IF YOU BUILD IT, WILL THEY STAY?
MISSION STABILITY IN NASCENT SOCIAL VENTURES

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ABSTRACT

We examine how and why missions emerge during social venture organizing processes. Through a real time longitudinal grounded theory study of seven nascent ventures, we discovered that prosocial motivations take distinctly different forms and that differences between how empathetic versus sympathetic founders conceive of those needing help drives differences in processes leading to mission emergence. We discover and theorize forms of passion that expand prior conceptualizations of entrepreneurial passion. Our findings provide a theoretical footing for research on the creation of social ventures while our model ties the creation of such ventures to mainstream approaches in entrepreneurship and organization theory.

INTRODUCTION

Social ventures result from entrepreneurial organizing processes in which a social mission plays a central role (Dees, 1998; Dacin et al., 2011). Prosocially motivated individuals come together around a perceived social need and create an organization intended to engage in efforts to meet the need (Dees, 1998; Zahra et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2012). Prior research has identified important challenges growing social ventures may face maintaining consensus on the mission and members’ engagement with it (Hwang & Powell, 2009). In particular, the need to attract and satisfy the demands of new stakeholders may create perceptions that a venture’s mission is drifting away from an unalloyed focus on the target beneficiary community (TBC) and thereby generate mission conflict and alienation of early organizers (Kelley et al., 2005). We have little empirical knowledge and less theory, however, to guide research about how the social missions emerge during the initial process of organizing a social venture. Compared to the broader entrepreneurship literature, which has generated a large body of research on venture emergence during the last twenty years (Gartner, 2004), work in social entrepreneurship has focused much less on examining the process through which new social ventures are constructed. As a result, we know little about how prosocial motivations affect the emergence of social missions or the organizing processes through which social ventures are created. These questions are important because social entrepreneurship appears to be an increasingly common tool for addressing social issues in the contemporary world and our theories of entrepreneurship need to be able to account for it.

Our grounded study of mission emergence in seven social ventures allowed us to observe patterns of behavior shaped by prosocial motivation (“PSM”) that strongly affected mission emergence. Our primary discovery is based on the observation that what began as seemingly minor variations in the dominant form of the pro-social motivation that organizers held toward the intended beneficiaries of the venture played a key role in shaping whether mission consensus and
member engagement were achieved. We define and distinguish between two PSMs, “sympathy” and “empathy,” map three different configurations of PSM onto three patterns of mission emergence and induct a grounded model that explains the process through which variations in PSM shapes mission emergence. Our model also explains the emergence process for several other key organizational features, including goals, boundaries and roles and authority structures (Hannan & Freeman, 1984; Aldrich, 1999).

Our work makes three primary contributions. First, we contribute toward better theoretical understanding of the processes used by social ventures in constructing a social mission during venture organizing. Second, we show that seemingly small distinctions between forms of prosocial motivation can play a surprising role in shaping social mission emergence. This argues for the value of more carefully delineating dimensions and types of prosocial motivation in studies of social entrepreneurship and more broadly in the important body of organizational research that has emerged rapidly around prosocial motivation (Grant, 2008). Finally, we contribute to the body of work on entrepreneurial passion in two specific ways. While this literature has focused on individual passion, our model describes the endogenous generation of shared passion that may have important consequences for founder behavior. In addition, while the prior literature on entrepreneurial passion has focused on individuals’ passion for particular roles in the entrepreneurial process and tied this passion to individual identity, in these social ventures we instead observe passion not for role but for an outcome defined by an emergent social venture mission (Dees, 1998; Cardon, 2014).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Research on social entrepreneurship has long suggested that a venture’s social mission plays a central role in expressing its goals, attracting resources and shaping its activities (Dees, 1998; Moss et al., 2010). Recent discussions often make the mission core to the very definition of social entrepreneurship (Zahra et al., 2009; Dacin, et al., 2011). Prabhu (1999:140) defined social ventures as “entrepreneurial organizations or ventures whose primary mission is the social change and development of their client group.” Dees (1998) identified the creation of social ventures as a specific form of entrepreneurship distinguished by a social mission. Similarly, work on not-for-profit ventures, which makes up a substantial portion of the social entrepreneurship literature (Peredo & McLean, 2006) emphasizes the centrality of venture mission (Powell & Steinberg, 2006). Minkoff and Powell (2006: 591) suggest that “In a simple, elemental fashion, a mission is a clarion call for nonprofit organizations. The goals or agendas attached to a mission serve to rally, engage, and enroll workers, volunteers and donors. They also serve as guidelines for how to go about the business of contributing to the public good, arguably the primary principle that motivates the nonprofit enterprise.” Tuckman and Chang (2006:632) put it more succinctly, offering the characterization that “Mission is the soul of nonprofit organizations.” A compelling social mission can be useful in attracting founding and later members who may work harder, at lower or no wages and even more creatively because of attraction to the mission (Brown & Slivinski, 2006). Summarizing their careful examination of the literature, Dacin and colleagues (2011:1206) provide a positive evaluation of this orientation, asserting, “we believe that a mission-focused definition of social entrepreneurship provides the field with the potential to offer something unique to organization science.” Oddly, however, prior social entrepreneurship research has seldom treated the initial emergence of a mission around which founders can rally their organizing efforts as much of a challenge or achievement.
Prosocial motivation has been broadly defined in a variety of largely consistent ways, for example, as addressing “the question of why we humans do what we do for others” (Batson et al., 2008:135) and as “the desire to benefit other people” (Grant, 2008:48). Prior research has argued that PSMs are likely to be important to the creation of social ventures. Zahra and colleagues (2009) theorized that prosocial motivation in the form of empathy is an important driver of what they described as the rapid internationalization of social ventures. Miller and colleagues (2012:620) argued that the motivational antecedents of social entrepreneurship, including the mechanisms through which PSM may shape the creation of social ventures, have been “undertheorized.” Consistent with the broadness of its definition, PSM may arise from many different sources (Batson, 1998). Such motivations, which are typically construed to include both cognitive and emotional elements (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987) have been variously labelled, “empathy,” (Batson et al., 2008), “sympathy,” (Irwin et al., 2008), and “compassion” (Atkins & Parker, 2012). Unfortunately, despite their incorporation in many careful studies, scholars’ use of these terms has been highly inconsistent and even contradictory. Although contradictory usage continues, contemporary researchers are generally careful to choose a construct label and define it explicitly in the context of their study. We adopt this approach.

It is important for our study to contrast one central distinction among “other-oriented” responses. We focus on how other-oriented responses distinguish the “other” toward whom the response is aimed. We thus define empathy as prosocial motivation toward concrete individuals who are seen as part of a more abstract category, and sympathy as prosocial motivation toward a concrete category containing individuals considered in the abstract. In plain terms, “You feel empathy when you’ve ‘been there’ and sympathy when you haven’t” (dictionary.com). In the context of our study of social ventures, empathy occurs when a founder’s prosocial motivation is directed toward particular individuals who are part of the TBC, with a more abstract sense of the “community” as the collection of such individuals, whereas sympathy occurs when a founder’s PSM is directed toward the community, with the anonymous beneficiaries considered more in the abstract than as concrete individuals. Trying to avoid some of the prior confusion, we treat both empathy and sympathy as forms of prosocial motivation that may or may not elicit behavioral responses or attempts to help the “other.” Like much of the prior literature, we view empathy and sympathy as integrating both emotional and cognitive elements (Parker & Axtell, 2001).

Though there has been little related empirical research to date, recent theory in entrepreneurship (Cardon et al., 2009) has begun to examine longstanding claims that passion, defined as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (Vallerand et al., 2003: 756) is important to understanding the behavior of some entrepreneurs (Chen et al., 2009). Research has focused narrowly on the passion that arises from engagement in particular activities – including tasks such as opportunity discovery, or founding or growth (Cardon et al., 2009) – that are closely tied to valued role identities (Murnieks, 2007). This work has provided important insights, including potential explanations for why there is sometimes an apparent division of labor between individuals who like to find new opportunities but don’t like to pursue them, and between those who like to found new organizations but can lack the passion to nurture or grow them (Cardon et al., 2009).

There are reasons to believe, however, that the role of passion in new ventures may be much broader. Individuals are often observed to be passionate about their engagement in a broad range of voluntary activities such as hobbies and social causes (Vallerand et al., 2003; Cardon, 2014). In addition, scholars have occasionally suggested that passion is not only an individual phenomenon,
but that it can be shared or collective (Ezzat & Maly, 2012) or even “contagious” from founder to employees (Cardon, 2008; Drnovsek et al., 2009). Together, these arguments suggest that the processes through which multiple prosocially-motivated founders come together on a voluntary basis to organize a mission-centric social venture will provide a useful context for exploring broader dimensions of entrepreneurial passion than those described in the prior literature.

**DATA AND METHODS**

In this paper we seek to understand how and why missions emerge in nascent social ventures. Because of limited prior explanations about this question a grounded theory methodology was appropriate for exploring patterns of behavior in order to derive novel elements of theory from the data and for answering the how and why questions posed by our research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We conducted cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009) of seven cases with data gathered through the real-time longitudinal study beginning with initial organizing discussions for each venture.

We collected primary and secondary data from multiple sources (Yin, 2009) over a period of two years and in four primary ways: a) direct (non-participant) observation of conversations, meetings and events; b) participant observation with each of the three core cases; c) interviews with the founders and other participants in the organizing process; and d) gathering of various documents, brochures, contracts, social media postings, websites, newspaper and magazine articles and legal documents. Participant and non-participant observation (by each author and several trained research assistants) totaled approximately 722 hours. In addition to 519 informal conversations and email exchanges, we conducted more formal interviews, ranging in length from 22 to 119 minutes that were recorded and transcribed into approximately 440 single-spaced pages.

We followed established procedures for building grounded theory through inductive research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994). We wrote and continued to update individual case reports and conducted cross-case analyses to recognize common themes and variations. Throughout this process, we continued to iterate between our data, our emerging theory and the prior literature in order to connect our inducted theory and concept with relevant contemporary theoretical conversations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Because of our real-time, forward-looking longitudinal design, the early parts of our project were characterized by the emergence of dozens of potential concepts and themes. Following the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), we gradually identified core concepts and themes that recurred across the cases. We developed ideas and described patterns in one case, then used the other cases to challenge and test these patterns. The inferences that remain formed the basis for the theory we inducted and which we present and illustrate in the results.

**RESULTS**

Our fundamental finding is that ventures’ dominant prosocial motivations predict distinctively different patterns of mission emergence. Empathy leads to mission consensus and engagement, sympathy to mission consensus but not engagement, and a mix of empathy and sympathy leads to dissensus and to unsustainable engagement with competing missions. Figure 1 diagrams the process model we inducted to explain the mapping we observed between forms of PSM and patterns of mission emergence and arrays the seven cases. Our starting point in each case is a series
of early meetings attended by people with a shared interest in doing something to help others in a community. These conversations either lead to or fail to lead to the emergence of a dominant PSM (either sympathy or empathy) among the founding members. The pattern of PSMs predicts how roles and authority will be structured. In turn, the role and authority structures provide the mechanism through which the PSM influences the boundary setting processes that determine who is or is not a member of the founding group. Together, these three distinct paths – empathetic, sympathetic or mixed – determine three distinctive patterns of mission emergence. (see figure 1)

Prosocial Motivation

We observed prosocial motivation – “the desire to benefit other people” (Batson et al., 2008: 135) – at a very general level in peoples’ statements of interest in helping the target beneficiary community (TBC) and in the optimistic discussions of what could be accomplished that characterized early meetings. From the beginning, empathetic and sympathetic founders conceptualized the people and communities they intended to help in distinctly different ways. Empathetic founders were motivated by needs of the TBC conceptualized at the level of specific individuals and the circumstances of their lives. For example, while in a discussion about the need for jobs Fairview founder Lucy (E) (“E” indicates empathetic, “S,” indicates sympathetic PSM) noted that this was not the whole story: “The first words that fall out of my mouth … are to elevate the human spirit, to give purpose and meaning and courage and skills to people who have lost sight of that.” She further specified that what motivated her was “the realization of people’s dreams. And not my realization of it but theirs.”

In most cases, empathetic founders had direct experience and prior one-on-one interactions with the people they were trying to help and identified closely with their circumstances. Luke (E) had spent the end of his career as a corporate manager “eliminating jobs” and transferring them to a Central American location. He felt the pain of the unemployed in Fairview in part because he had played a role in making it happen: “I lived with the people for that period of time until the last one was gone,” at which point “I couldn’t get off the couch. I was just, it was done … you’re telling them they don’t have work.” He joined the Fairview founding team to try to help people like those whose jobs he had outsourced find ways to rebuild their lives.

In contrast, sympathetic founders described members of the targeted communities in abstract ways as the largely anonymous individuals who happened to live in these disadvantaged circumstances. Most had little or no experience interacting with individual members of the TBC and did not identify closely with their particular circumstances. For the most part, sympathetic founders were motivated by the needs of the TBC conceptualized at the level of the community. CentVent founder, Jack (S) expressed his strong sense that Centerville was simply one of many communities in which he believed his preferred approach for doing “this kind of work” could be successful. Centerville was a trial location for future replications: “I would imagine once this catches on, what we’re doing here could apply to lots of different communities in the general area. I could also see the idea being … franchiseable into other communities.” Similarly, Jake (S) described Riverside as “one of 150 small towns that nobody seems to care about” and also viewed it as a pilot location for future replications if effort at revival proved successful.

In the FairVent and RivRev cases, founders mostly comprised groups of likeminded friends and colleagues and the numerically dominant PSM shaped the nascent venture. In Centerville,
however, initial founding conversations took place among two distinct groups with seemingly similar interests. Rick, a local economic development specialist, knew people from both groups and made introductions that brought the two groups together. As he explained,

They [Jack and Ginnie] were using some of the same words and same terminology that Neil and I had already been talking about….I mean, a bunch of people working towards the same common goal and stuff really does not have anywhere near the same power as a group who collectively working together for the same common goal.

CentVent founders from one group were all empathetic in their approach to the TBC while members of the other group were mostly sympathetic, creating a relatively even mix. Alex, a local design entrepreneur and CentVent founder, provided a nice illustration of empathy as he bemoaned the current loss of young design talent to other areas, “Like I have 10 interns working for me …and several of them have moved out of the area because this is not an [artisanal craft location]…I just had so many people that said you know they’re gonna go to [the west coast] when they graduate. They’re gonna go to [the Midwest]. And that is just disheartening to me.” In contrast to the empathetic founders, the sympathetic founders perceived the failure of the town to welcome struggling young designers less in terms of how it affected the designers and more in terms of the economic and social loss for downtown. Most of the sympathetic founders did not claim to know any designers other than those they met through CentVent.

Organizing

By “organizing” we mean the overall process through which founders moved from initial conversations to attempting to create structure around the ideas to start to decide who would be involved and what each person would do. We observed two main processes that provided the mechanisms through which PSMs affected mission emergence: the structuring of roles and authority and the creation of boundaries defining the nascent venture.

Structuring Roles and Authority. Early discussions led to conversations about who would play what role and who would have what authority in organizing the nascent venture. The mix of PSMs among the founders drove both the tone and the path that the organizing processes would take. As shown in Figure 1, in both the empathetic and sympathetic paths, discussions were characterized by a sense of amiable compromise, but for two different reasons. In the empathetic path, founders assumed that they needed to learn more about the individual needs of members of the TBC and roles would emerge as needed. In a telling illustration, the founders of Fairview decided that they had no way to “bring jobs” to the community but might be able to teach members of the TBC to create jobs and changed the direction of the nascent venture accordingly. As Sam (E) described it,

If you educate people and they want to stay in the community and work, but there are no jobs for them, then you have to create a new paradigm. Okay. So the entrepreneurship initiative was if we have raw talent and the people in the local communities, provide an education, provide basic necessities of life, and then provide them with the inspiration, that they can be productive and creative. But most importantly now is – okay, now they need something to do. So they need businesses. When you have no business, you have to think as an entrepreneur. You have to be entrepreneurial and – you know, how do we create businesses where there are no businesses?
The fluidity of roles and authority was striking. For examples, we frequently commented that no one dominated the process of organizing in FairVent. Many of the founders looked up to Lucy (E) as the natural leader, but she rejected this role. As she noted proudly during the pilot program, “I have probably been in the classroom setting [only] three times; they’re doing it, they’re making it happen.” During one interview we had scheduled with Lucy, two other founders came instead. When we asked Lucy about this, she noted that we should talk with them because they were making the decisions: “I believe it’s become their vision and I have really backed out of it a little bit and let them dream it.” By the time that the pilot program finished, participants were in charge and sharing the responsibility for continuing program development. Not only was the authority shared, but it was also very much “bottom up” in the sense that decisions were driven by close assessment of beneficiaries’ needs and also in the sense that knowledgeable members of the TBC took direct responsibility for key roles.

In the sympathetic path, the sense of amiable compromise came from a very different source: from one or two people taking control and others deferring to their authority. Founders focused on the community as a whole assumed that they could determine what venture roles were required without needing to interact much with community members. A clear leader was quickly apparent and a top-down authority structure emerged easily, with defined roles delegated by the leader. For example, in RivRev, Ellie (S), a successful and well-respected artist, did not take operational responsibility, but served as a stopgap leader while setting up a hierarchy to shape organizing efforts to revitalize a community her family had once called home. As the RivRev conversations continued, she reached out to colleagues for donations and raised enough money to pay a project manager – Jake – a small stipend to focus on the project. Jake’s approach to organizing efforts mirrored Ellie’s top-down strategy as he in turn defined and delegated roles for other founding members and volunteers, who deferred to Jake’s appointed leadership role.

Compared to the amiable compromise that characterized organizing processes in the sympathetic and empathetic paths, organizing in the mixed pathway was contested and often uncomfortable. Strong contestation began during discussions of who would play what roles and who would make what decisions. Sympathetic founders, focused on trying to make measurable progress at the level of the community, attempted to create pre-defined roles and authority structures. For example, in CentVent, Jack (S) and Ginnie (S) maneuvered to control meeting times, places and agendas and on occasion interrupted other founders to “get the discussion back on track.” Although no explicit discussion had taken place regarding who would be in charge, Jack and Ginnie began bringing agendas in PowerPoint format to the informal weekly organizing meetings. They appointed an executive committee, making each committee member a chair of a subcommittee, and therefore responsible for weekly deliverables back to the executive meetings. During an interview around this time, Jack explained that the logical step for he and Ginnie to lead the development is because, “We bring business wisdom, organizational know-how, leadership ability, ability to communicate, ability to influence and argue a position. We know how to create businesses. That’s quite a lot. And it seems to be the kind of thing this community would need.”

The empathetic founders of CentVent took a more fluid and organic bottom up approach to roles and structures. Neil (E) the most vocal of the empathetic founders in CentVent, later objected in private conversations with Jack to his attempt to expand the goals of CentVent quickly and beyond the designers who had been the initial focus for organizing the venture, “I think one of the things that the group has done that is bad in recent meetings is we’re trying to expand the district
and community to include too much too quickly…but I think…that might be part of the problem is we’re trying to start it all at once and so you get bogged down really quickly doing that.”

Boundary Setting. Emerging roles and authority structures allowed the founders to shape boundaries of the emerging ventures in distinctly different ways: who would have an active role as an insider and participate in decisions, and who would not? In both the empathetic and sympathetic paths, those sharing the dominant PSM excluded the outnumbered minority members by relegating them to what we labeled “bystander” status. Bystanders were treated as passive supporters of the organization and were no longer involved when decisions were made about either the venture’s mission or it would be organized. In addition to shaping boundaries by exclusion, the bottom-up structuring of roles and fluid sharing of authority in the empathetic path supported inclusion of members of the TBC into the organizing process. In FairVent, members of the target beneficiary community were brought into the organization in loosely defined roles and other roles and assignments were adjusted to fit the skills and interests of the newcomers. For example, unemployed local mother Beth (E) ended up playing a dual role as someone who was trained in the pilot and was then recruited to organize the training program development.

Parallel processes constructed boundaries on the sympathetic path. RivRev boundaries were shaped by the exclusion of empathetic founders. Illustrating this, Ian (E) described founder Mia’s (E) connection with people in the town by saying, “The most important member of our board is Mia, who is a long-time resident, born and raised in Riverside, and certainly has her feelings for the community and her finger on the pulse of the community. But it’s really all for the residents of Riverside.” Mia (E) was, however, consistently excluded from decision making and even from informal conversations about what RivRev should try to do for whom. Asked directly about RivRev’s relationships with the community, project leader Jake (S) fumbled for words: “Oh, gosh. Um, I don’t know how to answer that question.” He also showed no interest in understanding prior work done by people attempting to engage members of the community in revitalization work. He told us “there was a girl that lived there for almost a year …She was wanting to try to revitalize the downtown area and was working – she worked alongside the people … you might want to talk to her. I don’t know her name…”

In the mixed path, the same processes of inclusion and exclusion became elements of contestation. For example, as they claimed authority over the definition and assignment of roles, Jack and Ginnie shaped the CentVent boundaries both by recruiting people into particular roles and by excluding others. For example, they sent an email to all regular attendees declaring that only the executive “leadership” was invited to future weekly meetings and thanking others for their service. Neil (E) resisted this move by recruiting individuals from the TBC, and inviting them to attend the meetings that Jack and Ginnie were attempting to restrict. Battle lines were drawn over roles, authority and who would be excluded or recruited in the organizing process.

Mission Emergence

Our focal outcome is mission emergence, which includes two elements, consensus and engagement.

Consensus. In the empathetic path, the fluid sharing of authority combined with amiable compromise and open discussion of issues smoothed the process of getting to consensus. The informal and largely implicit process of excluding members who were sympathetic toward the community
contributed to a sense that everyone who remained in the core group was oriented toward helping the same beneficiaries with a similar – empathetic – motivation. Joint awareness of consensus was also enhanced by the boundary setting processes that generated mild overtones defining “us” versus “them” and by the sense of joint connection to members of the TBC. For example, starting from a conceptualization of the TBC in terms of individuals, and gaining focus through the pilot “entrepreneurship training” program, the organizing process brought FairVent founders to consensus that the organization would focus on the people founders came to call, “the least, the last, and the lost,” and that the primary form of help would be training and support for the development of participants’ own ventures. This process led them to clarify their mission: rather than fighting to keep people off the street, Lucy (E) noted, the mission became not to “take children off the street but to get them back on the street” with entrepreneurship and other skills training. As Luke (E) noted, they would thereby create an “enriched community with people that not only are more employable but maybe could be employers one day.”

In the sympathetic path, for example in RivRev, deference to Ellie (S) and Jake’s (S) authority continued to support the sense of amiable compromise that allowed Jake to lead the rest of the founders first to focus on a mission of starting a vocational training school and when that did not work out to consensus on the creation of a training workshop that would manufacture and sell products to Ellie’s (S) artist associates. The ultimate goal of RivRev remained focused at the level of the community for economic revitalization and job creation. Jake described, “That’s all people talk about is creating jobs and …. I want to create jobs.” She described the mission, “We create the jobs, then … it becomes a catalyst to bring other things to the area.”

In the mixed path, consensus never emerged. For example, in CentVent, Jack (S), Ginnie (S) and the sympathetic founding members aligned with them developed a “take all comers” mission that eliminated focus on the original TBC of struggling designers and focused instead on attempting to revitalize the downtown neighborhood through generic entrepreneurship training with additional consulting available for a fee. Neil (E) and his smaller cohort of founders remained tightly focused on developing a bottom-up understanding of designer needs and finding ways to meet those in downtown Centerville. Even after Liam Taylor Designs split off from CentVent, CentVent II never reached consensus – until Rusti Sage Creations also split off, leaving behind a dominant coalition of sympathetic founders.

Engagement. Mission engagement occurs when founders continue to exert effort in the organizing process on behalf of the mission. Engagement was shaped by a sense of progress toward the mission. In the empathetic path, because the beneficiary group was conceptualized at the level of the individual, seemingly any progress toward helping even one person could avoid the sense of frustration; small successes were viewed as progress and this encouraged founders to stay engaged. In the sympathetic path, because the beneficiary group was conceptualized at the level of the community, a sense of progress depended on achievement of relatively substantial outcomes. Differences in conceptualizations of the primary target beneficiary community—versus individual—meant founders in the mixed path were hard-pressed to have any sense of progress.

Empathetic Path. In FairVent, the pilot workshop to develop entrepreneurial skills and increase aspirations among a small group of disadvantaged people from the town was viewed as successful. The pilot resulted in the production of several product prototypes and inspirational promotional videos. The graduation ceremony was structured as a major celebration with heartwarming testimonials of empowerment from the participants and evidence of hard work and mastery of
basic business topics. Family, friends and community members came to see the final presentations and provide encouragement. This created a sense of progress and belief in the practicality of the emerging mission. As Sam (E) noted, “Every positive thing that happens out of this is a success from my perspective” and “the inspiration that came from that one week was tremendous.”

Shared passion for the outcome. Only among the empathetic founders did we observe what we labeled “shared passion for the outcome.” During the emergence of mission consensus and engagement, much of the organizing work was done in close coordination and communication with other founding members, and warm and cooperative founder-to-founder relationship became a source of increased energy used in working toward the outcomes envisioned by the mission. For example, several months after “escaping” from a trying period of repeated contestation first in CentVent and then in CentVent II, Rusti Sage Creations founder Alex (E) enthused at length about the skills and dedication of the five founders who surrounded him, emphasizing that we are “enthusiastic and excited people,” committed to “openness and transparency” and “this is all about collaboration and working together for what we care about, which is, [the] mission of helping designers build businesses in downtown Centerville, connect with one another and with others who can help.” The founders experienced a shared passion that emerged from and transcended their separate individual motivations as they succeed in working together to help individual designers’ experience small successes, while enjoying one another’s company and a sense of “being in this together.”

This sense of togetherness was enhanced by the fact that individuals from the beneficiary community were embraced as founding members and by the development of rich dyadic ties between founders and beneficiaries. At FairVent, Lucy (E) summarized the excitement among the beneficiaries after the pilot project, noting, “they’re like kites” because of increases in “confidence” and sense of “self-worth.” This excitement fed back to the founders and enhanced their own sense of joy and commitment to the mission outcome as worthwhile. Joe (E) confirmed the importance of a third type of relationship – the relationship between the beneficiaries – describing a sense of happy surprise that “we really gelled together” to make things happen. Together, these repeated and mission-oriented connections with other people who shared the same goals elevated the energy levels among the individuals and generated a shared passion for the outcome that in turn enhanced founders’ mission engagement. We observed this emergence of shared passion for the outcome intended by the mission in both FairVent and Rusti Sage Creations, but not in any of our other cases.

Sympathetic Path. In Riverview, mission consensus emerged around the development of a new manufacturing and distribution firm intended to train and employ local citizens and attract additional businesses to the area. Because the mission was defined around economic revitalization and the creation of a substantial (though undefined), number of new jobs, from RivRev’s perspective, progress would be defined by substantial steps or completed milestones, rather than by “small wins.” Unfortunately, progress was slow and this led to a spreading sense that the organization’s mission was quite daunting; frustration ensued as progress stalled. Jake (S) expressed his burgeoning frustration about the lack of sustained engagement from people who originally came to the table around the inchoate idea of economic development: “I have met with so many people in Riverside, in Washington, D.C….even when I have meetings with … I’m sorry, it’s bulls**t. You know. Nine months and we’re trying to find out … so I think what – what is also a little frustrating is, you get a little from [various people and institutions] to still see here’s a bit of a commitment but – but there’s nothing completed.” Several founders disengaged from the project; Jake moved on to another project in another state.
Mixed Path. As the battle lines became clearer in Centerville, founders dug in their heels and demonstrated separate engagement with the two distinct missions that had emerged. After months of feeling they were compromising too much, and conferring with several other founders and advisors, Neil (E) noted, “I am tired of this s**t; Jack and Ginnie think they should be in charge just because they are older, they want to just do what they have always done.” Jack (S) and Ginnie (S), in a separate interview, referred to Neil as the “naive, young entrepreneur.” Rick, who had first introduced Jack and Neil, noted, “Jack and Ginnie just can’t seem to understand what Neil is trying to do or the business model he sees.” Neil led a group of founders out of CentVent to spin off Liam Taylor Designs. This group, which focused on helping designers open businesses in the downtown area, included only members of the TBC and followed the empathetic pathway described in Figure 1 (quickly and with no need to “exclude” anyone because the group was homogenous from the beginning). Absent the resistance those who left had provided, Jack and Ginnie took tighter control of the organizing process in what we labeled CentVent II, eliminating the weekly organizing meetings among other interested participants. CentVent II nonetheless continued on the mixed path. Jack (S) and Ginnie (S) and the remaining empathetic founders moved forward over the next eight months to open a downtown training and sales location and announced a major “opening” celebration at a downtown club. The day of the night of the celebration, what started as minor disagreement over control of the money from sale of tickets between Jack and Ginnie versus what became “Rusti Sage Creations” turned into what one observer described as an interaction that showed “the true face” of how “Jack and Ginnie had taken control” of CentVent II. The celebration continued, but by the next week, empathetic founders Alex (E), Carol (E), and Betty (E) had spun out of CentVent II to form Rusti Sage Creations, with an organizing process and structure very similar to that of Liam Taylor Designs but with a general mission of providing training opportunities for young designers who lacked the skills or experience to be part of the TBC targeted by Liam Taylor Designs. Each of the empathetic founders of Rusti Sage Creations either was or had been a member of their TBC and therefore identified closely with the TBC. Both of the spinouts followed the empathetic path described in Figure 1. Following the departure of the founders of Rusti Sage Creations, Jack (S) and Ginnie (S) recruited Anna (E), a volunteer with a record of past success at improving a community by attracting a group of artisans to create and sell their wares. Seven months later, Jack and Ginnie decided it just wasn’t working, and – in the words of Rick – “pulled the rug out from underneath Anna” and everyone else involved in the business and simply closed the doors and shuttered the location. As of our writing, it remains an empty storefront.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

**Prosocial Motivations and Mission Emergence**

The creation of a social venture is a specific form of entrepreneurship distinguished by the centrality of a mission (Dees, 2001) that serves to express its goals, shape its activities and attract resources, including founding members, to the venture. Our work contributes to the very limited body of prior research attempting to understand why and how social missions are shaped through the venture organizing process. The model we inducted shows and explains the mapping of three configurations of founder prosocial motivation to three patterns of mission emergence.

The results of our study show that founders’ prosocial motivations strongly shape mission emergence during the organizing process for social ventures. In contrast to prior research, our study highlights some of the contingencies and challenges faced by the well-meaning founders
of social ventures. We show that two important and commonplace forms of PSM – empathy and sympathy – shape venture organizing and mission emergence in distinctly different ways, and these contrasting effects explain some of the central challenges faced by founding members of social ventures. Our explanation of the process through which empathy and sympathy influence the emergence of a social venture’s mission also indicates how and why the joint achievement of mission consensus and member engagement can be fragile. Contestation can subvert what initially seems like consensus and lack of a sense of progress can undermine engagement. Overall, our results suggest that it is important not to place a halo around “prosocial” or to see it as a panacea for overcoming the possibilities of petty bickering and self-interest in the process of forming a social venture. Instead, future work examining the role of PSM in social venture creation needs to investigate and attend to differences in the form of “wanting to help others.” Regardless of whether our specific findings regarding empathy and sympathy are supported in subsequent empirical tests, future studies of prosocial motivations in the creation or management of organizations should avoid assuming they are all of a kind.

Rather than assuming the venture’s social mission is something carried by a founder and imprinted on the new organization (Dees, 2001), we observed and theorized mission emergence as a contingent outcome of venture organizing processes. Although our research focused only on mission emergence rather than overall “venture emergence” (Gartner, 1988; Aldrich, 1999) our model fits well with much more general organization theory perspectives on organization creation. For example, Aldrich (1999) defined organizations as “goal-directed, boundary-maintaining activity systems” and Hannan and Freeman (1984) argued that role and authority structures are “core” elements of organizations. Our inducted process model directly addresses venture goals in terms of mission emergence, and also shows the emergence of role and authority structures and boundaries. This suggests that our model may be applicable beyond the context of social ventures.

Entrepreneurial Passion

Influential work on “entrepreneurial passion” (Cardon et al., 2009) has mostly built on the research program developed by Vallerand and colleagues (2003), which has focused on passion for “activities” and demonstrated close connections between valued individual identities and passion for activities that support and reinforce one’s sense of self. Perhaps because of the mostly individual-focused laboratory studies that formed the basis for this profound body of work, theory in entrepreneurship building upon it has also focused on individuals’ passion for particular sets of activities, and how these are tied to role identities and related motivations to reinforce one’s sense of self (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Our observations complement this prior work and suggest two significant expansions. First, we observed the emergence of shared, rather than only individual passion. Emerging from the continued interaction of founders who had achieved consensus and engagement with the mission, this shared passion arose from the continued interactions of founders and members of the TBC as they celebrated victories and a sense of togetherness in working toward something they believed to be both interesting and worthwhile. Second, this passion was not for a particular “activity” or set of activities, but was instead for an outcome. Unlike prior work suggesting passion for activities such as opportunity discovery, or venture founding or growth management we observed founders who were passionate about the outcome specified by their consensual mission and represented in the persons of some of their co-founders from the TBC. Passion for the outcome generated found-
ers’ continued willingness to take on whatever tasks and roles were seen as necessary and useful in support of the mission. We suspect that such shared passion may provide a motivational boost to nascent and young social ventures and also to reinforce mission consensus and engagement. This may increase the likelihood of surviving the liabilities of newness and smallness (Stinchcombe, 1965; Wiklund et al., 2010) for social ventures in which shared passion has emerged for the mission-specified outcome, but such passion may be fragile in the face of the sorts of setbacks that are likely for any new venture.

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REFERENCES


Figure 1: Process Model of Prosocial Motivations and Mission Emergence

NUMERICALLY DOMINANT PSM

- Sympathy
  - [RetRev, CentVent III]

- Empathy
  - [FairVent, Liam Taylor Designs, Rust Sage Creations]

- Mixed
  - [CentVent, CentVent II]

ORGANIZING

Roles & Structuring

- Top Down
  - Hierarchical Authority

- Bottom Up
  - Shared Authority

Boundary Setting

- Core Founders: Exclusion of Others
  - Beneficiary Community: Kept at arm’s length

- Core Founders: Exclusion of Others
  - Beneficiary Community: Recruited to participate

- Core Founders: Exclusion of Others (both)
  - Beneficiary Community: Kept at arm’s length & Recruited to participate

MISSION EMERGENCE

- Consensus: Yes
  - Engagement: Yes

- Consensus: No
  - Engagement: Yes

Prosocial motivations lead to conversations around inchoate idea

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