DISCUSSION NOTE

FOUNDING AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PLURAL PHILANTHROPY

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INTRODUCTION

I am tasked with establishing new academic Chair in African Philanthropy within the Wits Business School (WBS). Preparation by others for this initiative included orientation visits to comparable centres. One topic on the table was establishing a dedicated philanthropy Journal that would be based on the continent but with a global remit. Such a publication does not yet exist. Exploring the practicality of this idea was included in the proposal for setting up the Chair, a process which has moved slowly, mainly by talking with a number of individuals in this field. As yet, no business modelling of such an idea has been undertaken.

Rather, a recent conversation with board members of the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP) and other individuals has given an encouraging impetus for further exploration. It was agreed that a Discussion Note, which sets out the pros and cons of the idea with suggestions about next steps, would be helpful in stimulating wider consultation.

The ERNOP exchange clarified two points. One was a need to ensure that a Journal was not simply identified with a prevailing perception that (Anglo-American) philanthropy is about financial transfers associated with private funds for public benefit. The terrain of pro-social behaviour to be covered is much, much wider, hence inclusion of the word 'Plural' as part of a possible journal title.

A second consideration was the merits or otherwise of approaching a publisher not already active in the similar areas. A sense was that this arrangement is to be preferred. Editors of existing publications used as outlets for philanthropy-related articles would not be expected to embrace a reduction in submissions to them within the same publishing house that an additional field-specialist journal would bring.

This Discussion Note considers three dimensions of pursuing a journal idea. First, is the relationship between demand for publication space and the potential supply of articles. Then, obstacles to establishing a journal and ways to overcome them. Third, what next?

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DEMAND WILL OUTSTRIP SUPPLY

Observations support an assertion that the demand for academic and 'pracademic' publication outlets for philanthropy-related works will exceed current supply of suitable space.

Whether or not the Euro-American financial crisis for public financing has had a stimulating effect, across the world there is a visible growth in varieties and scales of philanthropy – venture, catalytic, strategic, mega to name but a few. These are generating more and more empirical material that is and can be researched and communicated in various ways to diverse audiences, including fellow academics and (evidence based) policy makers.

A similar story can be told for innovations in and diverse approaches to social investment. This sub-field is often allied to the pursuit of responsible and sustainable corporate models with 'shared value' a frequent strategic business framing.[2] While still modest, growth from a low base in corporate social investment and tendencies towards 'giving back' by High Net Worth Individuals (Trust Africa, 2014), are likely to increase demands for professionally skilled staff and investment in studies and (re)search for lessons about what makes this type of redistribution effective which will be communicated with different levels of confidence depending on the type of outlet.

As many nation states are more and more constrained in b ringing about social wellbeing, middle class growth of personal giving within developing countries and Diaspora flows to them are propelling a reallocation of financing for such goals from people themselves. Such civic initiatives are further pluralising an already highly varied philanthropy landscape, offering new areas of operational study and resources for doing so. These expansions are running in parallel with policy debates about ethics, unaccountable power and influence of philanthropists as well as demands for more professionalism and rigour in measurement.

There are at least three reasonable proxy indicators of the value of and demand for a Journal dedicated to philanthropy and all its expressions across the world. First, perhaps as an entrepreneurial response, the number of academic centres devoted to Philanthropy are increasing. Establishment of new centres dedicated to philanthropy at universities are to be seen in Scotland (St. Andrews), Switzerland (IMD Business School, Lausanne), India (Ashoka University) and South Africa (Wits Business School).[3] These are often finding academic homes in business schools or even migrating to them as is the case of the Gerhard Centre at The American University in Cairo. These institutional developments point to an inevitable upsurge in demand for an academic capacity directed at research and teaching in the field, that is becoming increasingly inter and multi-disciplinary. Such expansions will inevitably generate more publications seeking outlets that cannot be met by existing Journals (see below).

In addition, recent geographic (Wiepking and Handy, 2016) and conceptually oriented foundational volumes (Moody and Breeze, 2016) signal growth in writing and interest in this area of pro-social behaviour that commercial publishers see as economically attractive.

[2] http://www.sharedvalue.org/about-shared-value
[3] *Alliance Magazine*, 2016, Vol. 21, No. 4, p. 6.

Moreover, the range of topics and writings seen in *Alliance Magazine* – the trade publication for philanthropy and social investment - demonstrate the multi-disciplinary nature, global growth and geographic variation in research areas, perspectives, experiences and practices.

Thirdly, Submission of papers at international conferences of learned professional associations such as the International Society of Third Sector Research (ISTR) and the Association for Research in Nonprofit Organisations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) show an increasing number with types of philanthropy as topics. Existing journals – *Voluntas*, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* (NML), *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (NVSQ) - are said to be turning away greater numbers of articles due to lack of space.

In sum, there are multiple signs of a growth in demand for a high quality, scholarly publication outlet that sets academic standards for, as well as profiling the plurality of, philanthropy to be found across the world. But there are also potential obstacles to a new Journal on the block.

Obstacles

Discussions with people familiar with editing and publishing academic journals put forward three common concerns, albeit with one or two dissenting voices.

A much expressed concern is that a new Journal will not attract articles because, at the start, it will not enjoy a high Index score that drives a lot of academic submissions. A counter argument to this worry is that, unless existing Journals increase their editions per year or number of pages, the probability of being published will decrease as submissions increase.

A counter view expressed by the editor of the new *Word Development Perspectives,* Dr. Ashwini Chhatre, is that academics want to publish come what may, so a dedicated Journal for their work may be attractive anyway as it gains status and recognition on route to high impact indexing. Better to publish in a new dedicated Journal than not at all. A possible amelioration of a concern about inadequate submission is by starting with a high profile Editorial Advisory Board in the sense of respected figures in the field of philanthropy, generosity, gifting, altruism, social investment and so on who testify to the editorial quality and a validation of the integrity of the initiative.

A second concern is around costs and level of effort required to run a Journal in terms of time demand on Editors and an Editorial Advisory Board. I have not yet been able to investigate this issue but do notice a growing number of requests to submit articles to peer reviewed e-Journals or to become a reviewer of Journals with which I am not familiar. This suggests that costs are not prohibitive, especially if a decision is made not to produce paper copies.

A third potential obstacle is to initiate a Journal without an association with a scholarly body and network which brings both legitimacy from a founding constituency and outreach to potential authors. The current landscape of relevant Journals does not show a one to one correlation between a scholarly body and a Journal. Hence it is difficult to assess the degree to which such a link is a requirement rather than simply desirable. Seeking opinions on this connection would be one component of next steps.

Next Steps

Given the current situation and uncertainties about this sort of academic enterprise it seems sensible to move sequentially on three fronts: testing the idea with peers; investigating the business case; and approaching potential publishers.

Testing the idea. Use the ERNOP and other scholarly networks as well as personal approaches to test the waters for interest in and support for a Journal dedicated to plural philanthropy. This may require a short motivation piece setting out the rational.

Identifying publication models, investments and costs. Effort needs to be put into investigating the business case and model(s) for a publication that will become the lead Journal in its field. I am unsure how to go about this.

A potential publisher. Following conversations, it seems as if networks and personal relations may be the best way to identify publishers not already involved with Journals that are current outlets for philanthropy-related topics. I can check with Wits to see if this is a possible option, but a global endeavour is more likely to be attractive to a Euro-American publishing firm seeking a new strategic positioning. A similar case could be made for identifying potential financing sources until a sustainable funding situation is arrived at.

References

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