

Understanding the Challenges Facing Social Enterprise Sustainability

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Abstract

This article seeks to create a basic understanding of social enterprises, outlines how they operate, identifies some of its examples, determines various benefits that can be obtained from a social enterprise, identifies various skills required to run it, with an intention of identifying the possible challenges that can affect their operations and various managerial skills required to illustrate how social managers can optimize or make use of these factors to attain sustainability within a social enterprise. It later on develops a conceptual framework to indicate how these various factors that challenge the functioning of a social enterprise are interrelated and their effects on social enterprise sustainability.

Keywords: social enterprises, managerial skills, sustainability

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ความเข้าใจในปัญหาและอุปสรรคขององค์กรธุรกิจสังคมแบบยั่งยืน

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความฉบับนี้ เป็นความพยายามในการทำความเข้าใจเบื้องต้นเกี่ยวกับองค์กรธุรกิจสังคม โดยได้ บรรยายถึงการดำเนินกิจการ ระบุตัวอย่างกิจการ ประโยชน์ที่ได้รับจากองค์กรธุรกิจสังคม คุณสมบัติที่จำเป็น ในการดำเนินกิจการ ปัญหาและอุปสรรคในการดำเนินการ รวมทั้งทักษะในการบริหารที่ผู้บริหารกิจการ จะต้องมีเพื่อให้ในการบริหารเกิดความยั่งยืนในองค์กรธุรกิจสังคม บทความนี้พัฒนากรอบแนวคิดที่แสดงว่า ปัจจัยต่าง ๆ ที่ท้าทายการดำเนินกิจการขององค์กรธุรกิจสังคมนั้นมีความสัมพันธ์กันและมีผลกระทบต่อการ บริหารองค์กรธุรกิจสังคมอย่างยั่งยืน

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Introduction

Social enterprises are businesses that have been created to particularly have a social purpose. In this regard, they are thought of as having social objectives, trade or do business in markets that are competitive and finally use their profits to benefit the communities in which they are established (Boschee & McClurg, 2003; Salkie, 2005). They work across a variety of industries that include, but not limited to, social care, renewable energy sources, and solid waste recycling (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). Since this sector is diverse, it may include a number of cooperatives, associations of housing, credit unions, societal or community organizations or businesses, community development trusts, and similarly social firms (Roper & Cheney, 2005).

This article will seek to build a general understanding of what a social enterprise is, outline how they operate and name some of its examples, determine varied benefits that can be obtained from a social enterprise, identify various skills required to run it, with an intention of identifying the possible challenges that can affect their operations and make use of the various managerial skills identified illustrate how social managers can optimize or make use of these factors to attain sustainability within a social enterprise (Boschee & McClurg, 2003). It later on develops a conceptual framework to indicate how these various factors that challenge the functioning of a social enterprise are interrelated and their effects

on social enterprise sustainability (Roper & Cheney, 2005).

What is a social enterprise?

Social enterprises are businesses that are mainly guided or driven by goals that are social and environmental in nature (Roper & Cheney, 2005). Similar to all the other businesses that exist in the market today, social enterprises also compete favourably to ensure that goods and services are delivered (Haugh, 2005). The major difference is illustrated in the fact that all their activities are governed by their social objective and that all the gains or profits that they obtain from the market are reinvested towards attaining that social goal (Roper & Cheney, 2005).

Social enterprises are run under a variety of legal structures. Some of them will operate like incorporated companies and they might, or better yet, not take a charitable status. Contrarily, others may be established as industries and provident societies. However, there is a new legal form known as the Community Interest Company (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). This one operates under the framework of a bespoke, customized or specially made company established for social enterprises that have a built-in or an incorporated asset Examples of renowned lock. enterprises include The Jamie Oliver's restaurant, Big Issue, Divine chocolate, and Fifteen (Roper & Cheney, 2005).

Setting up social enterprises

If any businessman has the interest of setting up a business that can achieve something above the regular financial returns then the best model to invest in is the social enterprise (Roper & Cheney, 2005). Social enterprises have often played a leading role in making use of commercial business principles to encourage the ethical approach model of buying and selling goods and attain and services social environmental objectives. Despite the fact enterprises that social have been traditionally looked at in regard to delivering or offering services that are public oriented, many have successfully operated across a wide range of commercial segments. As such, they operate in commercial segments that include the renovation of furniture, the supply of water in bottles, production of chocolate and coffee, the hospitality segment, graphic design, consultancy firms, call centres, amongst many others.

Examples of social enterprises

Most social enterprises are established intention of addressing a specific environmental or social need, for instance in the provision of community transportation services for school-going children, the disabled and elderly persons, or may be plastic waste recycling services (Mair, Robinson & Hockerts, 2006). A very good example to illustrate the framework within which these corporations operate is the 'Women like Us' social enterprise. Its main purpose is to support women to take interest and consider being employed in

part-time terms, or flexible models of employment (Haugh, 2005).

Most of the social enterprises that already exist address several societal needs at the same time, such as the Eden Project that is established in Cornwall. Its sole purpose is to educate visitors on issues of global environment while at the same time regenerating and attracting tourism to this area (Haugh, 2005). Further, an individual in the society may have identified a market niche in the society for provision of local services or some sort of failure in the commercial segment, and establishing a commercial enterprise thereby addressing a widespread community (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006).

Consumers in the commercial sector are goods that are ethically-sourced and manufactured, while the reform of services in the public sector has led to a continuously growing aspiration for greater choice. An example is in the provision of health and social care in communities (Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). Central Surrey Health (CSH) is a social enterprise that provides services in the community for nursing and therapy in Surrey. It actually began as local primary care trust but currently exists an autonomous as organisation, co-owned by its employees (Haugh, 2005). It was established with the intent of offering the Surrey community with healthcare services within the bounds of primary care trust, but currently functions a separate nursing and therapy organization operating in conjunction with the NHS.



Benefits of a social enterprise

Social enterprises need to generate profits or funds for sustainability but also have social or environmental objectives that are equally important (Roper & Cheney, 2005). The necessity to manage this 'multiple bottom lines' approach geared towards achieving financial, social and environmental objectives might pose a variety of challenges that are unique to these businesses (Roper & Cheney, 2005). However, the capacity to bring forth a positive change in the lifestyle of people in certain communities can be very much satisfying and provide a means of sustaining these organisations, also to mean making a living.

One of the main benefits of running a social organisation can be in the provision of employment opportunities for individuals in local communities. This may comprise personalities that have in the past found it difficult to gain access into the labour market. As such, it is an ideal environment where such personalities can nurture and further develop their business potential skills, either as employees or operation managers. People who may or have the potential of benefiting from managing or being employed in social enterprises include those that have been unemployed for long, individuals searching for an opportunity to change careers, individuals with learning difficulties or disabilities, disable personalities, individuals mental and psychological health problems, ex-offenders of the law, marginalised ethnic groups, women in the society, and young people in schools who can be incorporated in pupil-run social enterprises (Brauer & Tatos, 2006).

Some individuals in the community may find it rather difficult to work or operate within the regulations or conditions that govern traditional working set ups. In this regard, societal enterprise business ideas or projects have been established to eliminate these employment barriers and provide a more flexible approach to managing or getting employment (Bull, 2012).

Skills required in running a social enterprise

Similar to any other business that exists, running a successful social enterprise demands that a manager or an employee have specific skills, therefore it is an absolute necessity the that social businesses employ personalities that portray pood business, promotional, financial and communication skills (Nkia, 2012; Burkett, 2010). This will give the business an edge over others since it will have a strong and broad-ranging base of personality skills. The typical skills that are needed in order to run a successful social enterprise include the following:

Leadership

An employee incorporated in a social enterprise is supposed to be confident and enthusiastic (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010). An additional indication of strength and pleasant behaviour can motivate and inspire other employees into working towards the objective of the organisation.

Teamwork

It is advisable that all individuals involved in the projects of the social enterprise work together as a team so that they achieve the shared dream or aim of the organisation (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010).

Finances and administration

A good manager or employee within a social enterprise ought to have the ability of keeping good records of finances, be guided by the budget in all expenditures (sticking to the budget plans and allocations) and monitor cash flow in order to keep the business operational (Mair, Robinson & Hockerts, 2006).

Communication

The ability of a manager (or an employee) to create, identify and develop new business ideas and opportunities depends so much on good communication skills. Since a social enterprise deals more with the community as earlier identified under its benefits, it is of utmost necessity that a culture of making clear and effective communications is adopted when dealing with people within or outside the social enterprise to ensure successful and smooth operation (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010).

Problem solving

Any key employee of the social enterprise is supposed to display outstanding prowess in identifying and

making use of flexible and innovative skills of approach to develop solutions to problems as prescribed in the social goals of the organization (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006).

Understanding

It is an absolute demand that each and every employee within a social enterprise displays magnificent awareness in regard to the social or environmental issues in the community (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). This is because solving social problems is the main objective as to why the organisation is established.

Business skills

Since there is a relative shift in the business operating within both social and commercial segments of the market, it is imperative that managers or employees gain and develop their business skills further by taking up short professional courses in business management, in addition to attending workshops and seminars that are meant to sharpen their skills (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010).

Social enterprises and the public sector

Similar to the opportunities that exist within the commercial sector, social enterprises are increasingly on the lookout for ways of diversifying their income streams, with some making decisions to operate exclusively or to a degree within the public segment (Di Domenico, Haugh & Tracey, 2010). Working hand in hand with



governments in different countries to deliver services to the public can lead to consistency of demand for the services of a social enterprise and consequently reward tremendously. However, it is within logical reasons to ensure that the entire income stream of the enterprise is not reliant on one source only for sustainability purposes.

Many social enterprises attraction towards the provision of services in the public sector because they see particular need to bring in or infuse their innovative approach skills to solving social problems unlike the traditional modalities of conducting business in this arena (Ostrom, 2007). As such, there exist wide ranging considerations of opportunities within the field of public service delivery, where social enterprises can work together with the government to solve public problems. These include, but not limited to, fostering and adoption of orphans, provision of transport services to the community, collection of household wastes recycling, provision of health and social care services and finally investing in sports and leisure activities and services.

Barriers that face social enterprises as they compete for public service contracts

Social enterprises are likely to face various issues when it comes to making attempts to compete with commercial enterprises or operators for contracts in public service segments (Burkett, 2010). These barriers may include, but not limited to, financial and structural barriers, in addition to lack of understanding of the social enterprise form among those

financing the projects and commissioners (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006).

Opportunities available in the public sector for social enterprises

Social enterprises can secure contracts within opportunities offered by local authorities such as, the provision of domestic care for disabled and elderly personalities within different communities (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). In addition, immigration advice or services is a possible opportunity that the social enterprise may secure. However, particular field has a lot of regulation and prospective social enterprise advisers have to demonstrate outstanding proof that they have the capacity to undertake this role, are professionally fit and are competent enough with regard to handling such responsibilities (Ostrom, 2007).

Sustainability in the context of a social enterprise: building sustainability in a social enterprise

The meaning of sustainable social enterprise

One of the results of recent central governments getting involved in funding social enterprises has been the reoccurrence of debates and discussions that are pointed towards the sustainability of social enterprises (Underwood 2012). One question that has been inevitably asked is, 'can social enterprises turn out to be successful after two or maybe three years (since this is how long they are supposed to be funded)' (Burkett, 2010)? Whenever a question such as what

does the term 'sustainable' mean within the context of social enterprises, then what immediately comes into the mind is that, "the social enterprise is no dependent upon funding from grants" (Underwood et al., 2012). It is quite interesting that the above mentioned discussions may argue on assumptions that social enterprises have the capacity or should be independent of funds from grants and that sustainability is only measured in regard to financial considerations (Burkett, 2010). Whether this is helpful appropriate, its fate lies with the open or further discussions that researchers in the business arena are yet to conclude (Underwood et al., 2012).

Sustainability in the context of social enterprises

Sustainability refers to the capacity an organisation to endure market pressure or forces over a given duration of time (Burkett, 2010). Within the definitive contexts of a social enterprise, imperative to note that the term 'sustainability' has two possible perceptions. One side of the argument is in relation to the fact that a social enterprise needs to have the capacity of surviving and enduring financially over a given duration of time (Young & Tilley, 2006). However, of important note is that talking about financial endurance without delving into making inquiries with regard to whether the social purpose of an enterprise can endure and whether it has the capacity to maintain

or even deepen its influence or impact over time is of little significance (Burkett, 2010).

In doing an analysis of a social enterprise, impact and financial stability of the organisation cannot be dealt with independently or in isolation (Austin, Stevenson & Wei-Skillern, 2006). Further, it is imperative to note that sustainability should be regarded as something that has the capacity to evolve, if and only if, a social enterprise can ascertain that it is viable. In other words, it is least expected for an enterprise to attain sustainability until it is demonstrated, beyond reasonable doubt, that it can realize both impact and operational outcomes over a given duration of time (Burkett, 2010). Finally, it important complex that а more understanding of financial sustainability is developed. There are three levels of financial sustainability that exist and they include operational sustainability, balance sustainability and financial sheet sustainability (Young & Tilley, 2006). Further, it is important to re-emphasize on the fact that financial sustainability cannot delinked from impact sustainability when it comes to developing an understanding of a social enterprise (Young & Tilley, 2006). As such, impact viability and impact sustainability should therefore begin and bring to an end any analysis of sustainability in a social enterprise. The table that is indicated below gives an outline of how viability and sustainability assessments in a social enterprise can be obtained (Burkett, 2010).



Table 1 Assessment of Viability and Sustainability of a Social Enterprise

Impact Viability. Ensuring best fit for impact.	 Is a social enterprise the best way to attain maximum impact in regard to the social purpose of the business? Can the employees demonstrate the viability of the social enterprise in achieving the perceived impact?
Operational Viability. Ensuring a viable business	 Is the business of the enterprise viable? Are the employees able to meet the operating costs of the business? Is the pricing of goods and services sufficient to cover all the business expense?
Operational Sustainability. Covering Costs/ Breaking Even.	 Can the business consistently cover the cost of its operations and all linked overheads and on-costs? Is the cash flow of the enterprise adequate, or does the business have adequate liquid funds? Has the business been able to protect and plan for its operational costs into the future and meet its financial obligations over time?
Financial Sustainability. Generating a surplus.	 Is the business generating profit or surplus? Is the surplus adequate to meet the ongoing growth and development needs of the business? Does the business have adequate plans and projections in place that will help the management to shape their financial future? Are the employees confident that the business is making proper use of its current resource most effectively and efficiently?
Balance Sheet Sustainability. Building Equity.	 Is the business building equity and savings over time? Is it possible to predict a financial storm or change in the predicaments of the business? Has the business built its asset base over time? How long would the savings of the business allow it to continue operating if a major source of income is lost?
Impact Sustainability. Maximising enduring impact.	 Is the business delivering the sort of social impact that it envisaged that it would? Is the business able to sustain and depend on this impact over time? Is the business finding ways to report and measure on their social impacts?

Currently. it may not be adequately acknowledged how much the two perspectives of sustainability co-exist in a social enterprise, the degree of tension that exists between these two perspectives and how much of a challenge it can be to draw a balance both over the life period of a social enterprise (Burkett, 2010). Of important note is the fact that, in order to possess the necessary qualities that is required to successfully achieve the sustainability that is mentioned above, employees and managers of these corporations must possess the qualities that were earlier mentioned (Underwood et al., 2012). As such. the various challenges necessary actions that need to be taken to overcome them in order to achieve sustainability are as discussed below (Young & Tilley, 2006).

Challenges facing social enterprise sustainability

Based on the above mentioned descriptions and literature reviews, it can be deduced that social enterprises have six defining characteristics. These include (Pearce, 2003; Salkie, 2005):

- 1. Having a social objective (purposes).
- 2. Attaining the social purpose by, at least partially, engaging in trade in the market environment.
- 3. Not distributing the accrued revenue or profits to individuals.

- 4. Holding wealth and general assets in trust for the benefit of a community.
- 5. Governing the organization by involving members of the community or its constituency via a democratic process (Tucker, 2010).
- 6. Being independent organisations that are accountable to a specific constituency and to the wider population of a community (Young & Tilley, 2006).

From the above mentioned characteristics, it is evident that these organisations are non-profit agencies that have made decisions to incorporate social purpose enterprises into their organizational structure (Laughland & Tima, 2011). As such, the management together with the board of directors need to understand that this responsibility will change both the staffing and culture of the organization (Douglas, n.d).

Non profit organisations that have made such changes, more often than not, report high staff and board turnover, community and funder concern, and enormous changes to the organization's internal systems (Young & Tilley, 2006). As such, challenges to the social enterprise occur in two main stages; at the beginning of the social enterprise and at the level of sustainability (Hynes, 2009). Since this paper is specific on challenges to the sustainability of the social enterprise, consideration will only be given to the difficulties faced after the establishment or inception of the organisation, or other



challenges faced at the operational stages of the organization as discussed below (Young & Tilley, 2006).

Sustainability in a social enterprise, since it is more of a social mission and not profit making, will depend on the commitment of employees or the organization and availability of funding or revenue for running the projects (Paton, 2003; Nkia, 2012). As such, its sustainability will be defined by factors that eliminate high employee turnover rates encourage continued stay at the environment with which the social enterprise operates, thus employee satisfaction is the main player (Bull, 2008). The challenges include:

Funding

Social enterprises have the alternatives of being run as profitable, non-profitable organization, sit somewhere mid way the two alternatives, and as a completely charitable organization (Haugh, 2005; Douglas, n.d). Some of them may be able to raise enough funds by selling goods and services that are socially beneficial, while some may not. They may similarly obtain funding from donations, corporate government funding, and investment (Young & Tilley, 2006; Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009). However, approaching investors for funding may not be easy if the enterprise is thought of being profitable than non profit, and has no possibility of making good returns to investors (Spear, Cornforth & Aiken, 2009). In addition, many donors distrust these organisations as plots to enrich managers by focusing so much on generating wealth

and not delivering services of social value (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009). The only way they can overcome this is via displaying the leadership skills and honesty to earn trust and proof via social impact (Haugh, 2005; Sung et al., 2003).

Communicating value in an objective manner

Since these enterprises are expected to deliver more than just the commercial value, and it is the additional social worth that many a time ignites the desire of the social manager (Paton, 2003). This if combined with the fact that social values cannot easily be measured, it may be pretty difficult to communicate the bottom line to the community at large, investors and donors (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009). The managers should therefore stay objective to remain convincing to the employees, donors, investors and the community of operation, and make the right decisions to steer the enterprise towards its social mission (Spear, Cornforth & Aiken, 2009).

Strategy and long-term focus

It is significant that any other business undertakes the responsibility of identifying a long-term plan, define proper goals, and steer development in a manner sustainable that is (Chell. 2007). Challenges for the social enterprises again arise from the actuality that the intention the organisation is to create communally social advantages. Many a time, it is the case that multiple social goals can mean various objectives, all of which must be assessed in terms of cost of delivery to guarantee true value creation (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009). A strong scheme will spot a unique value proposal and indicate in detail what the organization will not undertake (D'Asaro, Shankar, Zhang & Zhu, 2011). Activities of the social enterprise should work together as a team and support one another (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009).

Remaining true to the mission

By setting up a good scheme for the social enterprise, it is possible that chances of mission creep will be mitigated. More often than not, it is easier to fight conflicts and not give a clear focus to the long-term objectives of the organization, but this could consequently cause an unexpected shift in the social value that the company provides (Chell, 2007). A successful social enterprise will make it a point of reviewing its strategies and working to improve it (Darby & Jenkins, 2006). Of important note is that making continuous changes to the mission statement of a social enterprise can end up diluting the impact of that same organization (Spear, Cornforth & Aiken, 2009). In order to remain true to the mission, donors, investors, managers, employees and the community at large must have a passion to create an impact in the society and only stop when the objective is fully achieved (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009).

Conceptual framework for sustainability of a social enterprise

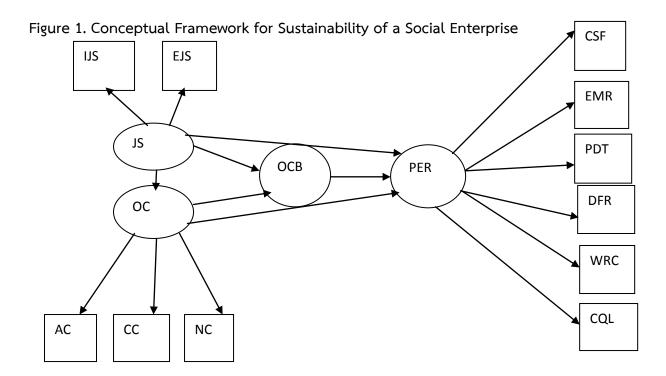
When a close consideration is given to the above mentioned challenges of a social enterprise, it is clear that the challenges all point out to one factor that determines the sustainability of these enterprises, and that is performance impact or other job satisfaction (Darby & Jenkins, 2006). Whether these enterprises are looked at in terms of availability of funds by donors, investors, or government grants, preparation of long terms strategies management or employees, commitment to the mission of the social enterprise, satisfaction on the side of the community that benefit from the services, communicating the outcomes or impact of the social enterprise project in obiective manner all amount to performance, thus job satisfaction (Darby & Jenkins, 2006).

It can therefore be deduced that job satisfaction or performance is the key factor that influences sustainability in a social enterprise. Other factors that affect job satisfaction such as intrinsic job satisfaction (governance, strategies and structure), extrinsic job satisfaction (the community, donors, investors and the government), organizational commitment (Planning and preparing long strategies) to the mission (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009), passion or affective commitment (desire to accomplish the social project), continuance commitment (endurance to the activities), normative commitment (carrying out normal programs of the firm), activities and organizational citizenship behaviour



(organizational culture and leadership styles), performance (profits), customer satisfaction (response from the community) (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009), employee morale (compensation and gains from the enterprise and skill development) (Lyon & Sepulveda, 2009), productivity (viability of the social mission), defective rate (Amount of products wasted, proper use of resources

and employee turnover rates), warranty claim (good customer relations), and cost of quality (correct pricing of products from the social enterprise to offset expenditures) are all it takes to ensure that a social enterprise succeeds in its projects (Darby & Jenkins, 2006; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). The linking among these factors can be represented below:



Key

JS=Job satisfaction

IJS=Intrinsic job satisfaction

EJS=Extrinsic job satisfaction

OC=Organizational commitment

AC=Affective commitment

CC=Continuance commitment

NC=Normative commitment

OCB=Organizational citizenship behaviour

PER=Performance

CSF=Customer satisfaction

EMR=Employee morale

PDT=Productivity

DFR=Defective rate

WRC= Warranty claim

CQL= Cost of quality

Conclusion

This essay was meant to explain in detail what a social enterprise is, define what it does, how it operates, outline the necessary skills for managing it, pin point key characteristics in them and finally identify challenges and factors that influence its operation with an aim of understanding how concepts of sustainability can be applied in its management. The findings indicate that the key factors that are used in measuring the sustainability level of a social enterprise are financial management and community impact of the social mission undertaken. Since the main objective of a social enterprise is to create a social change, a keen interest is given to performance or impact of the social enterprise projects.

The findings also indicate that the level of satisfaction or job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational culture or citizenship behaviour have the ability to mediate positive effect on performance levels. Organizational citizenship behaviour completely reconciles the link between job satisfaction and performance and between organizational commitment and performance. This indicates that

managers in social enterprises act as agents for change and represent role models and positive influences on their assistant employees. Managers should therefore give close and keen focus on OCB of employees and performance.

Further, adjusting the quality of job satisfaction will in turn increase the sense of organizational commitment of employees, organizational citizenship behaviour, and performance of the social enterprise. Growth and maintenance of a mature degree of job satisfaction and organizational commitment correlation will be advantage to not only the organizational managers and employees, but also the whole enterprise for achieving their social objective. Job satisfaction and commitment to missions of the organization therefore help the firms advance toward a better performance via citizenship (community) behaviour. Organizations aiming to improve their impact in the society and achieve their business objectives should therefore satisfaction, make iob organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviour their centre of attention for development purposes.

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