricably linked with particular resource providers. These resource providers might be banks supplying finance, of indeed skilled professionals, or just workers. These resource providers will have high asymmetric power in their relationship with that particular organization. They can use this power to extract excessive benefits from the local organization (Hillman, Withers, and Collins, 2009) or uncertainties in the performance of the resource providers themselves can jeopardize its performance.

The theory, in short, implies that resource-dependence on some particular resource providers or providers, on the part of any organization, is not good. Hence firms or organizations should endeavour to reduce resource dependence on any one resource supplier. This can obviously be done by finding alternative sources for that resource or equivalent resource. This reduction will reduce opportunism on the part of anyone resource provider (Hillman et al. *op. cit.*). Under the RDT, an optimization process is suggested focussing on standardizing the resource base and increasing the number and diversity of resources mitigating resource dependencies.

Still under RDT, firms concerned about excessive dependence on powerful resource providers can look for alternative resources that are substitutes, even though imperfect (McDougall and Oviatt, 2000). This is bricolage. The concern of the firm choosing this approach is stability, even though they might not be operating efficiently, unlike the firm following the optimization route pursuing efficiency.

### **Resource-based View (RBV)**

Organizations assemble resources to create capabilities and leverage those capabilities to create value (Sirmon, Hitt and Ireland, 2007). Similar to RDT, an organization's approach to resource assembly could also be from either the optimization or the bricolage approaches. A visionary firm structures its resource set by acquiring market resources at seemingly high prices with a goal of bundling these resources into a competency that pioneers new capabilities addressing a market opportunity. The firm may buy high quality inputs from specialized suppliers or hire talented employees from a limited labour pool. This explains the high prices the firm might have to bear. This could make it dependent on powerful resource providers, which might seem risky from an RDT perspective. But these risks may be worth taking for the firm to build a valuable, rare, and hard-to-imitate competency. In this case, optimization may be the appropriate strategic approach for a firm seeking superiority.

On the other hand, with resource costs high, a firm may structure resources by focusing on accumulating discarded, slack, or undervalued resources. Such a firm is not seeking superiority as a goal, but satisficing.

Applying this discussion to social enterprises, it can be stated that theories have provided insights into when and how firms might use optimization and/or bricolage approaches to mobilize resources. Desa and Basu (2013) used these insights to develop hypotheses for when social ventures would adopt a bricolage approach and when they might adopt an optimization approach. They came up with two antecedent conditions – organizational prominence and environmental munificence.

### ***Organizational prominence***

Desa and Basu (2013) state that important resource providers avoid young and smaller organizations since these suffer from the “liability of newness” or the “liability of smallness” (Stinchcombe, 1965). This seems to be the curse of small and micro-enterprises, as they find it difficult to attract funding from banks. Funders for social enterprises would rather donate

their resources to prominent organizations as they are more likely to get more publicity from that than if they donate to small unknown enterprises. It is these young and small ventures that may intuitively adopt RDT logic and engage in bricolage for resources (Baker and Nelson, 2005). Moreover, from the RBV perspective, they may seek to minimize costs and satisfice their aspirations by seeking to combine readily available resources. In other words, lack of organizational prominence might lead firms to indulge in necessity-based bricolage. Struggling ventures become bricoleurs trying to access low-cost resources.

As time goes on, the organization grows and becomes more prominent, hence overcomes the liabilities of newness and smallness (Mishina, Dykes, Block and Pollock, 2010). From an RDT perspective, there is little need for such to bricolage. However, for highly prominent organizations, the RBV logic becomes silent in predicting an increased level of bricolage.

### ***Environmental munificence***

Environment munificence is defined as the extent to which critical resources are available to incumbent firms through their environments (Castrogiovanni, 1991). When environmental munificence is low, competition for resources intensifies adversely affecting firm profitability and organizational slack (Bradley, Wiklund and Sherpherd, 2011). In this case, resource providers will have high asymmetric power relative to firms seeking their services, leading to higher prices for such services.

In line with RDT logic, the venture or firm that requires the resources is likely to look for alternative resources to substitute for the standard resources (Hillman et al., 2009). Moreover, consistent with RBV logic, it may adopt a satisficing approach and seek to combine available low-cost resources in the best possible manner. Therefore, in low munificent environments, social ventures are likely to adopt a greater degree of bricolage, which is typically necessity-based.

As munificence increases, there will be more providers of resources. RDT logic argues against social ventures’ use of bricolage. However, when munificence is extremely high, even bricolaged resources are of high quality and adequate for venture implementation. In line with RBV logic, social ventures recognize the considerable value that can be generated through the

combination of bricolaged resources. The table below attempts to summarize the above discussion.

<b>STRATEGY</b>	<b>ANTECEDENT</b>	<b>RESOURCE DEPENDENCE THEORY (RDT)</b>	<b>RESOURCE-BASED VIEW (RBV)</b>
<b>Optimization</b>	<b>Organizational Prominence (High)</b>	To reduce dependence, find alternative resources, which reduces opportunistic tendencies of resource-givers: efficiency. ‘Liability of smallness’ is reduced as the firm becomes more prominent.  From an RDT perspective, there is little need for such firms to bricolage.	Visionary firm structures its resource set by acquiring market resources at seemingly high prices so as to bundle them into a competency for new capabilities: superiority.  For highly prominent organizations, RBV logic becomes silent in predicting an increased level of bricolage.
<b>Optimization</b>	<b>Environmental Munificence (High)</b>	When munificence is high, there are many resource providers and firms avoid bricolage or bricolaged resources are of high quality when munificence is very high.	In line with RBV logic, social ventures recognize considerable value that can be generated through a combination of bricolaged resources.
<b>Bricolage</b>	<b>Organizational Prominence (Low)</b>	To reduce dependence, firms look for alternative resources: stability.  Small firms suffer ‘liability of smallness’ – necessity-based bricolage.	Where resource costs are high, structure resources by accumulating discarded, slack or undervalued resources. Minimize costs and satisfy aspirations by seeking to combine readily available resources.
<b>Bricolage</b>	<b>Environmental Munificence (Low)</b>	Where munificence is low, competition for resources intensifies; firms look for alternative or substitute resources: bricolage. Resource providers have high asymmetric power and charge high prices for their services. RDT logic dictates that firms look for alternative resources.	RBV logic dictates that firms adopt satisficing approaches and seek to combine low-cost resources.

**Source: Formulation by Researcher based on Desa and Basu (2013) analysis.**

**DISCUSSION**

What is now clear from the Desa and Basu (2013) analysis is that bricolage in organizations is contingent on a number of issues, prominent among which are the theory the organizations are presumed to operate under, and the antecedent conditions. The table constructed above shows clearly that bricolage might not be at the firm's or individual's whim. The majority of firms are forced by circumstances to adopt bricolage. Yet, the fact that a firm experiences poor environmental munificence, does not make it necessarily an accomplished bricoleur. Baker and Nelson (2005:357) cite what they term "bricolage capabilities" which means that firms may differ in their ability to apply bricolage 'skilfully'. In fact bricolage capabilities, besides the other factors above, can be seen as a competitive priority in very crowded and competitive markets, where a decline in resources might see least capable firm disband or forego opportunities (Baker and Nelson, 2005).

The theories discussed in this paper, help to emphasize that the resource-constrained environment is the element tying together social entrepreneurship and bricolage (Desa and Koch, 2014). For both theories, bricolage can only occur where organizational prominence is low and/or where environmental munificence is also low. These imply the inability of an enterprise to command resources due to either its size or just their unavailability.

If we were to assume that a social entrepreneur initiates operations, their size and/or availability of resources in the market will partly determine whether they would follow the optimization route or bricolaging. If they are a large operation and/or there is environmental munificence, they will find it easy to mobilize resources, hence they are likely to follow the optimization route. From the RDT perspective, resource providers do not possess symmetric power, hence there is no need to bricolage. However, for such prominent social ventures, RBV logic is silent in predicting whether or not there will be bricolage.

If the social venture initiating operations is small and/or environmental munificence is low, resources are likely to be more costly or just not available, hence the venture is likely to opt for bricolage. Such ventures suffer from the "liability of smallness". RDT logic dictates that such firms look for alternative and cheaper resources. Also, RBV logic requires that such firms adopt satisficing approaches by combining low-cost resources.

In addition to cited examples from Baker and Nelson (2005) above, it might help clarify the arguments if we cite the Botswana example of private colleges that mushroomed at the turn of the century. The Botswana Government faced so much pressure from school leavers that it prioritized education in its budgets, and private colleges that set up, whether small or large, found it easier to be financed. It could be concluded that the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century saw private educational colleges pursuing the optimization route. They were quite profitable because the main financier was prepared pay whatever the colleges levied. These expenses were still low for the government compared to financing students in foreign countries.

The global recession changed all that around 2008/9. The resources that seemed plentiful for the government were now reduced. Environmental munificence was reduced from the private colleges' perspective. Government drastically reduced the numbers of students allocated to these colleges, hence the colleges were forced into necessity bricolage. This type of social bricolage

follows a process as discussed above (Di Domenico et al., 2010). This process or processes are discussed using the colleges as theoretical examples.

The colleges had to “make do”. While prior to the crisis, it was a matter of choice for a college to intensify the recruitment of the so-called ‘private’ students (students not financed by government), now it was a survival necessity. Secondly, colleges had the option to request for an allocation of graduate interns to teach certificate and diploma programmes. After the crisis, most colleges increased the use of these interns. Some were even using them to teach degree programmes. They were ‘making do’.

A number of these colleges felt so much of the pinch that some considered closing down. However, high schools continued producing their graduates, hence, even though government was cutting back, there were still possible takers. The colleges refused to be constrained by the ‘limitations’. Some had ‘made the hay while the sun shone’, yet others tried all types of alternative financing options. Bricoleurs refuse to be constrained by limitations.

A social enterprise, like education, could compete in the commercial market for funds. A number of investors were persuaded that indeed education is a profitable investment. This was never thought possible before 2008 when the government demonstrated that indeed education is a social good. This is akin to improvisation on the part of the private colleges. One college had even persuaded the Botswana Development Corporation (BDC) that it was worthwhile investing in. Social enterprises are set to create ‘social value’ unlike commercial enterprises that must generate profit. The example we have been looking at of private colleges cannot fully fit the model of social enterprise in that sense since they are really created to generate profits. Social value in the sense of education being some social value seems only incidental. There are, however, some social enterprises that solely create social value, like the Red Cross, United Nations and Church enterprises.

These ‘pure’ social enterprises owe their sustainability to stakeholder participation. Churches run schools and Hospitals, not for profit, but to generate social value or social benefits. Most of the church projects would depend on donor finance and direct participation by their members and stakeholders, who, beside donating resources, put a lot of free labour and skills. This is the only way there can be sustainability in these enterprises.

To raise donations and get sympathetic consideration from governments, social enterprises have significant actors on their side. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)(formerly United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund) is good at placing significant actors as UNICEF Ambassadors to constantly have that persuasion. These are the proper social enterprises that work for the good of the public without necessarily expecting financial return, hence they create social value.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The paper explained the concepts of resource mobilization, bricolage and social entrepreneurship. It introduced two pertinent theories, Resource Dependence and Resource-based. It also explained antecedent conditions, Organizational Prominence and Environmental

Munificence. Where each antecedent condition applies, theoretical assumptions were applied to determine whether an enterprise would optimize or bricolage. Hence, unlike some discussions of bricolage, the paper clearly showed the alternative to bricolaging and the conditions under which bricolage would and would not occur. A table was constructed based on Desa and Basu (2013).

In summary, social enterprises that are either organizationally prominent and/or that are in munificent environments, will tend to optimize. Social enterprises that are small (or organizationally non-prominent) and/or in non-munificent environments will tend to bricolage with an intention to satisfice. There are situations where very prominent organizations in munificent environments might bricolage with high value resources, demonstrating the other side of bricolage which does not exhibit penury.

To the extent that the entrepreneurial research dialogue in Botswana excludes concepts like bricolage and sectors like the social sector, our main recommendation in this paper is that researchers should strive to be *au faire* with current global entrepreneurial debates. This research needs to be extended to the empirical level to determine whether constructs such as bricolage can be discerned in daily operations. This is necessary if we have to dispel views that constructs like bricolage reflect mere traits of entrepreneurship.

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