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THE SEVEN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES MODEL AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE CASE OF SOLE MISSION

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To Korista, for being my biggest cheerleader, believing I could even when I did not, and for doing hard things. You are my favorite. I love you!

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THE SEVEN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES MODEL AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE CASE OF SOLE MISSION

Abstract

Can a credible prescriptive model for the creation of new social enterprise organizations be developed? This dissertation explored that question by examining the appropriateness of Bisel and Bisel's (2023) Seven Entrepreneurial Activities (SEA) model for explaining the origination and maintenance of volunteer and donor dependent nonprofit organization (VDDN). While the SEA model was developed to explain the constitution of new for-profit organizations, VDDN are nonprofit entities that realize value propositions via the labor of non-employee volunteers and external financial benefactors, and, therefore, may involve constitutive activities that are distinct from for-profit organizing. A case study of a social entrepreneurial endeavor (i.e., Sole Mission) was conducted, including ethnographic observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with organizational stakeholders. Sole Mission is a 16-year-old VDDN that provides new, fitted, and appropriate socks and shoes to impoverished American children. Utilizing organizational documents and interview data, an organizational life history was constructed to identify social entrepreneurship (SE) practices, which occurred during the organization's origin as well as maintenance and reproduction phases. Analysis identified three entrepreneurial practices from the VDDN's origin phase (0-2 years) and two from the maintenance and reproduction phase (3-16 years). Further analysis of the organizational life history was used to assess whether SEA model activities were apparent. On one hand, analysis revealed the presence of all three SEA model higher order sets in both phases of organizational life. On the other hand, three exigency-based divergences were also observed in relation to the VDDN: (a) *affinity opportunities*, (b) *volunteers not employees*, and (c) *donors not investors*. Taken together, these finding extend organizational communication theory, including communication constitutes organization (CCO) theory, the four flows model, and SEA model. Furthermore, this research contributes to the body of literature on social entrepreneurship. Ultimately, by adding a description of contextually-based divergences, the SEA model is an efficacious prescriptive communication-based model for explaining the constitution of new volunteer and donor dependent nonprofit organization.

Keywords: SEA model, social entrepreneurship, volunteers, donors, nonprofits

THE SEVEN ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES MODEL AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE CASE OF SOLE MISSION

Rationale

With over 1.8 million charitable entities in the United States, nonprofit organizations are common fixtures in most communities (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2021). Nonprofit organizations are charitable organizations, which are formed for purposes other than earning profit and seek to provide relief among various communities (Internal Revenue Service, 2023). In the United States, these organizations receive $500 billion annually in tax-deductible donations (National Philanthropic Trust, 2024) with another $147 billion in donated labor (Schlachter, 2019). Additionally, the nonprofit sector is America’s third largest employment sector (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Individuals participate in charitable entities for a variety of reasons, including religious convictions, family ties, and a desire to reinvest in their communities.

With the prevalence of nonprofit organizations in operation and the large number of people who participate with them, an investigation into understanding how they come into being, and what communication mechanisms enable their establishment and perpetuation, is needed. Understanding what activities are necessary for the successful and sustainable constitution of a nonprofit organization may lead to practical and prescriptive recommendations for those interested in starting new charitable endeavors. This study examined whether recent theorizing about entrepreneurial activities explains *nonprofit* entrepreneurship and whether additional theorizing is needed for its application within the unique nonprofit context.

Theoretical Significance

This study explored the communicatively constitutive nature of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship (SE) is a field of study which encompasses nonprofit, for-profit, governmental, and networked endeavors toward making social changes (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). While social entrepreneurship received increased research focus in business, management, and communication since the early 1990s (Saebi, Foss, & Linder, 2019), it is still a topic with remaining opportunities for inquiry. Meanwhile, a specific strand of theorizing in organizational communication lends itself to investigations of new organization formation: The communication constitutes organization (CCO) theory argues “communication calls organization “into being” (Bisel, 2010, p. 124). Additionally, according to one tradition of CCO theory, the four flows model (FFM; McPhee & Zaug, 2000), four intermingling communication forms ultimately constitute organization ontologically. These communication types, or “flows,” consist both of internal and external messaging. If this is the case, how might calling “into being” occur within social entrepreneurial endeavors, and what forms might each of the communication flows take? Finally, Bisel and Bisel (2023) offered an extension of the FFM in the form of a prescriptive model for business entrepreneurship. Their seven entrepreneurial activities (SEA) model entails behaviors which when enacted constitute and sustain new businesses. Might this prescriptive model of for-profit entrepreneurship also serve as a guide for nonprofit start-ups as well?

Key Contributions

This study made several contributions. First, this study examined whether the SEA model (Bisel & Bisel, 2023) is a credible prescriptive model for explaining the creation of new social enterprise organizations. Fieldwork with a successful nonprofit, Sole Mission, indeed confirmed the SEA model is a credible prescriptive model in this regard. Second, the study adds to the SEA model literature by describing three contextual exigencies which may need to be accounted for when applying the prescriptive model to volunteer and donor dependent (VDDN) social enterprise organizations. Namely, (a) social enterprises take different and longer-lasting approaches with donors than for-profit endeavors do with early-stage (e.g., angel) investors, (b) social enterprises engage in a different constitutive leadership approach with volunteers than for-profit corporations do with employees, and (c) VDDNs may need to engage in services adjacent to organizational value propositions too costly to maintain overtime as well as to appeal to or appease donors. Additionally, this research contributes to organizational communication and social entrepreneurship literatures by offering an empirical example of how CCO theory can explain entrepreneurialism, particularly social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, this study makes a methodological contribution to organizational communication theory by employing an underutilized method of data analysis – organizational life history (Berg, 2011; Bisel et al., 2017; Banas et al., 2019). The following section provides a review of literature concerning social entrepreneurship (SE), communication as constitutive of organizing theory (CCO), the four flows model (FFM), and the seven entrepreneurial activities (SEA) model.

Literature Review

Social Entrepreneurship

The driving principles of social entrepreneurship are not new. Since humans made the move from disparate tribes to large, complex, and diverse social systems, certain societies sought to act and organize in ways that served the masses. For example, religious texts, such as the Jewish Torah (New Revised Standard Version Bible, 1989, Deuteronomy 23:24-25; Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Leviticus 19:13) and ancient civil guidelines, such as those put in place by the Babylonians (Fitzgerald, 2016) exist as evidence of such a reality. Mercy and compassion for the sick, downtrodden, and defeated inspire action, including the formation of groups which evolve into organizations motivated to address social need (e.g., orphanages). This tradition of advocacy continues to be transferred intergenerationally and cross-culturally, arriving to this point in history. Currently, Americans alone donate $500 billion annually to charity (National Philanthropic Trust, 2024) and volunteer 5.8 billion hours each year (Schlachter, 2019).

In the American context, the U.S. tax code is the process through which charitable entities are formally recognized. As such, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has long identified a difference between entities which exist to serve the social good and those which function to build wealth. Organizations formed for charitable purposes became exempt from federal income taxes with the institution of the *Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act of 1894* (Dietz, n.d.). This act, though later repealed, included language that became the rhetorical cornerstone for how the American government would conceptualize such entities moving forward. Such considerations culminated with the *Tax Reform Act of 1969*, proffering clear boundaries concerning activities in which various organizations for social good are prohibited from participation (Dietz, n.d.). At present the IRS recognizes 30 different types of tax-exempt organizations (e.g., 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4), 501(c)(9), etc.) each operating toward the promotion of various social goods and constrained by clear guidelines for organizational activities (Internal Revenue Service, 2024).

The social entrepreneurship (SE) literature suffers from, as many concepts do, a proliferation of definitions. The lack of "unifying paradigm" (Bacq & Janssen, 2011, p. 373) is even observable within singular texts. In Mair et al.'s (2006) edited tome; ten different chapters written by ten different authors who present their own unique definition of SE. While each of these definitions are complementary, containing a common thread of seeking to set right social imbalance (Swanson & Zhang, 2010), they do differ in foci. For example, Mair and Naboa (2006) define social entrepreneurship as "as the innovative use of resource combinations to pursue opportunities aiming at the creation of organizations and/or practices that yield and sustain social benefits" (p. 121). Thus, Mair and Naboa place emphasis on resource combinations that lead to organization creation for the purpose of sustainable benefits. Meanwhile, Robinson (2006) however defines SE as a:

> process that includes: the identification of a specific social problem and a specific solution… to address it; the evaluation of the social impact, the business model and the sustainability of the venture; and the creation of a social mission-oriented for-profit or a business-oriented nonprofit entity that pursues the double (or triple) bottom line (p. 95).

Robinson's definition represents an expansion of foci to also include profit, a concern of all corporations.

For the purposes of this investigation, I adopt the definition of SE provided by Austin et al. (2006) who offer, "Social entrepreneurship is innovative, social value creating research activity that can occur within or across the nonprofit, business, and public sectors" (p. 2). Though more succinct than other definitions, this definition is nevertheless conceptually broader and inclusive of multiple functions. To start, it is inclusive of innovation. Innovation is vital to social entrepreneurial endeavor as conceptually SE is, in essence, the response to an imbalance in the current social reality (Swanson & Zhang, 2010). Additionally, it is understood as a research activity. Conceptualizations of SE as a research activity holds a two-fold purpose. First, as this investigation is itself a research activity, there is an obvious parallel. Secondly, the research activity found within SE is the search for the locus of the social imbalance which the innovation seeks to address. Thus, SE is a structured and organized process, which aligns with the other phenomena under study in my research. Finally, this definition is inclusive of the nonprofit, business, and public sectors. SE must be understood holistically. While the uninformed may find it easy to relegate SE as a work of the religious or idealist, left to the purview of the government, or even cynically, the role of the wealthy in search for tax-exemptions, in truth, SE may be all those facets, but is never just those facets.

Volunteer and Donor Dependent Nonprofits

This investigation further focuses on what the author coins *volunteer and donor-dependent nonprofit* (VDDN) organizations. VDDNs rely on financial donations as well as volunteer service hours in lieu of product based income streams and the work of paid employees to accomplish organizational reasons for being. In doing so, expenses can be kept low with income and energy expended directly toward mission and beneficiaries. VDDNs also build corporate and community partnerships for funding, resources, and opportunities to accomplish missional goals. In their 2009 article, Foster et al. enumerate ten models for funding nonprofits. Each funding model is necessarily connected to both the organizations' value statements as well as operational structures. VDDNs, such as the one under study in this dissertation, seem however to not fit neatly into a single funding category but engage aspects from multiple models. For instance, one model elucidated by Foster et al. (2009), is the *Heartfelt Connector* funding model. The *Heartfelt Connector* model is an entrepreneurial approach which focuses on creating opportunities for people, regardless of their backgrounds, to connect with social causes where no previous opportunity to do so existed. This model is applicable to organizations with a broad missional appeal, and often connects donors directly to the cause via volunteerism. Such approaches are found within VDDNs. However, the *Heartfelt Connector* typically engages many people in the funding decision-making process. This is not necessarily true for VDDNs. Furthermore, unlike with many *Heartfelt Connectors*, the services of the VDDN may never be applied to friends or family members of volunteers. Similar observations may be made about the *Resource Recycler* funding model, which describes organizations that distribute “goods that are created in the market economy” (p. 37). VDD nonprofits, such as Sole Mission, fit this description, and have a decision-making approach that mirrors that of the *Resource Recycler*. However, *Resource Recyclers* are typically funded either primarily or solely by corporate sponsors and are motivated by self-interest, two characteristics not found in VDDNs. In short, VDDNs are social enterprises which employ a hybrid funding model to survive and thrive.

As with any organization, social enterprises must have leaders. Social entrepreneurship endeavors are led by social entrepreneurs, which are:

> a visionary individual, whose main objective is to create social value, able at one and the same time to detect and exploit opportunities, to leverage resources necessary to his/her social mission and to find innovative solutions to social problems of his/her community that are not properly met by the local system (Bacq & Janssen, 2011, p. 388).

These individuals are “change makers” (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010, p. 41). Social entrepreneurs are entity founders, and originators of an answer to the problem of social imbalance. Social entrepreneurs are often driven by family legacy, transformative early childhood experiences, and previous employment to engage in social enterprise making (Shumate et al., 2014). Like other entrepreneurial leaders, social entrepreneurs are responsible for sharing a vision of what their mission will be, gathering participants and stakeholders, and oversee the transition of the organization from visionary concept to functional reality (Atonakis & Autio, 2007). While social entrepreneurs employ a wide range of leadership styles, transformational leadership (i.e., leadership associated with inspiring change; Yukl, 1998) is strongly associated with leadership outcomes in entrepreneurial endeavors (Eyal & Kark, 2004).

While the principles behind SE may not be new, SE as a scholarly field of inquiry emerged relatively recently (Marti, 2006; Short et al., 2009). Of SE as a research agenda, Light (2008) says, “as a field of inquiry, the study of social entrepreneurship is barely past its infancy. As such, it resembles the early years of the study of business entrepreneurship” (p. 2). A meta-analysis of SE research conducted by Short et al. (2009) revealed that the first example of clearly SE research was published in 1991. In the intervening years between that first publication and their meta-analysis, 152 SE focused articles were published in journals pertaining to the fields of anthropology, business, economics, education, entrepreneurship, finance, law, management, marketing, political science, and sociology. Each of these disciplines sought to stake their philosophical claims, marking a rapid increase in interest. Notice that communication researchers were not numbered among the early inquirers. A decade later, an additional meta-analysis conducted by Saebi et al. (2019) discovered the number of publications increased to 395, which tended to highlight issues related to poverty, women’s empowerment, social transformation, and institutional change. The increase in research interest also coincided with an increase in the number of nonprofits in the United States from 828,000 in 1987 (The New Nonprofit Almanac and Desk Reference, 2002) to 1.54 million in 2019 (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2020).

Three Schools of SE

Research concerning SE contains three primary schools of thought: (a) the Social Innovation and (b) Social Enterprise school—which were developed in the United States, and (c) the EMES approach, which was founded in Europe (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). While each school of thought is conceptually similar, all focused on the work of the common good. Yet, they take different stands on organizational types which may be included in consideration of their operational definitions.

The *Social Innovation* approach is the most inclusive and all-encompassing school of thought (Fu, 2018). This broad approach attends to a variety of parties from diverse sectors: public, private, governmental, and nonprofit. Any organization or venture designed to address perceived social imbalance could definitionally fall within the boundaries of the Social Innovation perspective. Examples of the social innovation approach includes organizations such as the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma – a nonprofit corporation, Life Church – a house of worship, Oklahoma Children's Services – a government entity, and Syrup's Center for Children and Families – a corporation using business profits to support a social mission. The definition of SE utilized for this investigation derives from the Social Innovation school of thought.

The *Social Enterprise* school on the other hand offers a narrower approach. This approach argues, "that only social enterprises that adopt market mechanisms to support their creation of social value qualify for social entrepreneurial ventures" (Fu, 2018, p. 17). As such, only organizations who utilize profit-making approaches to in turn reinvest the profit into the social missions of the organization qualify as SE. For example, the shoe company, TOMS is a for-profit company whose corporate mission statement is, "We're in business to improve lives" (TOMS, 2024, para. 1). Originally, TOMS pioneered a one-for-one project, donating a pair of shoes for each pair of shoes purchase. Over time the approach shifted and diversified and now the company donates one-third of its annual profits for the funding of grassroots non-profit mental health services worldwide. TOMS is a classic example of a for-profit business venture utilized to fund a social mission focus.

Finally, the *EMES* (*L'Emergence de l'Enterprise Social en Europe*) school is a cross-continental collaboration of researchers originally hailing from European Union member states. EMES members hold common conceptual understandings of SE but with each national government setting its own legal definitions of SE to establish clear norms (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). Defourney and Nyssens (2008) define the EMES approach thus:

> Social enterprises are not-for-profit private organizations providing goods or services directly related to their explicit aim to benefit the community. They generally rely on collective dynamics involving various types of stakeholders in their governing bodies, they place a high value on their autonomy, and they bear economic risks related to their activity (p. 204).

More recently, Karre and Mossel (2017) echoing Brandsen et al. (2016) further described this school as being characterized by "networks and joint action in social realms beyond business and government routines [and that], at any given moment, raise the hope and expectations of progress towards something 'better'" (p. 3). Such joint actions could include endeavors, such as community gardens, repairing cross walks, and organizing training to assist those seeking employment.

Communication and Social Change

Communication research may have missed the initial procession into SE research, but researchers have subsequently engaged. What is more, though communication did not engage in early SE research, communication focused on social change is a 70-year-old endeavor (McAnany, 2012). Communication and social change (CSC) "is about understanding the role played by information, communication, and the media in directed and nondirected social change" (Thomas, 2014, p. 7). CSC contains a rich research agenda, with explorations on storytelling and emotion (Roundy, 2014; 2022), politics (Pamment, 2014), public health (Chasi, 2014), environmentalism (van de Fliert, 2014), and social justice (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Building from this tradition, the combination of SE and communication research is producing a wealth of scholarship. Such scholarship includes viewing SE as a paradigm for social innovation (McAnany, 2012), digital and informational communication technologies (Aruch et al., 2014; Ratten, 2018), nonviolent activism (Ziegler et al., 2014), and advertising (Mallin & Finkle, 2007).

Within the field of communication, SE finds an efficacious partner in organizational communication theories and methods. Organizational communication is the nexus between the study of human communication and the study of human organizations (Farace et al., 1977). The subfield includes the examination of how organizations are communicatively constituted ontologically via the talk *as*, *at*, and *about* such organizations. Modern scholarship in organizational communication includes research at many different institutional levels, whether structural, leadership, systemic, policy, and practice (Kramer & Bisel, 2020). Topically, SE fits well alongside contemporary organizational communication studies, particularly as SE occurs either in the form of new enterprises or as an expression of an existing enterprise. While SE can occur on an individual and networking level, SE will almost certainly require organization if it is to have wide-reaching affect or significance (Mair et al., 2012).

Scholarship is readily accessible within the combined research approaches, including studies on nongovernmental organizations and corporate alliances (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010), umbrella organizations (Feldner & Fyke, 2016), healthcare organizations (Amini et al., 2018), organizational identity (Moore, 2012), and organizational performance (de Adro et al., 2021). What is more, Kuhn and Marshall (2019) argued that entrepreneurship is a communicatively constituted reality consisting of identity and ecosystem construction, and communicative entrepreneurial actions. Finally, Koschmann (2011) contributed to the development of a communicative theory of nonprofit built from the communicative constitution perspective, along with a keen focus on lived experiences and discourse. In sum, organizational communication concepts and theories fit well with a continued investigation of entrepreneurship in all its forms, including SE.

Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO) Theory

Communication constitutes organization (CCO) theory is a well-established and empirically supported area of research within the organizational communication subfield. (Boivin et al., 2017). CCO describes organizations as "ongoing and interconnected communicative processes" (Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015, p. 295). Organizations—in this case, social entrepreneurial enterprises—are called into being ontologically via communication (Bisel, 2009; 2010) as communication is constitutive of organizing (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009) and maintained and reproduced through interactions consistently (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). While there are multiples perspectives from which to read the project of CCO and its development, for the purposes of this examination I offer a brief history of its theoretical foundation and roles within organizational communication studies.

While the bulk of work on CCO has been conducted in the last 25 years, CCO literature has roots in the theorizing of Karl Weick and Anthony Giddens. Weick (1969), a social psychologist, described organizations as social systems in which members interpret situations continually for the purposes of decision-making. The interpretive process, he argued, “may be influenced by such things as the nature of the answer sought, the characteristics of the environment, the previous experiences of the questioner, and the methods used to acquire it” (Daft & Weick, 1984, p. 285). As such, the interpretive process outlined by Daft and Weick *is* meaning-making, or more clearly, communication. Furthermore, the result of each interpretation is action. Weick understood this movement from interpretation to action as the network “organizing” and the and the outcome of action after action being organization (Weick, 1969).

CCO was influenced by structuration theory. Structuration is a theory that attempts to answer the puzzle, “Do structures or agency determine society and members’ behaviors?” For Giddens (1979), structures are “patterns of social relationships” (p. 61). Such structures include phenomenon like organizational discourse—ways of talking and therefore thinking—and organizational texts (Taylor et al., 1996). Structuration is the reproduction of systems, which takes place through human action, similar to the product of Weick’s interpretive process. “[Structures] are the medium of action because members draw on structures to interact. They are its outcome because rules and resources exist only by virtue of being used in a practice” (Poole et al., 1996, p. 117). Every new structure develops as the result of a past human behavior. Rules are principles, routines, guides, and norms for action. Resources are action facilitators. Structuration includes the presence of a paradoxical duality, the mutually constitutive relationship between structures – routines for action that reproduce routine, and agency – the ability to choose otherwise (Iverson et al., 2018), both of which enable and constrain each other. Similarly, communication exists as a duality within CCO, by both calling organizations into being and being the substance of which the organization consists.

CCO theory is not singular in its definition but "a proliferation of tenets" (Putnam, 2022, xxvi) divided among three distinct schools of theoretical thought: the Four Flows Model (FFM; McPhee & Zaug, 2000; 2009), the Montréal School (Cooren et al., 2006; Taylor & van Every, 2000), and the Luhmannian Systems Theory (Grothe-Hammer, 2022; Luhmann, 2003; Seidl & Becker, 2005). While each of these theories describe organizations as complete entities, they outline the process by which they become complete in different ways (Putnam & McPhee, 2009). As Schoeneborn et al. (2014) pointed out, the theoretical approaches differ vastly concerning opinions on empirical methods for observation and the role of agency. In particular, while the FFM insists that agency can only have uniquely human origins (Bisel, 2009; McPhee & Zaug, 2000; 2009), the Montréal School instead defends the notion that organizations themselves are also agentic (Taylor & van Every, 2000); in other words, for the Montréal school, agency can include non-humans. While the researcher recognizes the great value gained from studying each of the CCO perspectives listed and is grateful for their contributions to theory, the FFM will be most influential in this investigation.

Like any theory, CCO is not without its critiques. CCO has been criticized for having an "organizing bias" (i.e., the assumption that communication facilitates, as opposed to hampers, organizational constitution; Bisel, 2009) and for not addressing materials explicitly—points that have been increasingly remedied in subsequent scholarship (Ashcraft, et al. 2009; Bisel, 2010; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018). Additionally, Sillince (2010) argued that as of yet, CCO, and particularly the FFM, are unable to demonstrate the differences between what is organization and other forms of networking communication, such as financial markets. Finally, research trends demonstrate that all-things-are-not equal among the CCO schools. The Montréal School significantly exceeds publications rates compared to the other CCO perspectives (Koschmann, 2011). Such a point that suggests the FFM is not as heuristically provocative as its rival tradition. As such, additional research is needed to continue to bolster FFM legitimacy and may be a contribution of this study.

The Four Flows Model

For a prescriptive model to be credible, it must be built on valid descriptive theory (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). As such, SEA model was inspired by the tenets of the Four Flows Model (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) of communication constitutes organization (CCO) theory. The FFM, inspired by structuration theory (Giddens, 1979)—a theory of social construction which sought to explain the constitutive nature of social systems and human action—posits organizations are communicatively constituted via the interactive processes of four distinct meaning-making types. Such a variety of meaning-making processes are necessary due to organizational complexity including the various facets of each organization and the audiences to and with which an organization must communicate. Each meaning-making process presents its own unique and important contribution to the constitution of the organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). The types of meaning-making include communication among leaders controlling the organization, between members of the organization, within subgroups of the organizations, and to colleagues outside the organization. According to the FFM, for organizational constitution to take place, all four meaning-making process must be "interrelated and mutually influential" (Bean & Buikema, 2015, p. 517). Such an interrelated and mutually influential nature of systems is indicative of theories which fall within the structurational school.

Based on Max Weber's (1947) interpretive analysis of bureaucracy, the FFM elucidates the communicatively interactive and behavioral processes which organizational members engage in toward the creation of an ideal organization. Reflective of Weber's approach, the authors argue, "Organizations are a social form created and maintained by manifestly and reflexively reifying practices of the members – the members think of, treat, and relate to organizations as real, higher order systems, and make provisions for their survival" (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, p. 31). Weber's interactive and behavioral processes are understood by McPhee and Zaug (2000) as meaning-making processes, which they name "flows" (p. 22) and of which there are four. Each flow singularly and in concert with each other delineate the ways organizational members "think of, treat, and relate to organizations… [and] make provision for their survival" (p. 31). Additionally, the authors employ the word "flow" in solidarity with Deetz and Mumby's (1990) view of organizational constitution, who outline three further clarifications. They argue organizations are not constant and static over time but continually being produced and reproduced, operate within a societal superstructure, and consist of integrated power. As such, if a flow is metaphorically understood as movement of liquid (or in this case communication), It does so while never standing still, always evolving, operating with force but within boundaries. In this manner do the four flows of *membership negotiation*, *self-structuring*, *activity coordination*, and *institutional positioning* (see Figure 2) interact for the constitution and maintenance of organization.

Membership Negotiation

Membership negotiation refers to the internal organizational meaning-making process by which individuals' relationships to the organization are clarified, managed, maintained, and altered. This flow is an identity constructing mechanism whereby the individual comes to understand who they are in relation to the organization and what the organization is to them (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). Membership negotiation is the communicative means used to draw the clear boundary lines concerning who is in and who is out of the organization (Bruscella & Bisel, 2018). The act of ongoing negotiation as "membership" is not understood universally the same across all organizations. For instance, in a for-profit organization, members will consist of employees and investors. In a nonprofit entity, members will consist of employees, but also volunteers, donors, and potentially those who are the focus of the nonprofit's mission. Furthermore, these meaning-making processes are engaged to establish organizational culture and conduct the process of organizational socialization (Bisel, 2010). Within the member interaction, organizational norms are communicated, monitored, and accepted and individuals become a true part of the organization. Procedurally, this process will include such elements as hiring, firing, recruiting, and onboarding.

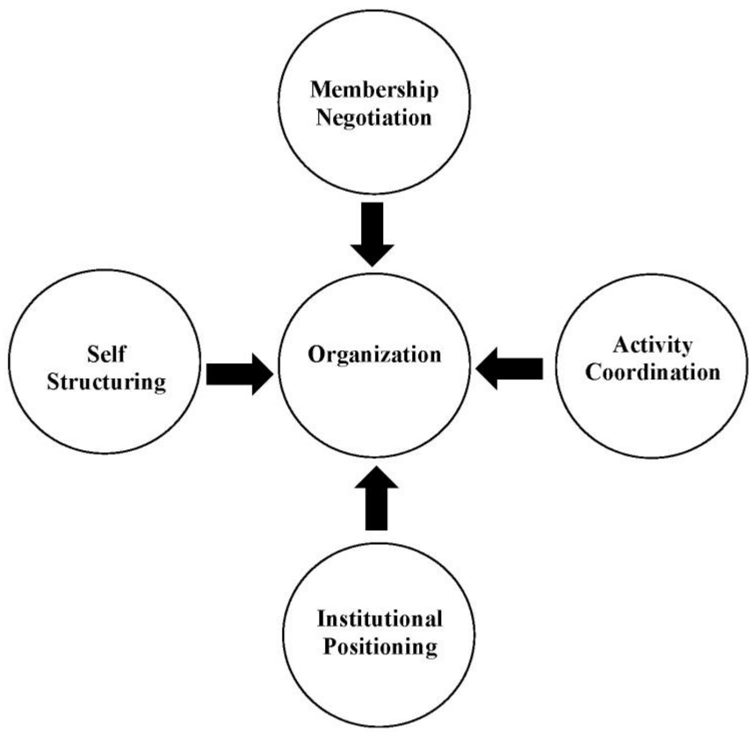
Self-Structuring

Self-structuring is the communicative process by which individual roles, rights, and responsibilities are established within organizations, including "any process that serves to steer the organization or part of it" (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, p. 36). This meaning-making process includes the direction of member time and the allocation of resources, an exercise in reflexive control and design (McPhee & Zaug, 2009), and encompasses division of labor, organizational hierarchy, and oversight. Such work is a coordinated and communicated effort, not naturally occurring via mere social interaction but strategically planned and instigated. The benefit of such work is all members know what is required of them and how they clearly contribute to the organization's ongoing work. Herein, lines of accountability are established, and span of control is understood. As such, self-structuring is a prescriptive rather than emergent process, coordinated via communication between organizational powerbrokers, and accepted by all organizational members, ensuring appropriate systems are in place for production and adequate organizational response for unforeseen circumstances. It is an expression of power that, as the authors explain, "… is unique in that it does not directly concern work, but rather the internal relations, norms, and social entities that are the skeleton for social connection, flexing, and shaping of work processes" (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, p. 36). Meaning-making processes will take the forms of flow-charts, bylaws, strategic plans, job descriptions, and any other formalized control system like budgeting and employee evaluations.

Activity Coordination

Activity coordination is the organizational method for team and individual members, working in concert on tasks they would not be able to complete by themselves (Iverson et al., 2022), toward the entity's "manifest purpose" (McPhee & Zaug, 2000, p. 38). Such movement is at least in part a byproduct of self-structuring, the result of the organization's execution of processes, plans, and policies, but it is also inclusive of the organization's day-to-day operations. This meaning-making process will also emerge organically through member interactions at times while still under the careful oversight of management. As such, activity coordination occurs when members interact concerning the completion of tasks. The first member inquires of a second member to ensure the work of both is complementary. Both parties, understanding the legitimacy of their linked work toward organizational goals, then work together to accomplish their tasks (Iverson, et al., 2022). Furthermore, such coordinated activity is designed to enable the organization to adjust and respond situationally in the face of real-time pragmatic issues. Activity coordination includes both instructions and commands by supervisors (Bisel, 2010) as well as the contributions of subordinates. Pragmatically, activity coordination consists of staff meetings, working group gatherings, memos, and one-off conversations.

Figure 1.



Institutional Positioning

The final flow is institutional positioning, which is the meaning-making process organizations use to relate both inwardly and outwardly designed to lead to the establishment of legitimacy as seen by other community entities within the organization's context. Institutional position is an exercise in identity establishment, external legitimacy (McPhee & Zaug, 2000), and image management (Bisel, 2010). This meaning-making process establishes identity through a comparison process with other organizations within the entity's context while simultaneously positioning the organization as a player in that context (McPhee & Iverson, 2009). Such a process occurs via communication which may look something like, "Our organization is like X in these ways but not these ways, and like Y in this manner but not in those." Furthermore, while functioning toward the constitution of the organization, institutional positioning also contributes to the creation of contextual social networks (Iverson et al., 2022). Through inter-organizational communication, not only are each of the organizations furthering their own constitutive legitimacy, they are also developing broader social systems in which to work and for others to contribute. Such social networks are particularly vital for entrepreneurial endeavors. Institutional positioning examples include marketing and advertising, public events, product orders, and networking events.

Material Considerations

While each of the four flows interact to bring an organization into being and sustain its existence, questions persist concerning the totality of elements needed for organizational existence. One question asked by organizational communication scholars is whether the behaviors are all there is to an organization or are there also components of a material nature? Organizational communication theories, such as FFM, are open to the accusation of excessive social constructionism. According to Burr (2015), "The key tenet of social constructionism is that our knowledge of the world, including our understanding of human beings, is a product of human thought rather than grounded in an observable, external reality" (p. 222). As such, later theorists began making the connections between material and social constitution. For instance, Leonardi and Barley (2008) state:

> materiality matters for theories of technology *and organizing* [emphasis added] because the material properties of artefacts are precisely those tangible resources that provide people with the ability to do old things in new ways and to do thing they could not do before (p. 161).

Or to put it more succinctly, yes, matter matters (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). Ashcraft et al. (2009) outline three commonly discussed and accepted organizational materials as vital, including (a) objects, (b) sites, and (c) bodies. *Objects* are artefacts organizational members interact with and communicate through which have both ideation and material aspects. Such objects include items reflective of the organization's identity, but also technology and organizational documents. *Sites* encompass the location in which organizational life occurs. As such, sites include office spaces, distribution centers, workshops, conference rooms, or any places business is conducted. Finally, *bodies* refer to the people of the organization, the workforce at all levels (Ashcraft et al., 2009). While different from other materials necessary for organizational function, people are nonetheless indispensable components of existence. While each and all these categories of materials are undeniably important for organizational life, each of them stems from an entirely more indispensable material. Where's the money?

Money can purchase an appearance of legitimacy, both for people but also for organizations. Enough money can allow entrepreneurs to "fake it until you make it." As a former social entrepreneur, I can attest that money is of utmost practical importance. So, what role does money play in the constitution of organizations? If money is conceived as a material resource, and I would argue it is the most foundational and important of all material resources for organizational constitution, then Bruscella and Bisel (2018) provide answers to this question in their empirical study examining material consequences on organizational constitution within terror groups. Their research specifically offers three addenda to FFM concerning the role of matter. First, because there is a material aspect to all communication (e.g., emails, satellite links); each of the four flows is at least partially material. For instance, institutional positioning may include the purchasing of advertising space in a local newspaper or television. Activity coordination utilizes the sending of emails to outline the members' approach to a major sales push. Secondly, materials are action facilitators and could be used both to "enable and constrain" (Giddens, 1979, p. 69) any of the four flows. An increase or decrease in material resources would impact members' abilities to carry out organization functions. Finally, members view the presence of materials with significance and in turn assign the organization greater legitimacy as a response to the presence of materials. Such is the idea behind purchasing impressive office buildings, owning state-of-the-art sound equipment, and driving the highest-end and most recent model vehicle. Material presence encourages material investment, whether those materials are money or embodied interest. Ultimately, the addendums demonstrate the need for both social and material aspects of organizational constitution. By doing so, we can accept that any dichotomies or ordering of importance between the two is a dichotomy.

Material resources, as demonstrated, are vitally important in organizations. Entrepreneurial endeavors often require start-up capital from investors as well as the presence of other materials and equipment to operate. There is, however, an additional layer of material importance for *social* entrepreneurs. Depending on the type of social enterprise being launched, ongoing material investment may need to occur throughout the duration of the organization's life. If the organization functions according to business principles as outlined by Fu (2018), then the organization has operational dependance on the development of profit from the for-profit aspects to fund the social focus. As such, the social enterprise relies on the for-profit's ongoing and continual injection of funds to operate. If, however, the organization operates as a classically conceptualized nonprofit entity from either the social innovation or EMES schools of thought (Defourney and Nyssens, 2008; Fu, 2018), then the organization is dependent on regular, constant, and renewable material investment both by members and external community members in the forms of finances and volunteer hours. In either case, reoccurring financial investment is pivotal. To not have such investments will hamper the effects of the four flows. While organizations utilize objects, sites, and bodies to operate (Ashcraft et al., 2009), organizations are most susceptible to cease to exist without money.

The SEA Model

The question becomes is there a constitutive theory-based model which may be looked to by social entrepreneurs for the establishment of social enterprises, particularly volunteer and donor dependent (VDNN) nonprofit organizations? One such recent and potential model is the Seven Entrepreneurial Activities (SEA) model (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). The SEA model is a work of prescriptive theorizing, based on case study, which proposes seven activities vital for the constitution of new entrepreneurial organizations. *Activities* are the focus of the model for important reasons. First, by placing activities at the centerpiece of the model, the SEA model authors push back against theories claiming organizations are the byproduct of a single communication dynamic (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). In short, such CCO theories—often within the Montréal tradition—imply organizational constitution is easy and the SEA model challenges that reductionism (Bisel, 2010). Secondly, the SEA model implies new organization (e.g., social enterprise) is a complex undertaking that requires many facets to "go right" for the entity to form and to survive over time (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). As such, this model contrasts with widespread stereotypes of wunderkind (mostly male) entrepreneurs who accomplish great success by themselves. The social entrepreneur must work in concert with others to accomplish their goals and any "great man" or "great woman" (Gill & Ganesh, 2007) implications or assertions are delusional and limiting.

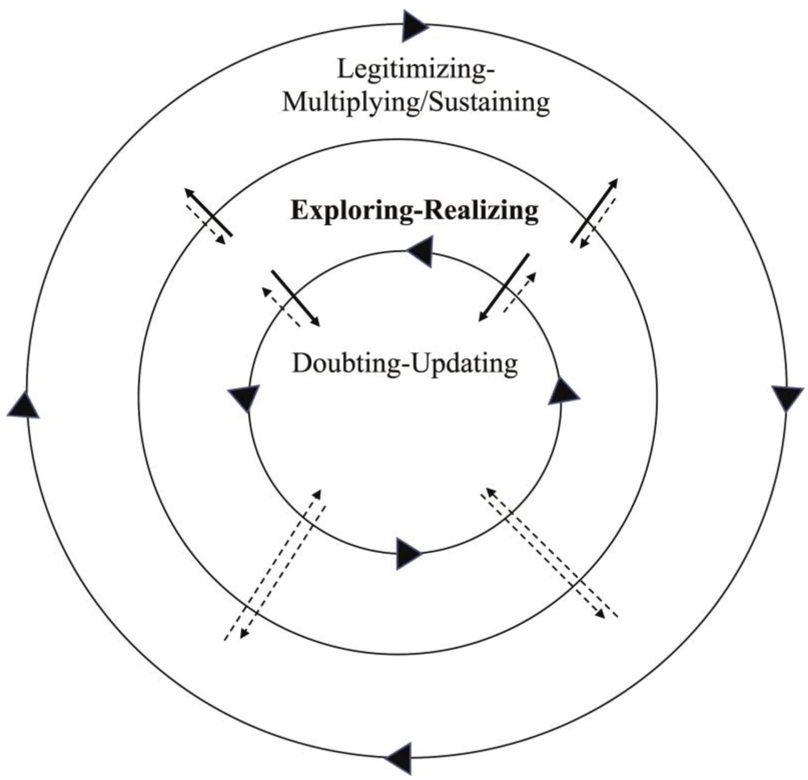
What, then, is the relationship between CCO theory and the SEA model? The SEA model is built on six premises highly influenced by the Four Flows model of CCO theory and are utilized within the SEA model to prescribe how a new organization can be created and maintained (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). The first premise states that *organizations are complex and not reducible to a single communication flow*. As such, McPhee and Zaug (2000) argued the complexity of organizations is too great for any one type of communication to encapsulate the whole. For entrepreneurs, this requires a recognition that they must conduct multiple activities at the same time while also engaging partners to assist in the execution of the activities. The second premise is *the communicative constitution of organizations is difficult.* The difficulty is evidenced by the high failure rate of entrepreneurial endeavors (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). The difficulty should serve as encouragement for entrepreneurs in their success and caution for those who may attempt the endeavor half-heartedly. The third premise states *constitutive organizational leadership will tend to have a distributed quality*. Due to the complex nature of an organization, a small number of people will most likely be unable to conduct the mixing of all four flows, thus the need for a more widely shared leadership approach. The fourth premise argues *internal and external communication both matter to surviving and thriving*. For constitution of the organization to fully occur, activities involving both members and community members must be engaged for the exchange of goods and services, the function of the organization's purpose, and the establishment of organizational legitimacy. The fifth premise is that while *change can happen quickly, it often doesn't*. The implication for entrepreneurs is that patience truly is a virtue, particularly when resources may not be readily available, and legitimacy is still forthcoming. The final premise is *only some, not all, communication is constitutive*. Not all talk is constitutive talk. Only the right talk matters for entrepreneurial organizational establishment (Bisel & Bisel, 2023; Bruscella & Bisel, 2017). The six premises together create a foundation on which the SEA can build the entrepreneurial enterprise.

The seven activities are categorized into three higher order sets (see Figure 1). The model argues all three categories are necessary simultaneously for a strong entrepreneurial enterprise to emerge, and the absence of any one of the three categories will result in a weakened or partial organization, to the point one may wonder whether the organization exists. The three higher orders, each of which will be described in greater detail, are *exploring-realizing*, *doubting-updating*, and *legitimizing-multiplying/sustaining*. Furthermore, the SEA model views organization as an emergent property, which requires the interaction of parts to make up the whole (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). The model therefore infers an entrepreneurial endeavor is the result of the interactive relationship of each of the higher order categories and the activities within. Each higher order is a subpart of the whole, and only when all three parts are engaged and interacting with each other will the entrepreneurial endeavor sufficiently endure enough to become an organization.

Exploring-Realizing: Initiating Organizational Communication

The first higher order category consists of the entrepreneurial activities exploring and realizing. The exploring-realizing categories includes activities vital to initiating organizational construction and are the activities most historically associated with entrepreneurship. This stage of organizational life is about discovery. Furthermore, it is shown in bold in the model to indicate this higher order set serves as the activity initiator for the remaining two sets. Herein, the entrepreneur identifies the needs of others (e.g. customers, clients) and in turn develops valuable good and services as the market demands. From an entrepreneurial perspective, the activities engaged in will often produce revolutionary results, including not only the introduction of novel goods and services but also the creation of entirely new organizations designed to respond to the realized void in the market. These second-order actions are the spark for momentum generation that will empower the new organization's initial forward movement and upward thrust (Bisel & Bisel, 2023).

Figure 2.



Exploring as an entrepreneurial activity is the process of discovering the organizational reason for being – known as *value propositions* – and communicatively retaining the steps to their discovery. Exploring is inclusive of creativity and innovation. During the exploring stage, activities are conducted designed to investigate whether perceived needs can be realized, and if so, establishing the need as a reason for being. Realizing, in turn, is an activity for the actualization of the value propositions. Realizing entrepreneurial activities are endeavors which require trial and error, teasing, testing, and learning from failures. The process is neither clean nor linear but is often an exercise in two-steps-forward-one-step-back experimentations. Ultimately, the SEA model argues that exploring and realizing are constitutive of each other. Together they form an organization's identity. In the absence of one however, the other cannot stand alone. If a perceived need cannot be realized then the proposition has no value, and if an activity is able to be enacted but has no organizational value, the exercise is of no import and the entrepreneurial efforts—and organizational constitution—end abruptly (Bisel & Bisel, 2023).

Doubting-Updating: Internal Organizational Communication

As exploring-realizing activities develop organizational movement and momentum, the second higher order of doubting-updating introduces activities designed to the enable the fledgling entity to "be established, survive, and thrive" (Bisel & Bisel, 2023, p. 36). Doubting-updating activities are first-order, internally focused actions, communicating concerning the identification and repair of organizational issues. Such activities also facilitate an organization's ability to make the most of new opportunities when they arise. Doubting-updating activities include actions such as system testing, process challenges, after action reports, market analyzation, quality control, and other activities that help identify shortcomings, deficiencies, and favorable circumstances (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).

Doubting, the third entrepreneurial activity, is so named because it requires the knowledge that (a) what seems to currently be working for the organization may not actually be working, and (b) what is working in this phase of organizational life may not continue to work or continue to be the most effective approach moving forward. Bisel and Bisel (2023) explain that doubting is "maintaining a mindset of confident uncertainty" (p. 44). Such a stance requires one be both open to learning and adaptation while simultaneously "committed to the notion that learning is indeed needed" (p. 44). Seemingly, doubting, as expressed through the SEA model is a posture toward learning which takes a position of continual growth. Confidence is therefore gained through addressing issues and accepting risks as they arise, while uncertainty works through the knowledge that all responses to opportunities and challenges are "bound by time and perspective" (p. 44).

If doubting is being open to opportunities and challenges, then updating includes the activities which are the responses to the opportunities and challenges. Updating is the process by which the organization is made stronger by engaging activities which bring it up to date within its environment. Activities enacted to address weaknesses and invest in strengths are updating activities. The authors are clear however that change is a biproduct of updating, not itself an updating entrepreneurial activity (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). Change for the sake of change can, after all, be damaging to the organization. Furthermore, updating and doubting are constitutive of each other in the same way exploring and realizing are. If a weakness is identified, it must be addressed. Implementing a new system where the old system was functioning perfectly is a wasted endeavor.

Legitimizing-Multiplying/Sustaining: External Organizational Communication

Once the new organization is established and operational, the SEA model contends that activities must be enacted to build trust in the organization's ability to deliver on its value proposition which it proposes to provide in quality ways (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). The legitimizing-multiplying/sustaining activities are first-order and external-focused activities designed to increase stakeholder perceptions of the organization's legitimacy. This is a recurrent yet transitionary stage, during which customers, clients, and others are dependent on the entity and not merely invested in the entrepreneur. Herein, the organization becomes bona fide, larger than any one individual, treated as such, and develops its own identity with the public. Activities in this higher order include marketing and advertising, networking, branding, as well as other significant and minute activities which serve to create a positive external image.

Legitimizing, the fifth entrepreneurial activity, consists of actions designed to develop "taken-for-granted consensus from key stakeholders that an organization exists and should be treated as such" (Bisel & Bisel, 2023, p. 49). Legitimizing activities build credibility within the organization's environment, including credibility with investors, strategic partners, and potential customers and clients. Such credibility is only established when community members recognize and accept the presence of an organization, not merely the efforts of an individual. Multiplying activities involve, as the authors put it, "growing growth" (p. 50). Growing growth is the process of "prioritizing additions which have the potential to add additions" (p. 50). Such is the difference between training a class with ten trainees or adding an employee who will train five new classes of ten trainees each. Finally, sustaining activities are actions employed to maintain organizational taken-for-grantedness. These activities ensure that resources remain available and can be counted on despite some disruption, and that stakeholders stay invested.

As with the previous two higher orders, legitimizing-multiplying/sustaining also represent a constitutive relationship. This higher order however represents a shift in approach, operating as a combined set. The activities are so intertwined because they represent a vital feedback loop for the ongoing well-being of the organization. For instance, the more legitimate an organization is seen, the easier it is for the organization to acquire a loan or purchase property. Reciprocally, a new purchase of property makes the organization seem more legitimate. Furthermore, the more legitimate an organization is seen by stakeholders, the more multiplying activities may need to be deployed. The authors note however that it is possible that multiplying activities may be engaged in *too much too soon*. In such cases, they argue that legitimizing-sustaining activities will need to supplant the multiplying activities to bring the organization back into wellbeing.

The SEA model posits that when each of the seven entrepreneurial activities proposed are present and interrelate, the result will be a roadmap toward successful for-profit entrepreneurship. Will the SEA model do the same however for entrepreneurial nonprofit organizations? Or are the two types of organizations sufficiently different as to require adjustment?

Research Questions

The focus of this inquiry is whether the seven entrepreneurial activities (SEA) model (Bisel & Bisel, 2023) serves as a credible prescriptive approach for the constitution of new *social* entrepreneurial organization (Austin et al., 2006). Recall the SEA model is an extension of the four flows model (FFM: McPhee & Zaug, 2000) of communication constitutes organization (CCO) theory. The SEA model was developed in reference to for-profit business organizations and has yet to be confirmed as credible for the creation of new social enterprise. Therefore, I ask, do business entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs encounter the same types of challenges during the organizational constitution process? Are the same emphases required for social entrepreneurial enterprises as business enterprises, or do adjustments need to be made? Are there entrepreneurial activities unique to social entrepreneurs not captured by the SEA model? As such, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What entrepreneurial practices were important in the origination of a social entrepreneurial venture (i.e., Sole Mission)?

RQ2: What entrepreneurial practices were important to maintain and reproduce the organization (i.e., Sole Mission) over its history?

RQ3: In what ways does Sole Mission's organizational history align with or diverge from SEA Model, and what are the implications for social entrepreneurship?

Methods

Research Context

Sole Mission is a 501(c)(3) nontaxable charity located in Conroe, TX. Started in response to growing need among impoverished communities, the stated mission is "giving new well fitted shoes to children in poverty across the US" (Sole Mission, 2024, para. 1). To do so, they partner with other nonprofit philanthropic organizations, faith-based institutions, and several corporate sponsors to provide shoes, socks, and other services to disenfranchised community members without charge. Sole Mission provides their services through community shoe distributions conducted at schools, community centers, and houses of worship. In addition to shoes, Sole Mission also makes available counseling services through state certified licensed professional counselors, and functions as a disaster response agency with certified crisis management experts. Sole Mission was founded in 2008 by Alisa and Kelly Ward, and they continue to lead the corporation today. In 2011, Sole Mission separated from its original umbrella organization Rural Compassion and has maintained and ongoing and integral relationship since. Sole Mission also maintains organizational affiliation with the Assemblies of God Christian denomination and the founders both hold chaplaincy endorsements from the denomination.

While Christian denominational affiliation is present, Sole Mission does not engage in any form of proselytizing. The founders consider Sole Mission to be a ministry of compassion, rooted in the words of Jesus concerning serving the "least of these" (*The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, 1989, Matthew 25). Organizational leaders publicly reject strategies which they believe to be a "bait and switch" approach and will not allow partners to use the shoes as a "carrot" to require recipients to sit and listen to a gospel presentation before receiving shoes. They also instruct their volunteers during the training process that they are prohibited from attempting to proselytize while giving shoes. If a volunteer is observed engaging in such practices, Sole Mission leaders will pull them aside, correct, and retrain before allowing the volunteer to continue. It is a value proposition of Sole Mission that the volunteers be "Jesus with skin on" and the gospel presentation the guests receive is demonstrated in the distribution of socks and shoes. Denominational leaders, volunteers, and donors are aware of this communication norm and continue their support of Sole Mission

Sole Mission is a social entrepreneurial organization functioning with *grassroots*, or bottom-up local volunteer driven (Uphoff, 1993), approach. The organization retains two full-time paid staff members (i.e., the founding social entrepreneurs) and two unpaid staff members. The nonprofit utilizes 35 regular volunteers, and over 1,700 event volunteers who invest more than 6,500 volunteer hours annually. Additionally, Sole Mission is funded completely through donations from individuals, houses of worship, and civic organizations. All shoes are either donated by community members or purchased new through donor funds. Since its founding, over 820,000 pairs of shoes have been distributed. Socks are provided through a corporate sponsorship with Bombas Apparel, which furnishes 40,000 pairs of socks annually. In 2019, Sole Mission was featured in an episode of the Facebook TV show "Returning the Favor" hosted by Mike Rowe. Organizational operations, including inventory storage and distribution training, occur in a 4,500 square foot outreach center.

Sole Mission was an ideal organization in which to investigate social entrepreneurialism, the constitutive approach to organizational ontology, and the SEA model. The organization fits clearly within the definition of a social innovation organization (Austin et al., 2006). At the time of writing, Sole Mission was in its sixteenth year of operation and has an established record of longevity. As a sixteen-year-old organization, there was ample data and available stakeholders with which to converse to develop an organizational lifespan. Noting the longevity of Sole Mission is important as 12% of nonprofits fail to exist after five years and 30% of nonprofits no longer exist after 10 years (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2021). Furthermore, as this investigation is in part an attempt to confirm the applicability of the SEA Model to nonprofit organizations, examining an established entity with a track-record of missional success was the best possible scenario to evaluate for the presence, absence, or modifications of the activities outlined with the SEA Model.

Procedures

For this study, I used a historical case study approach to examine the efficacy of the SEA model to characterize the creation and maintenance of a social entrepreneurial organization accurately, namely, Sole Mission. Historical case study approach has been used previously to investigate organizations in operation (Bisel et al., 2017). Furthermore, this investigation is based on Berg's (2001) framework for historical case studies, which includes investigating past activities and their relationship to present activities to understand the organization in a meaningful way. To conduct research with Sole Mission, I embedded as a volunteer and conducted ethnographic field research within the organization for six weeks in the role of participant observer (Gold, 1958). In this role, "the researcher becomes more involved with the insiders' central activities" (Baker, 2006, p. 177) attempting to understand what it is like to be a member of the organization to understand it better (Schwartz & Schwartz, 1955). The constant presence and friendly approach gained the trust of volunteers and enlightened me to information that one-off visits and a more distanced posture could not afford (Takyi, 2015). Finally, the participant vantage point allowed me to identify both the boundary conditions and applicability of the SEA model.

To complete the organizational life history, I utilized ethnographic research coupled with semi-structured interviews (Appendix A). Ethnography is the systematic observation and documentation of the cultural context from which individuals draw to make sense of their lived experiences and find meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Fieldnotes consist of documenting, describing, and interpreting the symbolic qualities of communication as the performance of social action. They are shorthand reconstruction of events and conversations had in the field, specifically various events, and the associations they evoke (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The notes include first impressions, key events or incidents, events and incidents community members find significant or important, and important statements (Reyes, 2020). Fieldnotes, once transcribed from handwritten to typed notes, were organized chronologically based on the event from which they were gathered (i.e., packing party, distribution, fundraising). Thus, conducting ethnographic research enabled firsthand observations of the communication processes under investigation within their natural ecology. This methodological approach is designed to generate theory, is guided by research questions, and functions as a result of considerable time spent in the scene. Ethnography is about being able to render an authentic culture performance though careful cultural study (Phillipsen, 1975). To that end, one valued feature of ethnography is thick description (Geertz, 1973), which serves to communicate the contextual significance of social practices for the performers being observed and can aid in transferability of findings (Creswell, 2014). As a result, the ethnographer should be able to explain the context of behavior so that behavior is meaningful to an outsider.

Data Collection

Practical mechanisms for data collection were as follows. To make attendees aware of my status as a researcher, and in keeping with institutional review board oversight and good research ethics practices, I wore a nametag indicating my role and was publicly identified at each event during Sole Mission team introductions. Furthermore, an IRB approved script announcing the presence of a researcher was read at the beginning of each event attended. Additionally, signs were posted containing my photo and the IRB approved script at the volunteer registration table as well as in various high-traffic locations at the distribution sites. Per IRB instructions, no direct engagement with Sole Mission beneficiaries was permitted for research purposes. Direct engagement via unstructured, conversation-based interviews with adult Sole Mission volunteers as well as other community members for research purposes did occur. Participant responses to these interviews are recorded within fieldnotes.

Observations Research Sites

I embedded with Sole Mission from the middle of May 2024 until near the end of June the same year. At the conclusion of the ethnographic fieldwork with Sole Mission, more than 120 hours of field observation were conducted, producing 40 pages of typed, single-spaced field notes. During this period, the I engaged with leaders daily, participating in various meetings, listening in on organizational discussions, and observing day-to-day operations. The executive director granted unfettered access to all aspects of organizational life with some conversations being audio recorded and others collected via fieldnotes. Being consistently onsite allowed me to function as a participant-observer in twelve “packing parties.” Packing parties are two-to-three-hour gatherings of volunteers at the Sole Mission warehouse who prepare shoes, socks, and other services for distributions. During the packing parties, field notes were collected as I participated in distribution packing activities, observed the actions of other volunteers, listened to conversations, and spoke with volunteers about their experiences with Sole Mission. Packing activities included collecting the number of pairs of socks and shoes in the correct sizes for the upcoming shoe distribution, placing them in bags or boxes, as well as collecting other items used during the distributions, such as shoehorns, runner sheets, clipboards, hand sanitizer, and feet measuring rulers. All distribution items are packed and placed on a pallet to be loaded in the Sole Mission trailer or to await pick-up by a partner entity. If the items are to be shipped, they are palleted within a large cardboard shipping container for the shipping company to retrieve.

Furthermore, I was present as a participant-observer for three shoe distributions: Houston and San Antonio, Texas and Brooklyn, New York. Each of these distributions included volunteer training, event set-up and tear-down, in addition to distributing socks and shoes. During each of these events I wrote field notes and took photos as well as observed and participated in the trainings, helped set-up, directed volunteers, spoke with volunteers about their experience, and spoke with the site location hosts of the events. The Houston event occurred at a church in a neighborhood known as the Fifth Ward. The Fifth Ward is a historically African American neighborhood, and the distribution site was a predominately African American church. This event was in partnership with the local church as well as an urban ministry group from San Antonio, both of whom provided volunteers. Local law enforcement also volunteered their time for safety and to direct traffic. In addition to socks and shoes, meals were also provided to distribution recipients. The San Antonio event functioned similarly to the Houston distribution. Site partnership was again with a local church in an impoverished neighborhood. Volunteers were again provided from the local church and the urban ministry group. The final event in Brooklyn, New York, was different from the other two events. This distribution occurred at a local outreach center in a neighborhood of former affluence but that is now home to several hotels which the city and state converted to migrant living facilities. The migrants living in these housing locations were the primary beneficiary group for the distribution. Furthermore, most volunteers were adults and teenagers from other states who were preset as part of a summer Christian service trip. Owing to the small building space, training was altered and offered outdoors and in a truncated manner to account for a schedule provided by the onsite coordinators and outside of the control of Sole Mission leadership.

Additionally, two fundraising events were attended, providing observations of the ways donations are collected, and regular donors are recruited. One of the donation events was a vacation bible school being held at a local Baptist church. Most of the donations were from children participating in the bible school with additional donations provided by church members who received information about Sole Mission through church communication mechanisms. The other event was a monthly meeting of ministers affiliated with the Assemblies of God in the north Houston area. During both events, Sole Mission leaders spoke about organizational values and told stories to motivate giving in age-appropriate ways and with varying calls to action.

Interviews

The attainment of further information occurred via semi-structured formal interviews (N = 36), with some interviewees being interviewed multiple times. Specifically, total participants (N = 20) included staff (n = 4), board members (n = 5), regular volunteers (n = 3), and community and corporate partners (n = 8). Interviews were conducted either in-person, over the phone, or via Zoom. At the start of each interview, I obtained consent using IRB-approved language. All interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 13 and 74 minutes. Interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service, producing 326 pages of data. As previously mentioned, some organizational leaders were interviewed multiple times on a variety of topics to attain a holistic understanding of Sole Mission’s life history and operations. For a list of sample questions posed to disparate interviewee groups, see Appendix A.

Additionally, I was provided access to dozens of essential organizational and legal documents. The collection of various types of historical and current data allows for an explanation of the functions and work of the organization in a story resembling a tapestry (Berg, 2001). Finally, 302 digital photographs were taken by the researcher at various locations. These photographs contain imagery of the sites, including helpful reminders of the environments and events observed. Per IRB guidelines, no beneficiaries of services nor any minors, including volunteers, were photographed.

Data Analysis

A stepwise approach was taken to inductive data analysis. In the first stage, a timeline of Sole Mission's existence from inception to present day was created using organizational documents and portions of in-depth interviews. I use this historical recreation of events to portray the evolution of the organization over time and elucidate the actions which served as triggers to such evolutions. Furthermore, the timeline serves as a strong corroborative aid to establish the facts and sequences for the organizational life history. In the second stage, a diachronic analysis—study in change over time—was conducted using the timeline, organizational documents, portions of in-depth interviews and field notes, to order the data into a narrative organizational life history. A portion of the analysis was conducted during data collection. This analysis occurred because access to some of the organizational members was limited once my time in the organization concluded. Additionally, data, such as data provided to me in the form of existing organizational documents, was useful in the cross-checking of analysis. This approach is outlined by Barge (2014) who adapted Silverman's (2010) concept of progressive focusing. This lifespan approach tells the story of the Sole Mission and allows for a better understanding of its communicative constitution and functioning, organizational evolution, and identify the presence or lack thereof of theoretical elements during data analysis. The lifespan approach also facilitates an opportunity for organizational comparison with the SEA model. Formal interview transcripts were organized chronologically.

Once organized, all data, including that which is a part of the life history, as well as recorded via fieldnotes, and transcripts of formal interviews was analyzed utilizing a pragmatic iterative approach. Tracy (2013) describes the pragmatic iterative process as alternating between "emergent, readings of the data and an etic use of existing models, explanations, and theories" (p. 184). This approach "encourages reflection upon the active interests, current literature, granted priorities, and various theories the researcher brings to the data" (pp. 184). Throughout analysis, literature concerning CCO and FFM (Bean & Buikema, 2015; Boivin, Brummans, & Barker, 2017; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018) as well as social entrepreneurship literature (Abebe et al., 2020; Alvord et al., 2004; Schumate, et al., 2014; Schumate & O'Connor, 2010) were regularly consulted. Primary cycle coding began with a close re-reading of the constructed organizational timeline, organizational documents, and interview transcripts that contributed to the life history's construction and continued with an examination of the formal interviews not reviewed in the creation of the life history and fieldnotes.

Early analysis was aided by the RQ's and theoretical frameworks, but care was taken so as not to overshadow emergent themes and cultural performances. Primary cycle coding yielded twenty-two open codes for RQ1 with fourteen open codes emerging from the data for RQ2. Owing to the theory driven nature of RQ3, the number of open codes observed were limited to model divergence and numbered four codes. Upon completing rounds of axial and focused coding efforts, I settled on three codes for RQ1, two codes for RQ2, and three codes for RQ3.

Credibility Check Strategies

To check the credibility of the findings, validation strategies recommended by Creswell (2014) were utilized. Strategies included peer-review process, thick description, member checks, and reporting researcher positionality. First, early findings were shared with a senior scholar to serves as a peer reviewer by challenging early theorizing, helping prevent too rapid of analysis. Additionally, the presence of the peer-reviewer assisted in assuring a compelling interpretation of the data is synthesized and presented (Lucas & D'Enbeau, 2013). Second, a thick description of the analyzed data is conveyed, including direct quotes from participants which affirm the findings (Merriam, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson, et al. 1993). Member checks were conducted by submitting initial findings to four participants and confirming the validity of historical timelines generated during analysis and interpretations (Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2010). Finally, As the researcher on this study, I was a social entrepreneur for ten years. I am friends with the entrepreneurs under observation and a financial donor to the organization. Some researchers (Tracy, 2013) encourage the declaration of positionality as a form of reflexivity and to give readers insight into analysis and findings.

Findings

This section reports findings from the case study of Sole Mission, which describes and explains social entrepreneurial practices employed by the organization's members over its 16-year history. Analysis of retrospective accounts provided by the founders, ethnographic field notes, and past organizational documents contributed to the creation of a timeline through which to view the organization historically, unfolding over time. Furthermore, interviews with Sole Mission's originating social entrepreneurs, organizational stakeholders and leaders, community partners and supporters, as well as volunteers produced rich responses. Analysis of responses revealed identifiable entrepreneurial practices, which are reported in the following section.

Finally, construction of an inductively derived organizational life history of Sole Mission revealed significant convergence as well as notable divergence from the seven entrepreneurial activities (SEA) model.

By way of summary, this chapter contains three sub-sections of findings to answer each of the three research questions (RQs). In the first section, to answer RQ1, a narrative retelling of Sole Mission's origin history (0-2 years) is relayed, followed by a discussion identifying entrepreneurial practices observed from the early timeline. Three initiating entrepreneurial practices are: (a) *sharing the story of shoes*, (b) *developing necessary organizational elements*, and (c) *conducting early shoe distributions*. Similarly, the next sub-section answers RQ2 by first providing a narrative description of Sole Mission's history (3-16 years) and then identifying two ongoing maintenance and reproduction practices from the second phase of the organization's life. The maintenance and reproduction entrepreneurial practices are: (a) *acquiring and utilizing partnerships*, and (b) *creating and implementing processes*. Furthermore, the first sub-section of RQ3 is answered by demonstrating convergence of each of the SEA model higher-order set (i.e., Exploring-Realizing, Doubting-Updating, and Legitimizing-Multiplying/Sustaining) throughout Sole Mission's life history. Finally, the latter half of RQ3 is addressed by identifying three important divergences from the SEA model, due to the unique nature of volunteer and donor dependent nonprofit (VDDN) social enterprise organization. Specifically, those divergences from the SEA model include: (a) *affinity opportunities*, (b) *donors not investors*, and (c) *volunteers not employees*. The following chapter elaborates on these findings.

Starting out on the right foot: Synopsis of Sole Mission's origin (0-2 years)

Sole Mission originated as an organization over the roughly three-year period between late 2008-2011. According to Alisa and Kelly Ward, Sole Mission's co-founders, they first noticed the importance of shoes while employed at Rural Compassion. Rural Compassion is a nonprofit organization, under the auspices of the Assemblies of God Christian denomination, that, at the time, assisted impoverished Americans in rural communities by distributing various donated goods and services. According to the founders, shoes were one of the most requested items at the events. After observing the demand for shoes at several events, the founders recall a conversation occurring between themselves and other leaders at Rural Compassion concerning a response to the shoe need. The founders reported that this conversation resulted in the Rural Compassion executive director assigning what was then called the "shoe project" to Alisa Ward to create and manage as a new Rural Compassion initiative.

According to the founders, for the shoe project to get started, they focused efforts in several areas. First, the founders began talking about shoes within their existing financial support networks to relay their need for financial capital. Rural Compassion is a donor-dependent nonprofit whose employees all raised their own salaries through donor networks. This being the case, no income was allocated or accrued for the new project. As such, the founders were responsible for raising the funds necessary for the organization to operate. To acquire funding, the founders recall sharing the need for shoes and their plan to distribute them within their existing denominational networks. Alisa Ward contacted the South Texas Assemblies of God women's ministries department and spoke to the secretary, who was a friend, about their initial vision. According to the founder, the secretary relayed the information to her boss, the assistant director of the organization. Within a mere ten minutes the assistant director of the organization called Alisa and asked her to explain the vision thoroughly. Alisa remembers that at the conclusion of the call, the assistant director said, "This sounds really good. I'm going to talk to the women's director and see what we can do." Within a couple of days, the assistant director called Alisa again. Alisa recalls being told on the phone:

> Okay, so here's what we want to do. We want you to come in two weeks. If you can get here, we'll take care of your expenses. You just get here, because we're having our women's conference, and there'll be anywhere from 700 to 800 women here. We're going to pledge $10,000 to you over the next year.

Alisa attended the event in March 2009 and shared the need and how they planned to meet it with the attendees. The attendees donated an additional $5,000.

The donations from South Texas allowed the founders to plan and host a “kick-off” luncheon with Rural Compassion during the Assemblies of God’s biannual conference in August 2009. In contrast to the March conference, this “grand opening” event to announce Sole Mission as a national initiative was an opportunity to ask for support and partnership with a national audience. The appeal was likely bolstered by the presumptive endorsement and credibility afforded by the strategic affiliation with the Assemblies of God. To acquire new partnerships, the founders recall leveraging existing relationships with others in their networks. After the event, Kelly described “working their contacts,” to expand Sole Mission’s partnership and volunteer base. According to Alisa, these efforts were effective, recalling, “Most of our early volunteers were from churches that we went and spoke to.”

While simultaneously communicating with others about their new organization, the founders recalled spending six months making “conscious decisions about everything that we did,” while generating and implementing important elements of the organization’s operation. After originally referring to the initiative as *the shoe project*, the team proposed and eventually agreed to change the name to *Sole Mission*. The founders report they decided on the name Sole

Mission because God's mission is souls, and their mission was to put soles on souls. They also recall creating brochures and other promotional materials. These materials served to announce the existence of the new organization, generate interest in their work, and provide contact information for churches interested in hosting shoe distributions, when they were distributed at conferences and mailed to churches within their denominational network.

Additionally, the founders recall how the establishment of policies were important to the origin of Sole Mission, in that early policies outlined best practices and organizational governance. Organizational documents collected from that era outline best practices, including policies concerning intake, such as how to receive, process, and account for donations, as well as how to accept, inventory, and store shoes. Policies also were developed for output, including how to process requests for shoes, choose sites for shoe distributions, and distribute shoes.

By the Fall of 2009, Sole Mission began conducting shoe distributions. According to the founders, the initial policies and procedures concerning acquiring and distributing shoes were established, but the shoes had to be physically obtained, inventoried, and stored. The founders recall "carving out" a small section of the Rural Compassion warehouse for shoe storage. Once the shoes entered the warehouse, the team recalled they sorted the shoes by gender and size and placed the shoes by pairs in rolling canvas bins purchased from a recently bankrupt t-shirt company. It was from this warehouse space and out of bins that Sole Mission and Rural Compassion employees packed shoes for the first distributions. Organizational documents record that in its first year of existence, Sole Mission conducted 15 shoe distributions in Texas, Arkansas, Ohio, and Missouri. In total, 5,000 shoes were given to children Sole Mission's first year. Because Sole Mission was still an initiative of Rural Compassion, distribution locations were limited, only occurring at churches in rural communities of 10,000 or fewer people, or on Native American reservations.

RQ1: What entrepreneurial practices were important in the origination of a social entrepreneurial venture (i.e., Sole Mission)?

The previous section provides a synopsis of Sole Mission's origin during the organization's first two years of existence as relayed by interviews with the founders and early organizational stakeholders. Review of organizational documents from that period tended to corroborate their reconstruction of events. This section in turn identifies entrepreneurial practices which the data sources indicate were present and important during the organization's originating period. These SE practices include (a) *sharing the story of shoes*, (b) *developing necessary organizational elements*, and (c) *conducting early shoe distributions*. For a visual overview of the research findings enumerated in this section, see Table 1 on page 89.

"Sharing the story" of shoes

Close analysis of the origin synopsis revealed three SE practices were involved in the formation of Sole Mission. The first practice included communicating a compelling description of why the organization was needed, what the SE was, and what the SE could become. The compelling description, which the researcher refers to as *sharing the story of shoes*, appears to have been communicated with others to achieve three primary purposes: fundraising, developing new organizational partners, and recruiting volunteers.

Fundraising is the systematic gathering of the financial capital required to enact the organization's reasons-for-being (Hommerova & Severova, 2019) and a requisite activity for donor-dependent entrepreneurial endeavors. The Sole Mission's founders' ability to communicate their reason-for-being to others was effective, resulting in consistent and significant donations in the organization's origin period. When examining the organizational life history, it appears the founders "shared the story" of shoes within their own networks with great success, indicated by the receipt significant financial donations.

Analysis indicated the founders of Sole Mission "shared the story" of shoes strategically, beginning with those already inside their relational networks, to build new organizational partnerships and to recruit volunteers. The intentional searching for partnerships and volunteers, including utilizing preexisting individual and organizational relationships is a critical activity in which nonprofit leaders must engage (Gray & Purdy, 2018).

Existing relationships appear to have initiated opportunities for new relationships. The Wards recall "leveraging opinion leaders" which they understood as utilizing the people they already knew to introduce them to people they did not know. This practice appears to have been effective among networks where the opinion leaders had longevity, a characteristic Kelly called, "the grey hair effect." Such endorsements seemingly resulted in the early development of interorganizational partnerships. It also seems the Sole Mission founders leveraged existing relationships to recruit new volunteers. According to the data, early volunteers were largely attained from the churches in the founder's existing relational network. A significant number of volunteers were enlisted from other aspects of their lives, such as school clubs in which their children were involved. Whether building organizational partnerships or recruiting volunteers, it is apparent from the data that "sharing the story" of shoes resulted in the acquisition of needed funds and volunteer personnel.

Developing necessary organizational elements

The origin of the VDDN appears to also have been furthered by the early development of necessary organizational elements. Such organizational elements, including the creation and implementation of the name, promotional materials, and various internal operational policies, seems to have been integral to the organization's ability to function. The name connected to and conveyed Sole Mission's reason-for-being. Internal organizational documents included intake policies which enabled the organization to systematically collect and appropriately allocate shoes and other materials. Organizational documents also included outtake policies which established requirements for event partnership and the distribution of shoes, including mechanisms for product transportation and event programming. From the organizational records, it appears such mundane practices were necessary at this time in Sole Mission's history to ensure operational efficiency and normality.

Conducting early shoe distributions

The collected data indicates that conducting early shoe distributions was the final SE practice that contributed to Sole Mission's origin. Distributing shoes to children is the organization's stated reason-for-being (Sole Mission, 2024). Organizational records show that Sole Mission immediately enacted the stated reason-for-being and conducted multiple shoe distributions within the first year of operation. According to the founders, the act of conducting distributions helped decide how distributions should be conducted, claiming they were "doing distributions to develop the system." Sole Mission did not wait until they developed all their systems, raised all the money they believed they needed, or recruited all the volunteers they sought before beginning to distribute shoes. Instead, they appear to have *learned by doing*, a point that will be of continued focus in section three of this chapter (i.e., RQ 3 findings).

Furthermore, in speaking with the founders and volunteers, these shoe distributions seemed to serve as an early motivation for involvement and investment for both organizational leaders and volunteers. Kelly, specifically mentioned the shoe distributions as an example of motivation, saying, "The constant motivation are the distributions. Alisa and I decided early on that we were going to be at as many distributions a year as we could." Police Chief Angela Dorsey of Angleton, Texas, a distribution volunteer, shared that in her opinion the distributions help communities "thrive," thus motivating her participation. Such stimuli created momentum and provided more evidence for organizational need which was in turn shared with others, i.e., Dorsey recruits several officers in her employ to volunteer at distributions. It appears that engaging in practices which fulfill the organization's reason-for-being encouraged and catalyzed leaders and volunteers.

Walking on: Synopsis of Sole Mission's organizational history (3-16 years)

By 2011, organizational records show Sole Mission averaged between 15-20 shoe distributions annually. These distributions were events that partnered with local churches or schools in various rural communities across the country. Information about the distributions were deiminated by the community partner prior to the event to generate interest and gauge the number of potential people who would be served. The founders, however, reported feeling constrained by the limitations of Rural Compassion. At the time, Sole Mission was receiving requests for shoe distributions in urban and suburban communities in addition to requests from rural areas. Rural Compassion however, only operated in rural American communities of fewer that 10,000 citizens. As such, Sole Mission was not permitted to conduct distributions in larger or urban areas. Furthermore, the founders remember that decisions were being made administratively, particularly concerning the use of funds, in the best interest of Rural Compassion but which the founders believed were inhibiting the work of Sole Mission. Such decisions included distribution locations, but also where funding could and would be allocated. Funds which had been raised for Sole Mission were reportedly being withheld. According to the founders, Sole Mission had “outgrown” Rural Compassion, and began separating Sole Mission from Rural Compassion, a process that was completed in October 2011.

Transitioning to an independent entity resulted in several organizational changes. First, the founders needed new office space. To that point, the founders were also the only staff members of Sole Mission. To keep costs down, they worked from their home. Inventory also needed to be moved out of the Rural Compassion warehouse. The founders recall transporting the shoe inventory and equipment to a monthly rental facility for six-months. Eventually, they acquired a 2,000 square foot warehouse space, moving their inventory and purchasing additional equipment needed to operate from this new location. Finally, Sole Mission leaders completed the legal process for the organization to become a recognized nonprofit corporation by the U.S. tax code. The formal recognition of nonprofit status included the creation and adoption of organizational bylaws, which defined the legal structure of the entity, and integrated legal board members as additional formal leaders.

According to Sole Mission’s annual year-end reports, from the years 2011-2018, Sole Mission grew the number of shoe distributions to thirty distributions annually. After separating from Rural Compassion, Sole Mission expanded distribution locations to also include urban and suburban communities. The increase in the number of distributions appears to be primarily due this change. The founders also attributed the organization’s growth to having total control over the organization as a whole. Since Sole Mission leaders were now able to act in what they considered to be the best interest of Sole Mission, administrative and financial decisions were apparently made without outside considerations. Such decisions not only allowed for an expansion in service locations, but limitations concerning the use of funds and other processes were removed or altered to empower leaders to pursue organizational ends.

Continued organizational learning apparently helped make distribution events more efficient, also contributing to the organization's growth by utilizing more volunteers, providing better service to the beneficiaries, and simplifying the distribution process. Sole Mission leaders learned from previous distributions, adapted, and adjusted the ways shoes were given to children at distribution events. Organizational documents and the founders' recollection describe how early distribution events placed all the shoes in the center of the room for parents and children to rummage. Over time, distributing evolved into a much more highly organized and structured event. In-depth trainings concerning the various event elements were added for volunteers before the distributions started. Distributions began to include "shoe rooms" where shoes were sorted into size and by gender assignment. The distribution space was organized into 15 stations evenly spread throughout the room where children are provided new socks and brought shoes to try on based on the child's size and communicated interests. Through trial-and-error, stations were provided with kits that included foot measuring sticks, shoehorns, foot wipes, and small trash cans. By developing these processes, Sole Mission leaders say they consistently average distributing 125 pairs of shoes an hour.

In 2018, Sole Mission's offices and distribution center moved from Springfield, Missouri to Conroe, Texas. According to the founders, the move was predicated by the death of their daughter-in-law in a house fire and a desire to assist in raising their grandchildren. The founders declared their intention to move to the South Texas District Council of the Assemblies of God, the regional ministry network in which the founders are ordained, and which governs the geographic area that encompasses the community to which the founders moved. South Texas leadership in turn donated a 7,500 square foot former church building to serve as Sole Mission's new offices and warehouse space. The building had been sitting vacant for a while and South

Texas leadership preferred to donate it to a ministry within their network than sell the property. According to the founders as well as interviews with volunteers and stakeholders, several churches, with which the founders had close relationships to their leadership, donated finances and manpower to renovate the donated old church building, arrange the building for Sole Mission's use, and move the organization's inventory from Missouri to Texas. Within months of transitioning to Texas, Sole Mission was also featured on Mike Rowe's Facebook TV show "Returning the Favor." Selection includes an episode focused on the work of Sole Mission and a $25,000 donation. Participation in "Returning the Favor" also resulted in a corporate sponsorship with Bombas clothing. Bombas now provides 40,000 pairs of socks free of charge annually to Sole Mission for distribution.

Sole Mission's leadership expanded beyond the founders and board members in 2020 with the addition of another full-time staff member. Gabby Beaty (no relation to the researcher), was a local schoolteacher who recalled starting with Sole Mission as a volunteer. She was introduced to Sole Mission through her church when Alisa and Kelly came and spoke on a Sunday morning and began to volunteer alongside some of her students. Beaty volunteered consistently at the Sole Mission warehouse as well as at distribution events. Over time and after numerous conversations with the founders, she was eventually asked to join the staff. Beaty held her position for 18-months. A decrease in donations from churches and individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to return to teaching school. According to Beaty, she and her spouse remain committed supporters and regular volunteers with Sole Mission.

Since moving to Texas, Sole Mission annual year-end reports demonstrate continued growth. According to the founders and other stakeholders, despite its history, Sole Mission has never limited its church partnerships to Assemblies of God congregations. In 2023, a new partnership with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) was formed. This relationship started when Alisa Ward served on a local community service board with Andi Cook, the communication director for the LDS church in the southeast United States. Andi had Sole Mission listed on the global service platform run by the LDS church called Just Serve. Just Serve is a website on which individuals desiring to volunteer can locate and sign-up to serve for various nonprofit organizations. After being included on Just Serve, Sole Mission was then listed among the official organizations endorsed for partnership with Church World Services, the global service and relief arm of the LDS denomination. This designation lent the LDS church's legitimacy to Sole Mission and allowed for more opportunities for local LDS wards to volunteer directly with Sole Mission. Resulting from these designations, Sole Mission was included in the LDS's annual Christmas Giving Machine effort. Sole Mission received over $23,600 from Giving Machines in 2023.

In 2024, Sole Mission conducted 14 training events and 44 shoe distributions in 13 states. That year saw over 37,000 pairs of socks and shoes donated to impoverished children. Over 2,200 volunteers from more than 120 organizations served with Sole Mission in 2024, over 1,600 of which volunteered more than eight hours. In total, volunteers gave more than 6,200 hours at over 100 volunteer events in 2024. Partnerships in 2024 also included distribution work in six regional public schools. In addition to operating budget donations in 2024 which exceeded $110,000, individuals donated over $48,000 in cash and over $100,000 in gift-in-kind donations, with another $26,000 donated by other organizations. According to organizational records, at the close of 2024, over 892,000 pairs of shoes have been donated at more than 450 distributions in Sole Mission's 16-year existence.

RQ2: What entrepreneurial practices were important to maintaining and reproducing the organization (i.e., Sole Mission) over its history?

The previous section reports the history of Sole Mission's ongoing work and growth during the organization's maintenance—years 3-16 of existence. The following sub-section identifies entrepreneurial practices which the data sources indicate were present and important during the organization's maintenance period. Analysis revealed that maintenance practices include (a) *acquiring and utilizing partnerships*, and (b) *creating and implementing processes*. For a succinct visual layout of the research findings in this section, see Table 2 on page 90.

Acquiring and Utilizing Partnerships

According to data sources, the maintenance of Sole Mission over time involved two especially relevant SE practices. The first practice included acquiring and utilizing partnerships. The previous narrative relays a history of consistent partnership with other organizations and people. Jason Brooks, executive director of AGORA Ministries, a nonprofit in San Antonio, Texas with which Sole Mission conducts an annual distribution said, "You can't do [this work] without the support of others." Sole Mission began as an initiative within another organization. Even when they separated, Sole Mission remained a partner with Rural Compassion. This relationship is clearly noted by the presence of Rural Compassion among the list of organizational partners on Sole Mission's website. Sole Mission has received various types of material support from other entities as well that are affiliated with the Assemblies of God (AG). They possess vehicles purchased for them by Speed the Light, an initiative of the AG youth department, and a forklift and pallet jacks provided by the AG men's ministry. They receive annual donations for shoe purchases from the AG's Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge (BGMC). The building they operate from was gifted from within their ministry network and Sole

Mission now owns the building outright. Finally, as evidenced by Sole Mission's partnership with the LDS wards and local schools, Sole Mission is also not limited in its partnership pool.

In addition to acquiring and utilizing organized entities, Sole Mission also appears to acquire and utilize individuals. Organizational records show that individuals provide monthly financial donations, donations in-kind, and volunteer at Sole Mission events. Concerning volunteers, a founder commented, "Volunteers are great, and we can't do what we do without them..." According to the collected evidence, Sole Mission leaders attempt to make the experience of partnering with people significant for the volunteers. A founder remarked, "We don't want this to be their one and done, 'Well, we volunteered, and it was terrible, and we don't ever want to volunteer again…'" Different types of events are planned with difference volunteers in mind. A founder remarked that anyone "3-93" can volunteer at a Sole Mission packing party. Packing parties are events lasting between 2-3 hours and conducted at the Sole Mission warehouse with the purpose packing socks, shoes, and other event materials for an upcoming distribution. The founders encourage families to volunteer together at packing parties, a practice which they say opened the door to and strengthened the relationship between Sole Mission and the LDS denomination. Distributions, on the other hand, are limited to minors over the age of 14 and adults. Distributions are 8-hour events, including setup and tear-down, training, and the allocation of socks and shoes to children. Both events include specialized training, the manuals and descriptions of each are included among the collected data, to prepare volunteers for service.

Creating and Implementing Processes

During the maintenance and reproduction phase of the organization's lifespan, founders and members engaged in what can be called the creating and implementing of processes. Processes include the myriads of systems and structures which enable an organization to operate.

While not a glamorous entrepreneurial element, processes ensure the organization functions according to its value statements, efficiently, and effectively. In the case of Sole Mission, these processes appear to have been developed over time via trial-and-error.

According to collected data, one example of the processes used by Sole Mission is volunteer training. As with any organization, training volunteers to complete tasks efficiently and correctly is vitally important to both the execution of organizational activities but also to the volunteer's overall experience with the event. Training at packing parties is rather simple, consisting of a description of important locations in the building, a run-down of the plan for the event, a demonstration of the task(s) to be accomplished, and information concerning how and where to access supplies. Volunteers are then allowed to work at their own speed and on the activities they find most interesting. Training for shoe distributions are robust and detailed. Trainings begin by assigning volunteers to the various stations at which they will serve during the event. Station assignments are based on several factors including personality, age, skills, comfortability with special needs children, and languages spoken. Trainings then transition to a brief introduction and Sole Mission's history. While conducting this talk, photos are displayed on a video projector of previous distributions and shoe collections. The photos include volunteers working with children, placing the shoes on their feet, praying with families, and other activities which will occur during the distribution that day. Training in this manner is apparently designed to create mindset of compassion and service in volunteers. Finally, trainings include a demonstration of each role that may be fulfilled by a volunteer during the event, including how to speak with and connect with the children being served. The training concludes with an opportunity for volunteers to ask questions.

Another example of a process forged and executed by Sole Mission is how it distributes shoes. Sole Mission has a practiced process for distributing the shoes. According to collected data, shoe distributions start by packing the shoes to be distributed. The site location for a distribution sends in a request with the number, gender, and sizes of shoes they would like to distribute. Packing sheets displaying the preceding information are printed. Volunteers pull shoes from the bin one size and one gender at a time to ensure accuracy. Shoes are pulled in a variety of styles. Shoes are placed on the worktables to be counted, and sizes confirmed before placed in the packing bag or box. Once sizes and counts are completed the shoes are packed and that size is checked off on the packing sheet. The process is repeated with each size shoes requested. Once a box is full, it is taped closed and a packing sheet is taped to the outward facing side saying how many shoes are inside, whether they are stylistic assign as to boys or girls, and sizes of shoes included. The box is then placed on a shipping palette with the packing slip facing out.

Finally, Sole Mission also has processes by which they can offer adjacent services. Adjacent services refer to functions which cannot be necessarily placed within the organization's value propositions or reason-for-being but nevertheless complement organizational vision and existing services. In the case of Sole Mission, the data indicates such adjacent services include disaster response and non-footwear provisions. Sole Mission maintains equipment and materials used in the response to natural disasters. When hurricanes flood areas of the United States, Sole Mission has processes in place to respond with socks, shoes, and other items. The Sole Mission Resource Center contains a "disaster room." In this room is water, shelves, clothes, non-perishable foods, and a rotating collection of supplies that can be given away at any time. It also contains equipment, such as go-bags, which can be grabbed to respond immediately to a disaster or crisis. Sole Mission occasionally distributes non-foot clothing items such as underwear, shirts, and shorts. Seemingly, most requests for such items come from local schools on behalf of impoverished children. Sole Mission has a line-item in their budget for the purchase of such items.

RQ3: Sole Mission and the SEA Model

RQ3 asked, “In what ways does Sole Mission’s organizational history align with or diverge from SEA model, and what are the implications for social entrepreneurship?” This final section answers the research question in two parts. The research question is answered via vignettes, which is a strategy for crystallizing data collected from interviews and organizational documents. Vignettes are used to communicate the organizational life history and serve as examples of how Sole Mission’s lifespan align with each Seven Entrepreneurial Activities (SEA) model higher order sets (see Table 3 on page 91). The second part of this section concerns areas of model divergence and answers the research question by elaborating on the activities identified from interviews, organizational documents, and ethnographic fieldwork. For a succinct visual layout of the research findings concerning model divergence, see Table 4 on page 93.

SEA Model Convergence

Based on the data collected (i.e., organizational documents, interviews with stakeholders, etc.), there is significant alignment between Bisel and Bisel’s (2023) SEA model and the organizational life history of Sole Mission. The following paragraphs provide examples of alignment. While observing the following examples, it should be noted that organizational histories are conveyed chronologically. As such, it may seem as though SEA model activities occur sequentially according to phases of organizational life. Such an assumption is not correct. The SEA model does not assume activities are restricted to eras or time periods. Each higher order set occurs and reoccurs in all phases of organizational life. What is more, in observing Sole

Mission, all three higher order sets were noted in both major phases of organizational life (i.e., 0-2 years and 3-16 years). The following paragraphs include examples of activities from all three higher order sets identified in both phases of organizational existence.

Exploring-Realizing

The *Exploring-Realizing* higher order set of the SEA Model consists of activities vital to initiating organizational construction and are the activities most historically associated with entrepreneurship.

How it started. While working for Rural Compassion (RC) in the Summer of 2006, the founders traveled to McLain, Mississippi, population 500, to help support continued community recovery after Hurricane Katrina. The focus of the work was the cleanup of a local school. The founders recall that to celebrate the school's repair, the community planned a grand reopening event, which included distributing various donated items (i.e., clothing, food, water, etc.). Included among those items were shoes provided to RC by another organization. The shoes were only in boys' size four and girls' size two. Alisa remembers the day:

> I remember thinking, "Why are we even attempting to give away the shoes? We only have two sizes…" And the families were so incredibly excited over the shoes because there was no place to buy anything in McLain. There's no stores. There wasn't even a Dollar General. There was nothing left, so you couldn't buy anything. If you wanted to buy something, you had to go to Lucedale. And that was a 30-minute drive. So, the shoes were huge, and it was just seeing the impact, the smiles. Boys didn't care if they were girl shoes. Girls didn't care if they were boy shoes. They didn't care if they were a little too big. They didn't care. And I just remember thinking "The power of a pair of shoes."

This singular event started the process for the founders to recognize the need for shoes among impoverished Americans.

The first shoe distribution. According to organizational documents, Sole Mission conducted its first shoe distribution in August of 2008 at Abundant Life Assembly of God Church in Toronto, Ohio. At the time, Sole Mission was still called *shoe project*. Very few processes were in place and none that are still being utilized today. The church requested 300 pairs of dress shoes with the idea that the shoes would be given away through a free clothing store. According to the founder, the church believed the shoes would be partnered with other dress clothes for people to take and use for job interviews, work, or going to church. In total, 161 pairs of shoes were distributed and not via the clothing store. The shoes were all placed together in the middle of a room and people were allowed to come and dig through them to find the sizes and styles they liked. The 161 pairs of shoes were the first of 5,000 pairs of shoes distributed during Sole Mission's first year.

Texas, our Texas. Sole Mission's physical operations moved to Texas in 2018. The founders decided to move the operation after their daughter-in-law perished in a house fire and they wanted to be geographically closer to their son's family to help him with his children. In making the move, Sole Mission vacated the 2,000 square foot facility in Missouri and moved into a 7,500 square foot facility in Texas. The Missouri facility had been a warehouse space from which Sole Mission mainly inventoried product and packed for distributions. The new Texas facility was a converted church and would include room to continue the previously enacted activities as well as function as a location for trainings, housing for potential interns, and include office space. Moving to Texas also created opportunities for Sole Mission to work with new partners. While working in Missouri, according to the founders, nearly all Sole Mission's volunteers came either from Assemblies of God churches or schools attended by the founders' children. In Texas, volunteers were recruited from Assemblies of God churches and local schools with no prior partnership history, but also from other new partnerships, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Each of these vignettes offer examples of the *Exploring-Realizing* activities. Recall that Exploring-Realizing activities are concerned with discovering, communicatively retaining the steps to their discovery, and actualizing the organization's value propositions. The first vignette describes the process by which it dawned on the nascent social entrepreneurs that there was both a need and desire for shoes. In fact, the needs and desires were so strong that individuals cared more about having the shoes than whether they fit or were appropriately gendered. Such an experience, followed by additional similar experiences, induced a dawning comprehension that something should and could be done. The second story then is the "launch" so to speak of the value proposition into action. Here, organized and intentional actions are taken to *realize* the value proposition that poor children need shoes, so much so that a distribution occurs in a town roughly 800 miles away from the Rural Compassion offices. The final story relays a significant evolution in Sole Mission's life, moving the physical operations of the organization to a new state. From this vignette, Sole Mission's *exploration* of new facilities and partnerships is retold. Furthermore, the final vignette occurs nine years into Sole Mission's organizational history, reinforcing the on-going nature of each higher order set. The vignettes each demonstrate activities from the life history of Sole Mission which were vital to initiating organizational existence.

Doubting-Updating

Doubting-Updating SEA model activities are first-order, internally focused activities designed to the enable the fledgling entity to be established, survive, and thrive.

Are we doing this right? As was mentioned in the second vignette, at the first shoe distribution, the shoes were all placed in the center of the room and people were allowed to rummage through the shoes looking for pairs in their gender, that they liked, and that fit. Within a year however, the Sole Mission team began noticing issues with this approach. Children and parents would fight with other children and parents over shoes. Children would try on shoes and not understand whether or how well they fit. Children would select, or parents would select for them, shoes based on name brand instead of fit, resulting in children leaving distributions with shoes that were uncomfortably too small or comically too large. The founders recall the parents would also take additional pairs of shoes and tell the staff the shoes were for their children "at home." When asked about these early distributions, Kelly Ward remembers, "…there was just a lot of trial and error… we like to say, 'we could tell you 101 ways not to do a distribution because made at least 100 mistakes,' probably a lot more …trying to figure it out." As each of these issues became clearer, Sole Mission leaders questioned the processes in place to greater degrees.

There has got to be a better way. Before long, Sole Mission began changing the systems in place and the manners in which they distributed shoes. These changes occurred incrementally as an evolutionary organizational process over time. First, seeing the chaos which resulted from placing all the shoes in the middle of the floor, they decided to have stations where children and their parents would instead sit and be brought shoes to try on. Once this change occurred it became evident that parents and children did not actually know what size shoes the child wore. Alisa remembers searching online to find a company that makes foot sizing sticks.

Upon discovery, Alisa called the company, explained what Sole Mission was, and asked them to donate 20 feet measuring sticks. The company did so. Around this time, organizational documents indicate the implementation of fitters as a volunteer role at distributions. Fitters are responsible to size the child's feet. Shoehorns were also added to help try on shoes. During this time, it also became obvious there was a need for socks. Many of the socks the children wore were in terrible condition. At one distribution a child remarked that they the family only had one pair of socks that the children exchanged with each other daily. The decision was made to start providing the children new socks to go with their new shoes. Once the socks started coming off, the fitters noticed the poor condition which many of the children's feet were in. Sole Mission started providing wipes to the fitters to clean the child's feet before they put on the new socks and shoes. This resulted in clean feet but a pile of dirty wipes. At this point, an entire kit was compiled for each station that included the shoehorn, foot wipes, measuring stick, hand-sanitizer, and a small trashcan. Finally, someone noticed that when the fitters went to get the shoes for the children to try on, the child was often left alone. To ensure the children remained accompanied by an adult while still retrieving the needed socks shoes, Sole Mission added runners, another volunteer position to go and get the socks and shoes for the child while the fitter stayed and cared for the child. Runners were also given runner sheets to write down the child's gender, size, and style preferences. These sheets were retained at the end of an event to serve as an additional mechanism to inventory the number of shoes distributed and the number that remained.

Each of the preceding paragraphs offer a myriad of examples of *Doubting-Updating* entrepreneurial activities. Doubting-Updating activities tend to involve the creation and later refinement of internal operation matters involving diverse issues, such as acquiring inventory, hiring and training personnel, and developing work processes. In the first paragraph, several early issues are elucidated. Each issue illuminates a problem that was unsustainable and unacceptable, and in doing so introduced seeds of doubt that eroded Sole Mission's confidence in the systems in place. The second paragraph thoroughly demonstrates through its examples the interdependent nature of *Doubting-Updating* activities. In response to a process which was not operating as they wished, Sole Mission updated the process in a manner that best exemplified their value propositions. On occasion, as was in the case with the foot wipes, an updating activity also produced a doubting activity which necessitated an additional updating activity. The value in identifying each of these activities is that they demonstrate SE generally and Sole Mission specifically cannot remain static in their processes but must engage in dynamic adaptive responses when their processes are found wanting. Doing so enables the organization to be more fully established, survive, and thrive.

Legitimizing-Multiplying/Sustaining

Activities included among the *Legitimizing-Multiplying/Sustaining* SEA model activities are first-order and external-focused activities designed to increase stakeholder perceptions of the organization's legitimacy.

Lunch on us. In August 2009, Sole Mission hosted a lunch at the Assemblies of God's (AG) biannual minister's conference and parliamentary session, called General Council. National, regional, and local church leaders attend to elect leaders, alter and update organizational documents, and to discover new information and initiatives concerning the denomination. Hosting a luncheon during General Council signals importance and draws the attention of influential leaders. During the luncheon, Sole Mission introduced themselves as a new initiative of Rural Compassion. Rural Compassion was a well-established organization with widespread credibility within the denomination. The executive director of Rural Compassion was the luncheon's keynote speaker. He also had high credibility within the organization because of his years of leading Rural Compassion and his family's history with the AG. According to the founders, the luncheon generated interest from leaders across the country and organizational documents indicate a wave of requests for shoe distributions following the event.

Can I have that t-shirt? Visitors who enter the Sole Mission Resource Center in Conroe, Texas have a lot to look at. To start, the building, though now used as a warehouse, office, and training space, nevertheless holds on to the undeniable architectural designs of the church it once was. Furthermore, there are photos of the wall from various distributions, framed articles about Sole Mission's work over the years, and promotional materials given to visitors concerning how they can get involved and donate to Sole Mission. If someone is looking for the restrooms however, you must walk down a long hallway in which the walls are covered with t-shirts. The t-shirts have been cut and attached to canvas but there is no denying that they once were t-shirts. The significance of the t-shirts is simple: each shirt represents an organization Sole Mission has worked with or an event in which Sole Mission has participated. The t-shirts tell a story. They communicate Sole Mission's willingness to work with anyone. The t-shirts demonstrate Sole Mission is not constrained by the affiliation of the organization, its geographic location, or its size. Some of the t-shirts are from shoe distributions. Some of the shirts are from large events where shoes, food, backpacks, and school supplies were handed out. Some of the shirts came from responses to a natural disaster. And one t-shirt is from Santa Fe, Texas, where Sole Mission was present and caring for the community in the aftermath of a horrific school shooting. The shirts tell Sole Mission's story.

What's with that big shoe? When someone enters the Sole Mission Resource Center warehouse, they cannot help but notice a red shoe large enough for a person to sit inside. The shoe, made of papier-mâché, was once on a float in a parade thrown in Sole Mission's honor. This parade was part of an episode of Mike Rowe's Facebook TV series called *Returning the Favor* that featured Sole Mission in 2019. In that episode, Rowe talked about all the work Alisa, Kelly, and Sole Mission did over the previous decade, highlighting their work with children. The episode, which can be viewed internationally, featured images from distributions, conversations held inside the resource center, and concluded with Rowe donating $25,000 to Sole Mission. The shoe, signed by Rowe, sits in a prominent location that cannot be missed by visitors to the warehouse. It is also a popular prop that groups use for photographs whenever they volunteer. People regularly tag photos of the shoe on social media and according to the founders the *Returning the Favor* episode produced a direct increase in volunteers, which organizational documents confirm.

That is a lot of shoes. Sole Mission started as the *shoe project* in 2009. The first distribution produced 161 pairs of shoes. That year, 5,000 shoes were distributed. As of the end of 2024, over 892,000 pairs of shoes had been distributed by Sole Mission. The year 2024 included 44 separate distributions, four of which distributed 1,500 shoes or more shoes at their events. One large distribution site was North Central Church in Spring, Texas. Adam Sanchez, missions pastor for North Central Church, shared about the growth for their distributions:

> The first year we sized 553 shoes for the students. All these are going back to school… You're actually working with them, talking to them, sizing their shoe, trying to get the shoe that fits them, what they want... We fast forward to this year. Last year we gave out over 1200 pairs of shoes. So, from 2018 it started off with a 500. This year, 2024, we're looking at 1500 pairs of shoes. That's our goal to give out…

In all, Sole Mission saw more than 37,000 shoes distributed in 2024, a 700% annual increase since their very first year.

Legitimizing-Multiplying/Sustaining activities are about validating the work, increasing production, and maintaining the level at which the organization is being seen by members and key stakeholders as a bona fide organization, in terms of ontological status and ethical dealings. The vignettes in the preceding paragraphs provide powerful examples of such activities within Sole Mission. The General Council luncheon accrued legitimacy from the luncheon speaker, attendees, and the event itself. The t-shirts demonstrate how many people believe in and want to work with Sole Mission. They also demonstrate how Sole Mission has been able to continue accomplishing their value propositions over an extended period in a variety of contexts. Each t-shirt bears the name of an entity that willingly partnered with Sole Mission and in doing so shared reputations. The big shoe communicates how compelling and worthwhile Sole Mission's work is. It reminds those who see it that influential and famous people found Sole Mission to be worth investment. The shoe also lends Sole Mission's legitimacy to the people who come and volunteer, which in turn inspires others to give their time. Finally, the number of shoe distributions, total number of shoes provided, and the sizes of many shoe distributions have grown exponentially since Sole Mission started. Each of the activities outlined here demonstrate Sole Mission's legitimacy, multiplicity, and sustainability. In doing so, all evidence indicates Sole Mission will remain viable for years to come.

The preceding paragraphs provide examples from Sole Mission's life history which demonstrate the SEA model is a credible and mostly sufficient prescriptive model for VDDN entrepreneurialism. All higher order sets of SEA model activities were observed in both phases of organizational existence. The SEA model sets adequately describe the kinds of activities that were involved with the creation, maintenance, and reproduction of Sole Mission.

SEA Model Divergence

While alignment with the SEA model is clearly observed over the course of the organization's life history, three importance divergences are also observed. These divergences, represent important additions to the SEA model, when it is being used to described *VDDN* organizational constitution. Each divergence identifies clear distinctions in the ways for-profit corporations and VDDNs function. They are important exigencies that distinguish for-profit entities from VDDN, and as such, are needed contextual addendums to the SEA model to adequately account social enterprise organizational constitution. Such exigencies are integral for social entrepreneurs to recognize and reconcile as they lead their organizations. The differences are also crucial addendums to the SEA model if it is to serve as a prescriptive model for VDDN entrepreneurialism. Such divergences include (a) presence of affinity opportunities, (b) differences between donors and investors, and (c) differences between volunteers and employees.

Affinity Opportunities

The first divergent SE activity observed within Sole Mission are affinity opportunities. Affinity opportunities include the adjacent services, which were mentioned above. As previously defined, adjacent services refer to functions which cannot be necessarily placed within the organization's value propositions or reason-for-being but nevertheless complement organizational vision and existing services. Adjacent services might be unique and common in VDDNs because engaging in such activities both motivate and pacify donors while also increasing the legitimacy of the organization within the community. Additionally, such services may provide supplemental income for the VDDN. Sole Mission regularly engages in activities which are adjacent to but not included within their organizational values proposition. The activities in which they participate compliment the work of Sole Mission but do not fall within Sole Mission's scope.

The SEA model, as originally stated, does not include affinity opportunities. The production of goods and services outside the value propositions of a for-profit organization would represent an unnecessary diversification and potentially damaging distraction from organizational mission. The expenditure of financial and human capital in the pursuit of tangential projects would be ill-advised in the normal course of business. Notable exceptions to this rule might occur during rare times of extraordinary cultural or industry upheaval (e.g., liquor distilleries producing hand sanitizers during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Sole Mission engages in two primary forms of affinity opportunities. First, Sole Mission responds regularly to needs from the community beyond providing socks and shoes. In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Imelda, a local church led by Pastor Charles Stoker was flooded and he placed a request with the local community support group for industrial dehumidifiers. Though humidifiers are not necessarily related to the provision of socks and shoes, the founders made a call to the Houston Tool Bank. Houston Tool Bank is a nationally networked nonprofit that rents tools at reduced or free rates to people and nonprofits when needed. The Wards were able to obtain six humidifiers for 12 weeks in order to provide them to the local church. The week before the researcher embedded with Sole Mission, the region flooded severely. The first day the researcher conducted ethnographic fieldwork involved traveling with Alisa to Pastor Stoker's church, where food from the Houston Food Bank and cleaning supplies were being distributed. Sole Mission's activities that day were non-shoe related. At Stoker's church, food and cleaning supplies were gathered by Sole Mission leaders to deliver to the home of a local social worker.

The social worker was an hourly employee in a highly rural and depressed area. Even though her home was uninhabitable because of the recent floods, and her family was forced to live temporarily with her mother, she was still required work. Two boxes of food, cereal, a case of bottled water, and two one-gallon jugs of water were delivered to her house. Alisa was also contacted the day before by one of the local schools concerning a family whose home was flooded. Leaders from Sole Mission also delivered food and water as well as shirts, shorts, and underwear to the local school for the children of the flooded family.

There are several reasons Sole Mission engages in community response calls as affinity opportunities. First, being a responding entity contributes to the organization's reputation in the community in which the organization is a member. As a VDDN, institutional positioning of this nature can be an impactful way to demonstrate to the community that the organization not only pulls resources from the community but invests resources back into the community. A positive communal reputation reinforces the organization's legitimacy and may result in unexpected future donations and volunteers. Just such an event occurred for Sole Mission, when a local sheriff's office secretly conducted a shoe drive on their behalf. Second, responding to community needs beyond the scope of Sole Mission's mission opens door for future opportunities to conduct activities within the organization's value propositions. Since, Alisa was able to get Pastor Stoker the dehumidifiers, Pastor Stoker's church now conducts shoe distributions.

Since Sole Mission is willing to deliver clothing, food, and water to the schools for families in need, the schools volunteer with Sole Mission. Finally, while responding to community calls for assistance is outside the formal scope of Sole Mission's operations, it nevertheless is reflected in one the motivating factors for Sole Mission's work. At Sole Mission distribution trainings, the founders regularly tell the volunteers "Today you get to be Jesus with skin on." Sole Mission does not allow volunteers to proselytize at its events. Though driven by the Christian faith of the founders and board of directors, Sole Mission is not an evangelistic organization. The leaders of the organization endeavor instead to demonstrate God's love through acts of service; giving socks and shoes to children. Responding to community needs is not Sole Mission's value proposition, but the organization does so to fulfill what may be understood as a transcendent or meta value.

The second primary form of affinity opportunity the founders engage in is marital and family counseling. Kelly is a licensed professional counselor, with licensure in several states. He provides in-person and telehealth therapy, often to ministers or children of ministers at discounted rates. Kelly also uses his therapy skills to respond to tragedies. Kelly was one of the therapists invited to respond after the school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas. In May 2018 a 17-year-old student at Santa Fe High School killed eight classmates and two teachers. Kelly spent two weeks freely serving the community members of Santa Fe, including being present during death notifications, and providing one-on-one counseling to parents, family, and friends of the perished. Kelly was also asked to be a part of the therapy team which responded to the Robb Elementary school shooting in Uvalde, Texas in 2022. Additionally, the founders host and lead week-long marriage retreats. The couple decided to start conducting the retreats because of a situation they observed with someone close to them as well as because of the challenging stories they learned when traveling and speaking to churches about Sole Mission. Consistently they learned of pastoral families, children and parents, who were struggling. The founders consider counseling as another way they could help.

Offering therapy shares a motivational factor with disaster response while also possessing its own unique reasons for being a service the Sole Mission founders offer. The shared motivational factor is the transcendent or meta value of being “Jesus with skin on.” Offering counseling services is another mechanism for embodying the love of God which is a central motivation for the founders and Sole Mission board members. The founders believe they are being “Jesus with skin on” when Kelly counsels hurting children in ministry families or grieving parents in the wake of school shootings.

Counseling is also offered for other reasons. First, it is Kelly’s educational background. Kelly graduated with his degree and began providing therapy a year before Sole Mission existed. It is part of who he is and how he understands his personal vocation. Therapy and Sole Mission do not, in Kelly’s opinion, compete or inhibit each other. Secondly, therapy functions as an additional income generator. Dependence on donors will be discussed thoroughly in the next section. However, finances are a notorious challenge for nonprofits. VDDN may often engage in affinity opportunities for financial benefit as a material necessity for organizational constitution. When asked about the biggest challenge concerning Sole Mission, Kelly remarked:

> It's always the money. Mike Rowe called it a barking dog, always wanting to eat, and that's it. The fundraising is always there, it has been from the beginning... We have more money coming in and we have more regular donors, but we also have more people wanting to do distributions. We have more shoes that need to go out. So as the money has increased, the demand has increased too. So, there really hasn't been a let-up. The demand for money grows with the demand for shoes. And so, there's not been a let-up, we have to constantly think about fundraising and where are we going to get money, where we're going to get shoes. That's always, always on our mind.

The monetary challenge includes ensuring their personal budgets are being met along with the organization’s budget. Providing counseling, even when doing it as a reduced rate, provides financial cushion for the entrepreneurs and lessens the financial burden on the organization and its donors.

When considering affinity opportunities, some may argue the activities are at best a “side hustle” or at worst a “distraction.” For the entrepreneurs and the VBDN, however, affinity opportunities appear to add personal and organizational value. The activities contribute toward organizational legitimacy, institutional positioning, financial stability, and self-structuring. These activities also appeal to and appease donors. Occasionally, according to Sole Mission founders and organizational records, donors will give “targeted gifts” or donations for a specific purpose. One such gift Sole Mission has received is for children’s underwear. Sole Mission can only use the money that was given for that purpose. So, when Sole Mission is contacted and underwear is an expressed need, or there is a regional disaster necessitating the distribution of underwear, Sole Mission has it available. It is not however a regularly distributed commodity or resource.

Some may ask, “Why not include these activities in the value propositions of the organization?” Some VDDNs may choose to expand their propositions to include some affinity activities. From observing Sole Mission however, these opportunities appeared and developed organically. Furthermore, expanding the organization to regularly include these additional elements is costly. For Sole Mission to evolve into an organization that not only distributes socks and shoes but also functions as a disaster response entity would require more inventory, training, equipment, space, and staff.

Finally, counseling as an activity is only arguably tangentially related to providing socks and shoes to children. Expanding the value propositions of the VDDN to include therapeutic services, especially early in organizational life, may stretch the organization beyond what is sustainable and divide organizational focus to the entity’s detriment.

Donors not Investors

The second SE activity that diverges from the SEA model is recognizing the differences between donors and investors. To understand these differences, one must first comprehend the difference in funding models between for-profit corporations and VDDN. For-profit corporations depend on financial investors willing to provide one-time, singular, large sums of money to start the company. To do so, for-profit entrepreneurs often seek out the participation of *angel investors*. Angel investors are financial partners willing to invest in the early stages of an entrepreneurial endeavor (Morrissette, 2007). Often fellow entrepreneurs, angel investors primarily provide funds on the "ground floor" of the fledgling company's existence with the expectation of a significant financial return or, secondarily, because of an emotional connection to the corporation (Ibrahim, 2008). Even in the case of emotional connection, a return on investment is still expected. A return on the investment is created when capital is produced from the sale of whatever product is created by the company. Angel investors expect anywhere from a 10-30 times return on investment within 3-5 years (Rose, 2014).

VDDNs do not have investors, but instead utilize donors. Individuals who give to nonprofit organizations have different motivation than for-profit investors. Donors are individuals who provide financial gifts to nonprofit organizations with no expectation of financial return, save an annual tax write-off. Donors must be cultivated. They must be convinced of both the vision of the organization but also the VDDN entrepreneurs. Donors also do not normally give large, one-time sums of money, but small monthly gifts. Organizations like Sole Mission have hundreds of individuals and other entities which send money monthly. The combined sum of the gifts serves as the operating capital for the organization. Depending on monthly gifts can cause anxiety to the entrepreneurs. Concerning depending on donors and donations, Alisa shares:

> So, you can look at your reports and decide whether or not you want to worry or not, if you're going to get a decent paycheck or not. Seriously. That's how this works every day. So, I have just decided, I may or may not look at it. I used to get up every morning and look at the report and just freeze. I don't look at it anymore. I look at it about once a week now…Because you just don't know what's going to happen.

Continuing to reflect on donor-dependence, Kelly said:

> When I worked a job where I had a salary, I didn't think about it. I knew on Monday or Friday or whenever it was, I was going to have a paycheck, and so I didn't really give a lot of thought, whether it was a good paycheck or not a good paycheck, I knew it was going to be there. And so, with this… it can be a roller coaster. It's up and down. And fortunately, now because we've been doing it so long and we've got such a good base, there tends to be more up than down. But there's still the dips…But just not having the steady guaranteed income can be scary.

Despite the years of continually utilizing the donor approach, the consistent inconsistency of donations still weighs on the entrepreneurs.

Depending on donors is especially challenging during economic downturns, when people have less disposable income to give, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked about the impact COVID had on their funding, Alisa remarked:

> I mean, nobody gave. Nobody. I mean, we had a couple of churches that sent offerings to us real quick to make sure that we stayed funded, but for the most part we were like, "okay." So, Kelly immediately turned on a shingle sign with BetterHelp.com and things

> like that, to try to make sure that we would stay financially okay…and to ensure that we would be okay to keep the lights on in this building, and all the things paid for that had to be paid for while we were waiting to see what happened.

Donor dependence is an anxiety-inducing practice that is as much an act of faith as a strategic financial planning system.

Additionally, unforeseen opportunities may arise for the VDDN that are outside the organization's budget or available cashflow. In such scenarios, VDDN entrepreneurs may go do donors and ask for large, one-time, targeted gifts to enable them to pursue the opportunity. Such an event occurred in Summer 2024 when the founders' ecclesiastical agency asked Sole Mission to conduct a shoe distribution in Queens, NY. The event was not formally sponsored like most distributions, required three-times more shoes than most distributions, and needed the founders along with seasoned volunteers to attend. Furthermore, the trip cost roughly $10,000. To pay for the trip, the founders called larger churches which support Sole Mission monthly, many of which conduct annual shoe distributions, and asked each church to donate $1,000. Without the donations, the event would not have occurred.

Volunteers not Employees

The final SE divergence from the SEA model is understanding the differences between volunteers and employees. Individuals join companies for a myriad of reasons. For many people, there is a vocational aspect to employment. The company is in a field in which they have great interest, are educated or trained to be a part of, and to which they may even have a sense of calling. Often people choose to work at a company because of its reputation or mission. Some jobs provide a sense of public welfare or social good of which people want to be a part. There is even an excitement factor associated with certain places of employment, especially entrepreneurial endeavors, because of the possibilities yet to be realized. Many people are motivated to work at certain companies for similar reasons people choose to volunteer with certain VDDNs. Volunteers want to make a difference. They want to spend their time working on and with a cause that matters. Volunteers are motivated by shared visions and values. Ultimately there is an excitement volunteering with a VDDN because of what could be. There are, however, several stark differences between working with employees and working with volunteers.

The first and most obvious difference is pay. Employees are paid. To be paid, employees work on specific and specialized tasks for which they are qualified. Furthermore, employees engage in their work during specified, continued work hours. Employees are required to be physically present daily, and complete the tasks assigned to them according to an expected quality and schedule prescribed by their supervisors or the organization. If an employee meets these standards, the employee receives financial compensation and other benefits. If employees fail to meet these or other prescribed standards or requirements, serious repercussions, including termination, may apply. Volunteers on the other hand are not paid. Some may receive adjacent benefits, such as service hours which count toward school requirements, but by and large there is not tangible reciprocal benefit to their act of volunteerism. Additionally, volunteers give their time whenever they decide. For VDDNs that have public and open opportunities for individuals to volunteer, there are no guarantees who will be present, even if volunteer sign-ups were requested. Each of these differences are self-evident when observing for-profit corporations and VDDNs in action and comparing them. There are, however, two differences that emerged within this study that are not self-evident: 1) the tension between need for volunteers and quality of work required, and 2) the challenge of working with friends and family.

Nonprofit organizations of this type are herein named “volunteer dependent” because they depend on volunteers. They do not have the financial capital or internal structure to employ enough people to execute organizational operations. Thus, they require volunteers to do much of the work. As such, very unique challenges arise in this dependence. Considering these challenges, Alisa said:

> Volunteers are exactly what they are. They come here and they're giving their time, but they don't always want to listen to you. And because we take everyone from [age] 3 to 93, it can be very challenging, from they don't pay attention to where they're putting the shoes to, are they getting all the tags off of them?

Kelly echoed Alisa’s comments concerning challenges that arise from the variety of volunteers. He also expounded on challenges unique with volunteers at events:

> And so, on-site at distributions, one of the issues is there's usually one or two people who want to tell us how to do the distribution. They think they know a better way to do it. And that can be really frustrating because, like I said, we made 101 mistakes, and we've got this pretty fine-tuned. And we're always open to suggestions, but it is usually not suggestions, its usually people trying to tell us how to do our job and that can be pretty frustrating.

Dependence on volunteers creates logistical challenges organizations with employees do not face.

Another unique challenge that arises in the tension between need for volunteers and quality of work is what happens when there are too many volunteers. On this point Kelly explains:

> We use Eventbrite with tickets…but we want people to sign up on Eventbrite and we limit it to 15 people or 15 tickets. So once those tickets are gone, then nobody else could sign up. But sometimes when we have organizations…we've planned an event just for their organization, they may have 20 or 25 people and we don't want to limit them. So, it just makes it a little more difficult to work with larger groups. We try to divide them up between different jobs… So, kind of divide and conquer situation where we have them divided into smaller groups that are more manageable.

VDNN entrepreneurial leaders are regularly required to identify and develop creative and beneficial responses to these tensions.

Occasionally, volunteers who give their time to a VDDN are family members and friends of the entrepreneurs. Many people consider it a joy to work so closely on meaningful work with people with whom you are close. Several of the volunteers observed during this research were serving with their families. The packing parties were particularly served by entire families volunteering together. Challenges arise however when family members and friends of the VDDN leaders attempt to volunteer and traditional relationship roles shift or blur. Alisa shared a story of one such incident. Recently, Sole Mission conducted a two-week circuit of shoe distributions on Native American reservations outside of Texas. A few volunteers who are also friends of the founders chose to attend. While at one of the reservation's distributions, a friend/volunteer made a racially insensitive comment. In response to this insensitive comment, Alisa recalled:

> [I] waited until we got in the car, made sure there was no one else around…And I said, "Hey, I need to talk to you." And I corrected her, but I was very careful about what I said. And she did not speak to me for a full day. And it made for a very rough next day

> distribution. And she's not worked with me since…And we have a very strained relationship...our relationship is not the same…She just did not handle that situation well.

According to the founders, this was not the only instance of elevated tensions and strained relationships when volunteers were also friends. Other instances were apparently resolved, and the friendship endured. Nevertheless, people with existing relationships may have unrealistic or naïve expectations concerning relational boundaries when they volunteer.

Discussion

The objectives of this dissertation was four-fold: (a) identify social entrepreneurial practices that occurred during a volunteer and donor dependent nonprofit (VDDN) organization's origin phase of existence, (b) identify social entrepreneurial practices that occurred during a VDDN's maintenance and reproduction phase of existence, (c) examine whether the higher order sets of the seven entrepreneurial activities (SEA) model (Bisel & Bisel, 2023) were apparent during a VDDN's life history, and (d) assess what divergences from the SEA model are needed to characterize a VDDN's life history accurately. These objectives were accomplished via a case study ethnography with a VDDN organization (i.e., Sole Mission), which included observations, semi-structured interviews with organizational stakeholders, and examination of organizational documents. Research questions were answered through the creation of an organizational life history of Sole Mission. Past and current entrepreneurial practices were identified by examining the history of the organization. The life history also allowed the researcher to explore whether the SEA model accounted for the social enterprise organization's origin adequately. Finally, the organizational life history served as a platform to identify divergences from the SEA model, which are specific to the constitution of VDDN organization. Findings contribute to organizational communication and social enterprise literature theoretically, methodologically, and practically. The following section elaborates on these contributions.

First, this study demonstrated the efficacy of the SEA model for explaining the creation and maintenance of organizing volunteer and donor dependent nonprofit (VDDN) organizations. Bisel and Bisel (2023) envisioned their theorizing as a prescriptive model for for-profit entrepreneurialism. The model shares important presuppositions and addenda with communication constitutes organization (CCO) theory—specifically, the four flows model

(McPhee & Zaug, 2000)—and is supported by case study evidence collected from decades of entrepreneurial work. This investigation provided more empirical confirmation of the SEA model by providing evidence that VDDN social entrepreneurs can utilize SEA model activities as a credible prescriptive approach to nonprofit organizational constitution. This research serves to further confirm the SEA model is a credible prescriptive extension of CCO theory. Extending the SEA model to encompass social entrepreneurialism is an important advancement for several reasons. Confirming the model's applicability to VDDNs suggests its credibility and transferability, while extending the model to a greater variety of organizational types adds to the model's resonance (Tracy, 2020).

Furthermore, a credible and prescriptive model of organizational constitution for social entrepreneurialism is significant in the sense that nonprofits are the largest employment sector in the United States (Drucker, 1989). Additionally, the social entrepreneurship literature gains a prescriptive theory in the SEA model. This research also adds to the body of knowledge for social enterprises, particularly in areas of nongovernmental organizations (Shumate & O'Connor, 2010) and umbrella organizations (Feldner & Fyke, 2016). Future research should include evaluating organizational life histories of other VDDN organizations to ensure Sole Mission's alignment with the SEA model is not isolated. Additionally, future research should include the assessment of social entrepreneurial endeavors, which utilize other funding and leadership models as well as those of grander size and scope to further confirm the SEA model for various nonprofit contexts and value propositions.

Relatedly, a second contribution of this study was the observation of divergences from the SEA model unique to the VDDN's organizational context. Divergences account for unique exigencies which VDDN organization founders must address, which are not necessarily contextually relevant for founders of for-profit organizations. Three divergences were identified within this research: *affinity opportunities*, *donors not investors*, and *volunteers not employees*. These three contextual exigencies were shown to require Sole Mission founders and volunteers' responses, such that organizational constitution may have been impossible without their efforts. Specific early- and late-entrepreneurial practices allowed Sole Mission leaders to address these exigencies by generating income and other material resources required for organizational operations, acquiring workers to fulfill organizational value propositions, enhancing the organization's credibility with existing and potential partners, and growing support for the organization. Identifying such conditional differences is a crucial exercise for VDDN organizational leaders because social enterprises of this ilk function in similar *and different* ways than for-profit entities. Social entrepreneurs may engage themselves or the organization in activities which complement but are not included in organizational value propositions. Successful VDDN entrepreneurs recognize and adjust for the differences between acquiring material and human capital through donations and volunteerism instead of investments and employment. Each require different motivational messages and perceived benefits than those utilized by their for-profit counterparts. Without adjusting for these divergences, the SEA model would be limited in the explanatory power of its guidance for VDDNs. Future research should examine other VDDNs for the presence of these or other divergences from the SEA model.

Third, these findings revealed entrepreneurial practices associated with the constitution of a VDDN organization occurred in both the origin *as well as* the maintenance and reproduction phases of organizational life. The SEA model's higher order sets (i.e., exploring-realizing, doubting-updating, and legitimizing-multiplying/sustaining activities) are apparent in both major phases (i.e., years 0-2 and 3-16) of Sole Mission's organizational life, supporting the SEA model claim that higher order sets occur in all organizational life stages. As such, these findings are a significant contribution to both organizational communication and social entrepreneurship literatures. The ongoing reality of the SEA model activities apparent in Sole Mission's life history reinforces the model's assertion that organizational constitution is a complex undertaking and not easy (Bisel, 2010; Bisel & Bisel, 2023)—a point that is in contrast to other CCO theorizing that may imply organizational constitution is reducible to a relatively small number of linguistic forms (e.g., Cooren, 2000). Furthermore, these activities are meaning-making process, presenting their own unique and important contributions to the constitution of the organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2009). Additionally, the constant reoccurrence of SEA model activities contributes to the ongoing constitution of the organization over time. As such, the appearance of these activities supports Deetz and Mumby's (1990) view of organizational constitution, who argue organizations are not constant and static over time but continually being produced and reproduced. The activities observed within the VDDN organization are mechanisms for the organization's ontological production and reproduction. Future research should examine whether the observation of all SEA model higher order sets appearing across an organization's life history holds true in other VDDNs as well as other categories of nonprofits.

Fourth, these findings contribute to CCO literature by offering another empirical example of how CCO theory explains organizational *origination*. Koschmann (2011) argued that the four flows model of CCO theory was comparatively weak in terms of its heuristic provocativeness, especially when compared to works by scholars associated with the Montréal School. He explained that since its publication in the year 2000, direct empirical examples and extensions of the model paled in comparison to the literature inspired by the Montréal School. Meanwhile, previous scholarship demonstrated that CCO theory, specifically the four flows model, can explain the *dissolution* of organization (Bean & Buikema, 2015; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018). This study offers support for the opposite as well: organizational origination. These findings further advance CCO theory by joining the research of other scholars (Ashcraft, et al. 2009; Bruscella & Bisel, 2018) in providing additional research demonstrating the fundamental role of material resources in organizational constitution. Additionally, this dissertation adds to the body of CCO and four flows model (FFM) research by investigating the heuristically provocative phenomenon of social entrepreneurship. Future research should continue to utilize CCO theory and the FFM as frameworks to investigate organizational constitution from all stages of organizational life.

Fifth, this dissertation contributes to social entrepreneurship literature the important classification *volunteer and donor dependent nonprofit* (VDDN) organization. Nonprofit organization founders face unique exigencies compared to founders of for-profit enterprise. Specifically, some nonprofit founders, such as those of VDDN organizations, must grapple with the dual challenge of funding and staffing. As has been previously elucidated, VDDNs rely on financial donations as well as volunteer service hours in lieu of product based income streams and the work of paid employees to accomplish organizational reasons for being. VDDNs do not generate internal income. They do not create product. Finances come from externally-donated sources. Much of their material resources (e.g., shoes) are also donated. The remaining needed material resources are purchased using donated funds. Concerning funding, social enterprises function according to various funding and staffing models, with research on many such models already present in the social entrepreneurship literature (Foster et al., 2009). Funding models range from single-source income streams of for-profit corporations, which engage in endeavors designed for social good (i.e., TOMS Shoes), to hybrid organizations (i.e., the Salvation Army, Girl Scouts), which sell products and accept donations to fund mission to organizations funded primarily by the donations of external individuals (i.e., Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma).

Concerning staffing, there exists a similar range of models as funding, with organizations utilizing paid full-time, paid part-time, and volunteer team members. Given the unique exigencies faced by founders of VDDNs, it seems likely they will be confronted with the contradictory notion of needing personnel for task accomplishment, while also needing to keep staff few and affordable. Social enterprise literature explores the potential interchangeability of volunteers with staff in nonprofits (Handy & Mook, 2008) as well as the economic benefits of so doing (Bowman, 2009). It appears VDDN organizations often tend to possess small staffs to match the scale of work accomplished within the entity's office. All other workers would be volunteers compensated by a sense of accomplishment, good deeds, or potentially by the fulfillment of service hour required elsewhere. VDDNs are not unique in their dependence on donors nor are they unique in their dependence on volunteers (Avila & Amorim, 2023; Mellow, 2007). They are unique however in their sole dependence on both for the execution of organizational value propositions. As this is a new concept, future research should be conducted to fully understand the boundaries of VDDNs. Questions concerning the implications of organizational size and scope, as well as the impact of total income need to be answered so that a complete image of a VDDN can be captured.

Sixth, this study further contributes to social entrepreneurship literature by offering an alternative to "Great Man" theories of entrepreneurs (Gill & Ganesh, 2007; Northouse, 2009) and the persistent "great entrepreneur-leader model" apparent within some popular and scholarly portrayals of entrepreneurship (McFarlane, 2011). Such theories emphasize the role of the singular organizational mover with an exemplar personality as the impetus for entrepreneurial success. Without question, entrepreneurial organizations need “visionary individuals” (Bacq & Janssen, 2011, p. 388) and “change makers” (Defourny & Nyssens, 2010, p. 41) to initiate nonprofit organizing and transition the organization from visionary concept to functional reality (Atonakis & Autio, 2007). However, findings of this study demonstrated that while visionary and committed individuals are important for VDDN organizing, serious consideration must be given to the explanatory influence of strategic partnerships and group-level processes as well. In both phases of organizational life, Sole Mission was dependent on group dynamics to enact value propositions. The constitution of the nonprofit organization occurred because of consistent partnership with well-positioned people who championed its rise. The organizational life history revealed that Sole Mission could not merely be attributable to the hard work, skill, or natural giftedness of the entrepreneur. In fact, it is apparent from the organizational life history it is not the organizer but the *organizers* who continually produce forward movement and executed value propositions. As such, this observation comports with the four flows and SEA model supposition that leadership in organizational constitution is irreducible to single communication forms and will have a distributive quality (Bisel & Bisel, 2023). Were it not for the volunteers and partnering entities, Sole Mission would not have the material nor human resources necessary to function. Future research may investigate the efficacy and broader employment of partnership and group level movement approaches to entrepreneurialism in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.

Seventh, this dissertation contributes methodologically to organizational communication literature by employing an uncommon method of data analysis: organizational life history. The use of organizational life histories in this case study research (Berg, 2001) was leveraged to develop fresh insights into organizational processes. Organizational life history method is rare (for a notable exception, see Bisel et al., 2017). Nevertheless, these findings demonstrate the efficacy of such an approach for the examination of organizations over time and development of theory. Organizational life history as a method provides researchers a systematic strategy for examining organizational initiation as well as organizational evolution, responses to cultural and leadership changes, market challenges, and even dissolution. As such, this dissertation serves as an exemplar for other researchers interested in the method and for the potential insights the method can afford. Future organizational communication research should utilize the construction of the organizational life history to gain a holistic understanding of the various mechanisms involved in the production and reproduction (Giddens, 1979) of organization across time.

Limitations

This study, like all studies, is subject to limitations. First, it remains unclear whether the findings of this research will transfer to other VDDNs and nonprofits of other categories. While the research methodology and analysis are sound, contextual variations of social enterprises may always necessitate unique deviations. Second, social enterprises and entrepreneurialism are international phenomenon, and this study is limited by the context of the United States. Future research may examine the cross-cultural transferability of the SEA model with the VDDN extensions. Lastly, as with any ethnography, researchers must recognize the real potential for their presence in the scene to influence the nature of what was observed in the field. Such influence can appear as bias in collection, analysis or interpretation. Additionally, because the researcher is also the tool for data collection, additional limitations concerning access must be acknowledged. To limit such biases, the researcher engaged validation strategies (Creswell, 2014).

Conclusion

Volunteer and donor dependent nonprofits (VDDN) is an original categorization of social enterprises which rely on the external supply of material and human resources to accomplish organizational value propositions. VDDNs engage in unique social entrepreneurial practices to originate, maintain, and reproduce the organization over its lifespan. Furthermore, this dissertation offered confirming evidence that the seven entrepreneurial activities (SEA) model is a credible guide for explaining the constitution of new VDDNs, identifying the appearance of each of the three SEA model higher order sets across the lifespan of a VDDN. This study also identified the presence of three divergences to the SEA model owing to the unique context of VDDNs, namely (a) *affinity opportunities*, (b) *donors not investors*, and (c) *volunteers not employees*. Each divergence should be recognized and accounted for to effectively deploy the SEA model for VDDN entrepreneurialism.

Table 1: RQ1: SE Practices During Origin Period (0-2 years)

Practice	Definition	Excerpt
“Sharing the story” of shoes	Articulating a compelling organizational reason-for-being, description of current organizational state, and future organizational direction.	*We're just trying to put shoes on kids – (founder).*
Developing necessary organizational elements	Creation, adoption, development, and adaptation of mechanisms required to enact organizational reason-for-being.	*“This is all 2008, we are developing everything for Sole Mission.” – (founder)*
Conducting early shoe distributions	Conducting events which reflect and accomplish organizational reason-for-being	*“The constant motivation are the distributions. Alisa and I decided early on that we were going to be at as many distributions a year as we could.” – (founder)*

Table 2: RQ2: SE Practices During Maintenance and Reproduction Period (3-16 Years)

Practice	Definition	Excerpt/Example
Acquiring and utilizing partnerships	Foster existing and create new partnerships toward the execution of organizational reason-for-being.	Alisa had spoken at their Ward. They connected with Sole Mission through the "Just Serve" website. Just Serve is a website on which local non-profits can alert community members of opportunities for service and allow people to come and help.
Creating and implementing processes	Develop and redevelop systems and structures that allow for values reflective, efficient, and effective execution of organizational reason-for-being.	The socks remained in their boxes but were sorted by size (XS to XL) and by style (ankle or calf). Volunteers wrote in large print the size and style on all four sides of each box and then piled the boxes in stacks based on size and style. Once sorted, the boxes were stored by size and style on the warehouse shelves. Once all the socks had been stored, we then started storing shoes on shelves that had been on pallets on the floor.

Table 3: RQ3: SEA Model Convergences for VDDNs

Entrepreneurial Activities (Higher-Order Set)	**Definition**	**Phase**	**Example**
Exploring-Realizing	Activities vital to initiating organization and are the activities most historically associated with entrepreneurship.	0-2 Years	Conversations between entrepreneurs about the need to provide shoes to poor American children
		0-2 Years	First shoe distribution (161 pairs of shoes)
		3-16 Years	Relocating Sole Mission to Texas
Doubting-Updating	First-order, internally focused activities designed to enable the fledgling entity to *be established, survive, and thrive*.	0-2 Years	Separating from Rural Compassion
		3-16 Years	Adding runner sheets to shoe distributions to keep track of the number of shoes distributed, available, and being offered to guests
Legitimizing-Multiplying/Sustaining	First-order and external-focused activities designed to increase stakeholder perceptions of the organization's legitimacy.	0-2 Years	Launch luncheon at 2009 Assemblies of God General Council during which the director of Rural Compassion spoke on Sole Mission's behalf
		3-16 Years	Hanging t-shirts in the building from organizations they have worked with and events of which they have been a part.
		3-16 Years	Featured on Mike Rowe's *Returning the Favor* on Facebook

		3-16 Years	Distributions in Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas, each providing over 2,000 pairs of shoes

Table 4: RQ3: SEA Model Divergences for VDDNs

Contextual Exigency	Definition	Excerpt/Example
Affinity Opportunities	Engaging in occasional or adjacent activities that are too costly to regularly maintain or which appeal to and appease donors but are not included within organizational values or reason-for-being	Conducting clothing, food, and water distributions in the wake of natural disasters.
Donors not Investors	The relationship and approach to donors from social enterprise founders and the motivation for donors to give financially are different than the relationship, approach, and motivation of investors in for-profit corporations.	*"…it can be a roller coaster. It's up and down. And fortunately, now because we've been doing it so long and we've got such a good base, there tends to be more up than down. But there's still the dips… not having the steady guaranteed income can be scary." – (founder)*
Volunteers not Employees	The relationship and approach to volunteers from social enterprise founders and the motivation for volunteers to give their time and talents are different than the relationship, approach, and motivation of employees in for-profit corporations.	*"Volunteers are exactly what they are. They come here and they're giving their time, but they don't always want to listen to you." – (founder)*

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for Sole Mission Founders

1. Could you describe for me what your life was like before starting Sole Mission?
2. Can you tell me a story or about an incident that served as motivation to begin Sole Mission?
3. What were the factor(s) in deciding to start Sole Mission?
4. Can you talk to me about the process of getting Sole Mission off the ground? What steps did you take?
5. Can you tell me about how you recruited your early volunteers? How has volunteer recruitment changed over time?
6. Could you tell me about the early challenges you faced in launching Sole Mission? Biggest challenge?
7. Can you tell me about a mistake you made early on that you learned from and how you and/or Sole Mission changed because of it?
8. Could you talk to me about an occurrence along that way that kept you motivated?
9. Can you tell me a story about a particularly impactful Sole Mission distribution, training, or service opportunity?
10. How have you developed relationships with the broader community? How has that changed over time?
11. Can you talk to me about some of the challenges Sole Mission has faced that we might not otherwise be aware of?
12. Tell me about the role materials have played (space, money, vehicles, etc.) in your ongoing existence as an organization. Has the role of materials changed over time?
13. In an ideal world, what would Sole Mission have and/or do that it currently does not have or do? What are the limitations, as you see it, to you reaching all of your goals?

Interview Guide for Sole Mission Staff Members

1. Could you describe what it was that drew you to Sole Mission?
2. Can you describe the process of getting involved with Sole Mission?
3. Tell me about your first-time volunteering with Sole Mission.
4. What was it about Sole Mission that made you want to transition from volunteer to staff? How did that transition take place?
5. Can you tell me a story about a particularly impactful Sole Mission distribution, training, or service opportunity?
6. How has Sole Mission changed as an organization during your involvement?
7. What makes Sole Mission unique from other organizations you have been involved in or are aware of?
8. Can you talk to me about some of the challenges Sole Mission has faced that we might not otherwise be aware of?
9. In an ideal world, what would Sole Mission have and/or do that it currently does not have or do?

Interview Guide for Sole Mission Volunteers

1. Could you describe what it was that drew you to Sole Mission?
2. Can you describe the process of getting involved with Sole Mission?
3. Tell me about your first-time volunteering with Sole Mission.
4. Can you tell me a story about a particularly impactful Sole Mission distribution, training, or service opportunity?
5. How has your involvement with Sole Mission changed over time?
6. How has Sole Mission changed as an organization during your involvement?
7. What makes Sole Mission unique from other organizations you have been involved in or are aware of?
8. In an ideal world, what would Sole Mission have or do that it currently does not have or do?

Interview Guide for Sole Mission Board Members

1. Could you describe what it was that drew you to Sole Mission?
2. Can you describe the process of getting involved with Sole Mission?
3. What was is about Sole Mission that made you want to serve on its board?
4. How has Sole Mission changed as an organization during your involvement?
5. What makes Sole Mission unique from other organizations you have been involved in or are aware of?
6. Can you talk to me about some of the challenges Sole Mission has faced that we might not otherwise be aware of?
7. In an ideal world, what would Sole Mission have and/or do that it currently does not have or do? What are the limitations, as you see it, to you reaching those goals?

Interview Guide for Sole Mission Donors

1. Could you describe what it was that drew you to Sole Mission?
2. What was it about Sole Mission that motivated you to begin giving? How long after you discovered Sole Mission did you start donating?
3. Can you tell me what about Sole Mission continues your ongoing investment in them?
4. How has Sole Mission changed as an organization during your involvement?
5. What makes Sole Mission unique from other organizations in which you invest?
6. What is it about Sole Mission that earns your trust with your donation?

Interview Guide for Sole Mission Community Partners

1. Could you describe what it was that drew you to Sole Mission?
2. What was it about Sole Mission that made you want to partner with them?
3. How has Sole Mission changed as an organization during the time you have partnered with them?
4. What makes Sole Mission unique from other organizations with which you partner?
5. What would your community be like without Sole Mission? Tell me a story of their impact.