

Collaborative Entrepreneurship

How Social Entrepreneurs Have Learned
to Tip the World by Working in Global Teams

by Bill Drayton



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Cover Images

Top left: Ashoka India Fellow Ashok Bharti is founding community-based cooperatives as an alternative distribution mechanism for electricity to reach India's slum dwellers. Using a participatory approach to services management systems, his model is profitable for both the private sector and consumers. Ashok's mutually beneficial model is a template for bringing expanded infrastructure and civic services to poor people -- and prompting the government to become more responsive, accountable, and participatory in its provision of social services. Photograph courtesy of Tribhuvan Tiwari/Outlook.

Top right: Ashoka U.S. Youth Venturer Charlotte was 12 years old when her family started volunteering at a local assisted-living facility. While there, Charlotte learned that many of the elderly residents felt disconnected from their families. Charlotte realized that the internet provided an ideal medium for the elderly to communicate with their loved ones, greatly improving their quality of life. Charlotte decided to start a program to facilitate electronic communication between seniors and their families. Through Charlotte's program, SeniorConnect, teenage volunteers visit assisted-living facilities with laptop computers and help residents set up email accounts. The volunteers help residents compose, send, and receive emails -- while a bond forms between the young and old.

Bottom left: Several Ashoka Brazil Youth Venturers launched Malabares Arte Circense (Juggling Circus Art) to engage the low-income youth population (ages 11 to 14) of São Paulo. Circus is a fun, positive medium that promotes cooperation, relaxation, and intense physical training -- all of which are critical in adolescent development. The students of the Malabares juggling and circus workshops not only develop physical skills and coordination, but also gain self-confidence and an outlet for creativity and concentration. In its first three months of operation, Malabares offered over 40 workshops. The response has been overwhelmingly successful. Monique, Tamires, and Ana hope that soon they will be able to reach out to youth all across Brazil.

Bottom right: In India there is a need for 24.7 million homes for the urban poor. Developers cannot serve people without pay stubs -- even if they have reliable income from, for example, selling vegetables every day. The citizen sector understands such people but is hopeless in real estate development. The two sectors have never talked. An Ashoka collaborative entrepreneurship team devoted to tearing down the walls between sectors has shown that, by getting the developers to build in partnership with citizen groups who handle selling and administration, everyone profits and the needed homes are built. This picture shows a staff colleague of Ashoka India Fellow Rajendra Joshi selling new units to some of these hardworking families. In 18 months, 10,000 units (\$120 million privately financed) have closed, opening a \$240 billion opportunity in India alone.

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How Social Entrepreneurs Have Learned to Tip the World by Working in Global Teams

The world, for 10,000 years, has been run by just a few people. This pattern is so archetypal that it is very hard for people to imagine anything different.

However, this pattern is dying. It does not work. As the rate of change accelerates, and as change comes from ever more sources, the model of a few people sitting on top of everyone else doing repetitive tasks simply cannot cope. Nonetheless, it is still pervasive, still dominant -- in how we are organized and in how we think.

The new model is already here. It is a world where everyone is a changemaker, not just a tiny elite.¹ You can see its principles at work in the world's most successful organizations and regions -- be it the Jesuits or Silicon Valley.

This new world will be a global team of teams, teams that come together in varying combinations, scales, and intensities as the need requires. The faster things change, the more the world will need this giant, fast-moving kaleidoscope of teams. A team is a team only when all its members are players; and in a world defined by escalating change, they can only be players if they can contribute to change.

Social entrepreneurs are essential in this “everyone a changemaker™” world. They conceive and engineer the basic new patterns. They are highly contagious role models encouraging many, many others to care and to organize. They are also mass recruiters of local changemakers -- that is overwhelmingly how they spread their ideas. In their turn, these local changemakers are role models and

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recruiters for yet more local changemakers, and a few of them will become the next generation of great entrepreneurs.

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Most important, social entrepreneurs are essential if this rapidly emerging world where all the basic systems are ever in flux is not to spin off in one ill direction or another. Right now, for example, privacy is under sustained attack because preventative surveillance

is more and more needed, the cost of connecting the dots has all but vanished, and many communications business entrepreneurs profit by accessing client information and selling it to others for a profit. Who has the interest and focused power to spot and get the overall system back on track?

It is the social entrepreneurs. The entrepreneur's job is to change the big systems. And what defines the social entrepreneur is that, to the core of their being, they are committed to serving the good of all.

This is, however, not a role solo entrepreneurs are well placed to serve. What is needed is a team of the world's best social entrepreneurs entrepreneuring together in an issue area that has become ripe.

That is the most powerful engine available to keep the world's systems moving in the right direction.

And such collaborative entrepreneurship is precisely what Ashoka has been working for over a decade to design and develop. A dozen such collaborations are now advancing rapidly.

How does it work?

First, the launch only comes when across the globe several hundred leading social entrepreneurs have committed their lives to causing big change in an issue area. When these top entrepreneurs (and over half the Ashoka Fellows have changed national policy within five years of their launch) move, we have the most persuasive possible open source indication that an issue area is ripe.

We then look closely at all these entrepreneurs' proven ideas, assembling the pieces together into a mosaic that allows us to see the overall picture and the most important, i.e., the most future-defining, new cross-cutting patterns.

The hardest step comes next -- identifying the new paradigm that will define the field in the future. Understanding the questions the patterns seek to answer usually provides very useful clues.

Once we know where the field must go, we must identify the one or two things that must happen if the world is to make this leap.

And then we must make them in fact happen.

Which is when the full entrepreneurial force of the hundreds of top entrepreneurs collaborating together comes into full play. If we can together make those few critical things happen in seven to ten key places on the planet, we can tip the world. (They are: (1) the core five -- China, Indonesia, India, Brazil, and the U.S., plus (2) German-speaking Europe, Japan, the Arab world, the Spanish speakers, and the French speakers.) This is a new, unprecedented force in the world.

Ashoka now has a dozen of these collaborative entrepreneurship thrusts in varying stages, including three in the final tipping stages.

For example, the 700 (of 3,000) Ashoka Fellows focused on children and young people have enabled us through this

collaborative entrepreneurship process to recognize that a world defined by change requires people to have different skills than before -- and that this means the paradigm that defines what success in growing up is must change.

Success used to be mastering knowledge and the rules (remember your report card?). This worked reasonably well in a static society. However, it no longer is enough. For example, the faster things change, less and less of a person's life can be guided by the rules: They have not been developed or are in conflict and/or are changing. Whoever has not mastered the complex, learned skill of empathy will hurt others and disrupt groups -- and will be marginalized -- i.e., thrown out -- regardless of the computer science or other knowledge they have.

The new paradigm focuses on the social skills a person must have to be able to contribute in an "everyone a changemaker™" world: (1) every child must master empathy and (2) every teen must be a changemaker (practice is the only way to mastery here) using all four of the core skills -- empathy/teamwork/leadership/changemaking. If a fifteen-year-old is not practicing changemaking now (e.g., by creating a tutoring service or a virtual radio station with friends), she will be at major risk when she is thirty since these skills will be all but required.

Ashoka has collaborative entrepreneurship efforts underway for both children and young people. The "Every Child Must

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Master Empathy” team, for example, is setting out to tip the ten key areas of the world using the jujitsu of two easily accessible

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levers. First, the team seeks to get a representative five percent of the influential schools to adopt the new paradigm. (That’s 50 to 60 of the 90,000 schools in the U.S., for example). Second, it seeks to

help thirty “maven” intellectual intermediaries, especially writers and publishers, to grasp the new strategic “everyone a changemaker[™]” environment and what it requires, and then the consequent new paradigm of what success in growing up now must be. These two elements, of course, feed one another strongly. Educators who love leading and have experienced what happens when all their children master empathy at a high level, and who own their approach to doing so, will want to spread their new model and will quickly be off to see the most influential writers they know. Since such stories and enthusiasm are, of course, exactly what the writers need, there soon will be a rapidly expanding contagion of educator advocate/writer and writer/writer and schools’ competing interactions.

Ashoka will not commit to a collaborative entrepreneurship effort unless it sees such jujitsu leverage. No entrepreneur, not even a global team of entrepreneurs, can tip the world through his or her own force.

Even more important is the heart of collaborative entrepreneurship -- active, entrepreneuring leadership by a global team of teams (one for each priority area, for example the U.S.) of many of the top social entrepreneurs in the field. They know which schools are the most influential and who to talk to and who not to approach. They know and are respected by the key intellectual intermediaries and influencers. They have created and are ever refining the tools that work. They attract the necessary resources, they do much of the work, and they create the new solutions at each step of what has to be a journey of iterative adaptation and creativity.

The leaders of each of the component teams bring complementary innovations and skills. The North American “Every Child Must Master Empathy” team has among its leaders, for example:

- Mary Gordon (Toronto, Ontario) enables all children to grasp empathy by bringing an infant (“the professor”) and a parent to class.

- Jill Violet (San Francisco) is bringing back recess, largely through group play which, of course, is one of the best ways for children to practice empathy.
- Eric Dawson (Boston) is making the classroom also a place where children practice empathy all the time.
- Molly Barker (Charlotte) helps girls in fifth through eighth grades, when many lose confidence, regain it (and avoid the “mean girl” syndrome).

Another and quite different area of collaborative entrepreneurship collapses the heretofore not only separate but not communicating business and social production and distribution systems that historically have served almost every need, be it irrigation or housing, into one. Doing so ends many major market failures and dramatically profits business, the citizen sector, and the ultimate clients.

For example, in a year and a half, another global collaborative entrepreneurship team has been able to generate \$120 million in private financing and has 10,000 new homes either built or under construction for urban informal sector workers in India. The business builders and finance firms could not build for a vegetable seller’s family because they have neither paperwork (e.g., pay records) nor cross-class comfort. The citizen sector knows these informal sector workers, has low cost, and has trust -- but is hopeless as a real estate developer or builder. If the citizen sector does the marketing, selecting, and servicing functions and leaves construction to business, the new hybrid system solves the previous failure of either party to deliver. India still has 24.7 million missing units; but this new model, now that it has been demonstrated and is clearly so very profitable for everyone, is spreading explosively.²

Collaborative entrepreneurship is, we believe, well on the way to becoming the core way our field truly changes the world. Ashoka is developing the model and the initial framework. Once the pattern is established, more and more teams will spring up and probably connect through networks such as Changemakers.com.

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1. See Bill Drayton (2006), “Everyone a Changemaker: Social Entrepreneurship’s Ultimate Goal,” *Innovations* 1:1 (Winter): pp. 80-96.
 2. For a full description see “A New Alliance for Global Change” in the September 2010 *Harvard Business Review*.

Meet the Founding U.S. Empathy Team

It is critical for the U.S. that *every* child in this generation master the complex, learned skill of empathy. The rate of change still continues to escalate exponentially. That means that the level of empathetic skill required is increasing every year -- and by a larger amount than the year before.

Every child must grasp how to observe themselves understanding everyone around them, layers out, increasingly far into the future, in and as groups -- and then guide what they do and say, so that they do as much good and as little harm as possible. This is not easy and requires a lot of practice.

In many ways this is like language and literacy. All healthy children deeply, genetically want to be an effective, contributory part of society. They work for decades on language, and they will do the same for the critical social skills now needed every bit as urgently -- as long as society provides the necessary conditions and support.

For most children, we are not doing so. How many elementary school principals do you know who know they are failing if they have one second grader who has not grasped empathy -- or if all their students are not steadily practicing empathy? Why would they? They are graded on the degree to which their students absorb information and are ruled.

The result, even now, is appalling. Anyone without this skill will hurt people and disrupt groups -- and be thrown out. Without it, moreover, it is impossible to go on to master teamwork, leadership, and changemaking, the other three essential skills everyone must have to succeed in a world defined by change.

For the U.S. to succeed in ten to fifteen years it must have an “everyone a changemaker™” population. If Poland and India have a higher percentage of changemakers, the U.S. will have lost the critical basis of next stage competition. The same is true for all countries and communities.

“Every Child Must Master Empathy” is critical for the U.S. And that the U.S. succeed is a giant step towards tipping the world.

Ashoka can play a major role. Critical to its doing so is a leadership team from within Ashoka’s community of leading social entrepreneur Fellows. That team in turn is critical in catalyzing and helping the 50 to 60 teams in diverse schools that like to lead. We will challenge these teams to use all the tools developed by Ashoka Fellows (700 of the 3,000 focus on children and young people) and others to craft an approach that ensures that all their children become empathy masters. Once *they* succeed, they will want to lead the field

(and attract students and resources). The Fellows' leadership is also critical for the other key class of actors, the "maven" publishers, writers, and other key thought leaders. As these schools and mavens connect, they will change everyone's framework of what is important.

Here are sketches of the founding U.S. Empathy Team members:



Mary Gordon and her organization, Roots of Empathy, are transforming classrooms and schools across the world. An infant less than one year old ("the professor") comes to class. As the students grasp what "the professor" is saying -- and then feeling -- they are mastering empathy. Throughout Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and the United States, more than 325,000 students have taken part. They increasingly recognize and respond to others' emotions. The results are powerful. Roots of Empathy reduces childhood aggression. Bullying rates drop sharply and stay down.



Jill VIALET and her organization, Playworks, are cultivating empathy through group play while improving the health and well-being of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and meaningful play in schools. Research shows that play is not only important for giving students a release that enhances the rest of the school day, but is also essential for tipping school climates, one student at a time. By fostering cooperation, conflict resolution, teamwork, and leadership, Playworks coaches lay the foundation for mastering empathy. The result is an increase in learning in the classroom and continued improvement of student well-being.



Eric Dawson and his organization, Peace First, are teaching empathy through a lens at the heart of why this new paradigm of growing up is so important: peace and violence. Rather than policing endemic violence in schools, Peace First uses cooperative games and community service to empower elementary school students to become peacemakers. Peace First has taught over 40,000 students and fostered 2,500 peacemaker projects. It has led to a 60 percent reduction in school violence and 70-80 percent increase in instances of

children breaking up fights. Peace First works to tip entire school cultures toward climates of empathy.



Molly Barker and her organization, Girls on the Run, support girls ages 8 to 13 in practicing and applying empathy in pursuit of a life of self-respect and healthy living. By increasing personal and social awareness in young women, Girls on the Run cultivates key “active ingredients” of empathy: self-awareness and self-efficacy. Participants realize their own capacity to cause feelings, both positive and negative, in others. They come to see through an empathic lens that forgives, understands, and searches for solutions faster than it rushes to snap judgment. This experiential-learning program has cultivated empathy in hundreds of thousands of young women.



Darell Hammond and his organization, KaBOOM!, are working to save play for children by bringing communities together to create playspaces within walking distance of every child in the U.S. Children in the neighborhood lead in the design of the playground, and everyone helps build it. This model fosters empathy on many levels. When generations and neighborhoods join together to create playspaces, they must also exercise their empathetic muscle in order to work together effectively as a team. When KaBOOM!’s work is done -- and a playspace has been built -- children have a new outlet for unstructured play, which has been shown to cultivate not only healthy bodies and creative minds, but also empathy -- the most critical playground, and life, skill.



ASHOKA INNOVATORS FOR THE PUBLIC

Ashoka: Innovators for the Public is the global association of the world's leading social entrepreneurs -- men and women with system-changing solutions that address the world's most urgent social challenges. Since its founding in 1980, Ashoka has launched and provided key long-term support to 3,000 leading social entrepreneurs in over 70 countries. It provides these "Ashoka Fellows" start-up stipends, professional services, and a powerful global network of top social and business entrepreneurs. It also helps them spread their innovations globally.

Ashoka's modest investments consistently yield extraordinary returns in every area of human need -- from human rights to the environment, from economic development to youth empowerment. Within five years of election, 76% of Ashoka Fellows have changed the pattern in their field nationally and over half have changed national policy.

By weaving these leading social entrepreneurs together into a community of mutual help and easy collaboration, Ashoka multiplies their impact. It also designs new ways for the citizen sector to become more entrepreneurial, productive, and globally organized.

Once there are hundreds of Fellows across the globe in a field, major change is coming. By joining together in collaborative entrepreneurship, a giant step beyond solo practitioner entrepreneurship, the Ashoka community and its allies, organized as a global team of teams, can spot where society must go and ensure that it gets there quickly and intelligently. "Every Child Must Master Empathy" and Ashoka's Youth Venture (for those 12-20 years old) are two examples discussed in this report.

2011 marks Ashoka's 30th year of pioneering the field of social entrepreneurship worldwide. Celebrate with us! Visit www.ashoka.org.

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Over the years, [Ashoka] became the venture capital behind many great social entrepreneurs all over the world. Today, to be chosen as an Ashoka Fellow is a badge of honour for outstanding individuals who love the entrepreneurial spirit and social change that has a deep impact. It is also a great example of global co-operation for solving societal problems.

June 8, 2011



Ashoka is a great global organization, built on a brilliant idea. It picks up social innovators when they themselves don't know what great changes they can bring. That's the stage when budding innovators need the support most. Ashoka helps pool local innovations into global solutions.

— Muhammad Yunus

Founder of the **GRAMEEN BANK**, Bangladesh
2006 Nobel Peace Prize Winner



Ashoka is helping the world see that it is not enough to give children information; they must also master the human skills without which they won't be able to contribute in our fast-changing world.

— Wendy Kopp, Ashoka USA Senior Fellow

CEO & Founder of **TEACHFORAMERICA**



Ashoka Fellows have built a long and storied history as pioneering change agents -- men and women who are transforming their communities, their regions, and one day the world. They will always deserve our gratitude.

— David Gergen

Director of Harvard Center on Public Leadership
Editor-at-large for **USNews**



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