

# Social Innovations Tidbits

Caroline Ridgway 01 August 2010

Each quarter, this section of the *Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal* brings you a selection of recent news reports and other publications featuring topics and trends related to social innovation, disruptive innovation, and social entrepreneurship. These "tidbits" offer brief summaries of stories and articles from around the country and the world, and fall under themes such as social media, technology, leadership, "what works," evolving trends, philanthropy, and others. If you come across something you think is worth highlighting here, please send it to Caroline Ridgway at [caroline@philasocialinnovations.org](mailto:caroline@philasocialinnovations.org).

## Technology

### **Five-Digit Giving: How Texting Became Young Donors' Preferred Way to Make Charitable Donations**

(Tamara Straus, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2010,

[http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/five-digit\\_giving/](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/five-digit_giving/))

The January 2010 earthquake in Haiti was undoubtedly a social, economic, and public health disaster of epic

proportions, but gave rise to unprecedented philanthropy via a novel mechanism: text-based giving. Donations made by text message had surpassed \$8 million only 72 hours after the quake. Of the \$50 million donated to the Red Cross for relief efforts, \$32.5 million came by way of small (no more than \$10) donations made through text messages. Text giving is fast and easy to do, and enables impulse giving, a phenomenon that traditional means of donation cannot capitalize on as easily. Commenting on the sheer volume of donations received, and also on the relative percentage of donations from younger populations, Sue Watson, director of marketing and visibility at the American Red Cross, stated, "[It] showed us the untapped potential that exists when people are empowered to channel their compassion into action by pushing a few simple buttons on their mobile phones." There are cons to mobile giving, such as the often high costs associated, the potential to tap out giving in the early stages following a crisis, and the \$10 limit on donations made. But, after the success of the relief campaigns for Haiti, text-based giving will undoubtedly become more prevalent.

## **Social Media/Evolving Trends**

### **Working Wikily**

**(Diana Searce, Gabriel Kasper, and Heather McLeod Grant, *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer**

2010,

[http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/working\\_wikily/](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/working_wikily/))

An increasing number of organizations are moving beyond Facebook and Twitter, which tend to be more unidirectional means of sharing information, and are experimenting with direct public engagement—"working wikily." The hallmarks of this new style include "greater openness, transparency, decentralized decision making, and collective action." The authors of the article note five key benefits of working wikily: actively forging stronger community, individual, and group connections; enabling a broad array of perspectives to be shared, coined "crowdsourcing" because ideas and opinions are derived from a multitude of people rather than only a chosen few; facilitating better building and sharing of knowledge, including common institutional goals and best practices; motivating and coordinating mass-scale collective action; and simplifying the identification and coordination of both resources and opportunities to apply those resources. The nuances of working wikily are still being discovered and refined. In some cases, these methods might not actually prove any more efficient or effective than traditional decision-making hierarchies. Organization leaders are exploring hybrid approaches, whereby information is sought publicly but final authority may still rest with internal experts. Though the rules of engagement with working wikily are yet to be defined, we

can expect to see more substantial uptake of these tools.

## **It Took Bravery, Total Commitment, but Social Media Is Working for Wellpoint**

**(Kate Quinn, *Advertising Age*, June 21, 2010, [http://adage.com/columns/article?article\\_id=144564](http://adage.com/columns/article?article_id=144564))**

Health-related habits, good or bad, rub off on those around you. Wanting to take advantage of that tendency, and to encourage better uptake of health-promoting behaviors, Wellpoint's affiliated Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield health plans "embraced social media in a significant way over the past year." The preliminary result of the initiative, developed in conjunction with advertising agency Deutsch LA, was the "footprint calculator," which allowed consumers to input key points about their health and their behaviors in order to measure their projected positive health impact on others. Users could also post the findings to Facebook or Twitter and receive health tips. Wellpoint signed on Bob Harper from NBC's "The Biggest Loser" to help promote use of the service. The author, vice president of corporate marketing for Wellpoint, acknowledges that pulling together all of the pieces was a challenge, but observes that total commitment from the players helped bring the project to fruition.

## **Philanthropy**

# Funding Social Innovation: An Interview with Paul Tarini

(Nell Edgington, *Social Velocity*, July 6, 2010, <http://www.socialvelocity.net/2010/07/funding-social-innovation-an-interview-with-paul-tarini/>)

*Social Velocity's* interview series highlights Paul Tarini, head of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) Pioneer Portfolio, which seeks out innovative and nontraditional ideas to revolutionize the health care space. With funded projects including a natural resources economist working on antibiotic resistance and the potential for digital games to be used as therapeutic interventions such as cystic fibrosis breathing therapy, the Pioneer Portfolio is not afraid to step outside the comfort zone where many foundations tend to settle. In fact, the Pioneer Portfolio was largely to support entities "doing work that isn't merely an improvement, but . . . something unconventional, disruptive and future-facing [that] could produce breakthroughs in health and health care." Observing that the Portfolio is not limited to supporting nonprofit applicants, Tarini noted, "If we're convinced the work meets that standard, we can usually figure out how to fund it." When asked about the capacity of philanthropies to be risk-tolerant, Tarini surmised that many foundations may steer clear of riskier proposals because they have no inherent incentive to adopt risk.

## What Works

# ***Scaling New Heights: How to Spot Small Successes in the Public Sector and Make Them Big***

**(Geoff Mulgan and Jitinder Kohli, Center for American Progress and The Young Foundation, July 2010, [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/07/pdf/dww\\_scaling.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/07/pdf/dww_scaling.pdf))**

# ***Capital Ideas: How to Generate Innovation in the Public Sector***

**(Geoff Mulgan and Jitinder Kohli, Center for American Progress and The Young Foundation, July 2010, [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/07/pdf/dww\\_capitalideas.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/07/pdf/dww_capitalideas.pdf)).**

The U.S. social sector is bursting with talented people who have good ideas about how to make change in their communities. Unfortunately, those good ideas are rarely sufficiently supported in their development or execution, and there is minimal capacity to scale the resulting initiatives beyond the initial phase or size. These reports from the Center for American Progress and The Young Foundation apply lessons from the private commercial sector to illustrate how the social sector could better identify, grow, and maintain innovation that will benefit society. In *Capital Ideas*, the authors offer six recommendations for how the government can generate better ideas to begin with. Generally, these relate to

enabling workforce to think creatively about the challenges they face on the frontlines every day, supporting innovation from the top executive level on down, adequately funding new ideas, and validating new ideas as worthy of consideration. *Scaling New Heights* addresses how to get those new ideas up to scale to maximize the reach and benefit of new or modified programs. The authors contend that a more robust and dedicated funding stream should be allocated to innovation, and that funders, whether government or foundation, should lend ample philosophical support to new ideas, and shouldn't be afraid to collaborate with experts about how to tailor new initiatives to a specific community's or population's need.

## **Innovation's Holy Grail**

**(C. K. Prahalad and R. A. Mashelkar, *Harvard Business Review*, July/August 2010, 132-141)**

Innovation itself is in the process of being innovated. Historically, innovative initiatives were premised on assumptions of abundance and expanding margins. The global recession, however, has changed the nature of the game. According to the authors of this article, "Affordability and sustainability, not premium pricing and abundance, should drive innovation today." Today's innovators have to make do with much less—fewer resources, fewer staff, less external and internal support. The authors extol the value of "Gandhian innovation"

based on the core principles of affordability and sustainability, and recommend five elements of successful innovation: commit to system growth that includes even currently underserved, non-obvious consumers, including a commitment to affordable prices; be very clear about goals and maintain the human element in the plan; be ambitious in setting targets but firm in projected timelines for goal completion; don't force constraints that cannot be removed and allow the needs of your projected demographic of consumers to set the boundaries of cost, etc.; and always keep a focus on the benefit your customer will reap from the innovation.

## **Stop the Innovation Wars**

**(Vijay Govindarajan and Chris Trimble, *Harvard Business Review*, July/August 2010, 77-83)**

It is now common practice for companies to have an "innovation team," but their work is too often undercut by tension between the team and core operations, with each one considering the other either idealistic and undisciplined or bureaucratic and outdated. This tension leads to isolation of the innovation team to minimize infighting, but it also minimizes innovation. The authors suggest a number of mechanisms to enhance the functionality of both groups. For instance, core staff should not be asked to take on tasks that over-expand the bounds of their day-to-day duties. Ordinary operations should not be disrupted by adding new projects or

interfering with staff's capacity to juggle unrelated responsibilities. Also, when a company is considering adding a dedicated innovation team, company executives should not be afraid to hire from outside existing workforce. Current staff who are brought over to the innovation side may benefit from having their functions totally redesigned and being given new job titles, so there is no confusion about what they are expected to be doing. Leadership should take steps to proactively emphasize the value of innovation, but not to the extent that core operations appear to be devalued. Each team needs to be made to understand that, ultimately, the success of one supports and feeds the success of the other.