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## The drivers of social entrepreneurship

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## **The drivers of social entrepreneurship: agency, context, compassion and opportunism**

### Purpose

The paper refers to the drivers of social entrepreneurship and critically explores the notion that it is prompted by a personal mission to enable social or ideologically motivated altruism. It refers to Shapero's Entrepreneurial Event Theory and the adaptation of it for social entrepreneurship in Mair and Moba (2006) and develops these so that both agency and context may be considered.

### Methodology

Fieldwork comprised a qualitative study of 12 life-story narratives of social entrepreneurs in central Scotland. The location was chosen because of its reputation for support of social entrepreneurship, and the qualitative methodology allowed for a depth of inspection and analysis of complex and situational experiences.

### Findings

Findings include observation of altruism but there are other drivers, including the appeal of the social entrepreneurship business model. Context emerges as a critical feature of social entrepreneurship too, including spurs for altruism and the human, financial and social capitals, skills and experiences of social entrepreneurs.

### Originality

The paper finds that the social entrepreneurship process involves both agency and context and is complex, and for some, reflects a strategic approach similar to commercial entrepreneurship. The paper also proposes further adaptation to Entrepreneurial Event Theory to capture this complexity of the social entrepreneurship process.

**Keywords:** social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, altruism, strategy, entrepreneurial event theory, context

## Introduction

The outcomes of social entrepreneurship are widely understood to include and prioritize social contribution and social value (Brieger and DeClerq, 2019; Duncan, 2009). Connected to this, the motivations of the social entrepreneur are associated with social or ideological goals and compassion (Miller *et al.*, 2012; Petrovskava and Mirakyan, 2018). These key elements are broadly accepted as those that distinguish the social entrepreneur from the commercial entrepreneur. However, whereas the commercial entrepreneur has been the subject of much inspection of motivations and drivers, with many studies finding there are myriad and diverse influences (e.g. Carsrud and Brannback, 2011; Maalaoui *et al.*, 2020), in the social entrepreneurship context there is little exploration beyond the assertion of it as altruism. The most common interpretation is that an individual perceives a socially or ideologically-informed opportunity, and thereafter acts like an entrepreneur to build a social enterprise, and at both the opportunity identification and social enterprise creation stages, social entrepreneurship is regarded as a largely agential process (Miller *et al.*, 2012).

There is, however, some evidence emerging that suggests social entrepreneurship is more complex than just involving agential response to a social or ideological cause and subsequent social business development. First, Zahra *et al.* (2009) and Tucker *et al.* (2019) find that social entrepreneurs can be traditionally opportunistic, that some social entrepreneurs may act like commercial entrepreneurs *before* the realization of an opportunity. Second, Yitshaki and Kropp (2016) and Hu *et al.* (2020) find that, alongside agency, context is also an antecedent and ongoing influence on social entrepreneurship. These emerging lines of enquiry – querying the primacy of social mission and of agency – have implications in terms of questioning our established knowledge of the social entrepreneurship process more broadly, suggesting further scholarly inspection is required. This is the key purpose of this paper.

The paper reports an in-depth qualitative investigation of the drivers for enterprise creation of a sample of 12 social entrepreneurs in central Scotland. The central questions the empirical work

explore are:

- a) What is the evidence for personally-informed altruism versus commercial entrepreneurial opportunism?
- b) Are contextual factors evidenced in the drivers of social entrepreneurship?

From a theoretical perspective, we refer to Entrepreneurial Event Theory (EET) (Shapiro and Sokol, 1982) and the version adapted for social entrepreneurship that is presented in Mair and Noboa (2006) because they allow for inspection of both agential and contextual influences on motivations.

Our contributions from this research are threefold. First, we examine the drivers associated with social entrepreneurship and find that while social mission and personal values are certainly evidenced, their expression is observably strategic and self-orientated in some cases. Second, through the lens of Mair and Noboa's adapted EET model we contribute data that shows that motivational drivers for social entrepreneurship may be both agential and contextual. Third, we contribute some development to the adapted EET model.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the literature on social entrepreneurship and associated drivers with a theoretical focus on activity in context. From this review, gaps in understanding are identified and these inform our two research questions. Following a description of the qualitative methodology applied to engage with these questions, findings are presented. We discuss these and present conclusions, including the theoretical contribution and implications for knowledge about social entrepreneurship.

### **The drivers of social entrepreneurship**

Social entrepreneurs have been described as value-orientated individuals who create social change through the start-up of an enterprise (Certo and Miller, 2008), as innovators who achieve social change through enterprise (Newth, 2018; Zahra *et al.*, 2008), and as individuals who are motivated by the opportunity to adopt an innovative approach to pull together resources and networks to satisfy needs

which the regular market or the state cannot, or fails to, provide (Thompson *et al.*, 2000). Elsewhere in the literature, social entrepreneurship is used to describe a wide range of phenomena. For example, Austin *et al.* (2006) refer to social entrepreneurship as a non-profit initiative in search of alternative funding strategies and management structures that create or pursue social value. Elsewhere, Hockerts (2017: 1-2) articulates it as “the identification of opportunities to create social impact through the generation of market and non-market disequilibria”. However described, the focus on social value is consistent, as is the notion that motivations for social entrepreneurship diverge somewhat from those for traditional, commercial entrepreneurship.

The general entrepreneurship literature includes much research on the intentions and motivations that precede entrepreneurial action (Carsrud and Brannback, 2011; Kautonen *et al.*, 2015). Overall, empirical studies have shown various antecedents to motivations for entrepreneurship (Amit and Muller, 1995; Dawson and Henley, 2012; Maalaoui *et al.*, 2020), most consistently including the desire to exploit an identified opportunity and to be one’s own boss (e.g. Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Verduijn *et al.*, 2014). Yitshaki and Kropp (2016) propose that these do not vary particularly for social entrepreneurship, but that social entrepreneurship is also based on solving specific social needs. Germak and Robinson (2014) find similar, as do Miller *et al.* (2012), who suggest that social entrepreneurs perceive social ventures as desirable because of specific emotional and cognitive attitudes. Petrovskaya and Mirakyan (2018) and, more recently, Tiwari *et al.* (2020) explain compassion as a key motivator and suggest social entrepreneurs rate higher on altruism, humility, empathy, trust in others and integrity as compared to commercial entrepreneurs. Dickel *et al.* (2020) propose links between social entrepreneurship and direct or indirect experience of a problem or deficit in childhood as a strong influence. What all these have in common is that the social entrepreneur is found to be motivated by an opportunity to make some social improvement and that this may be personally meaningful to them.

Alternatively, however, recent studies argue that the good intentions of social entrepreneurs should not be taken for granted and, for some, social entrepreneurship can be driven less by personally-

informed altruism and more by traditional entrepreneurial opportunism (Kimmitt and Muñoz, 2018). To exemplify, there is empirical evidence that suggests that some social entrepreneurs are motivated by attractions such as personal enjoyment (Dey and Lehner, 2017), autonomy (Dey and Steyaert, 2016) as well as fame and recognition (Tucker *et al.*, 2019). This suggests that social entrepreneurial intent may not necessarily, nor solely, arise from pro-social, altruistic motivators, and indeed, Zahra *et al.* (2009), find evidence, akin to commercial entrepreneurship, of *scanning* the environment for (social) entrepreneurship opportunities, as opposed to identifying an opportunity in response to a personally perceived need. Therefore, rather than social entrepreneurship being a vehicle by which to engage in a social agenda, in some cases at least, the motivation to become a social entrepreneur can *precede* the identification of a social goal. This latter motivation is relatively unexplored in the social entrepreneurship literature.

Elsewhere in the literature on motives for social entrepreneurship, the role of context and circumstances is similarly little explored. This is not unique to the social entrepreneurship literature of course, with critical studies of the role of context only appearing with regularity in the mainstream entrepreneurship literature relatively recently (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011; Lee and Jones, 2015). In the social entrepreneurship area specifically, there is similar critical engagement emerging. Recent research into the drivers of social entrepreneurship identify both agential and contextual characteristics as determinants. Yitshaki and Kropp (2016), Hockerts (2017) and Hu *et al.* (2020), for example, note the importance of multiple key factors associated with the social entrepreneur, and critically, their background and current circumstances. Dickel *et al.* (2020) similarly describe how social entrepreneurial motivations occur within a social context, where actors within a social entrepreneur's family and community play a role not only in driving social entrepreneurship but also on the overall entrepreneurial process. Elsewhere in the literature, research has taken an institutional approach to focus on the context in which social ventures operate (Stephan *et al.*, 2015; Urban and Kujinga, 2017), suggesting environmental factors are important for the emergence and implementation of social entrepreneurship. These suggest that rather than being entirely agency-related, social

entrepreneurship is a socially and contextually embedded process and does not occur in isolation. This too requires further investigation.

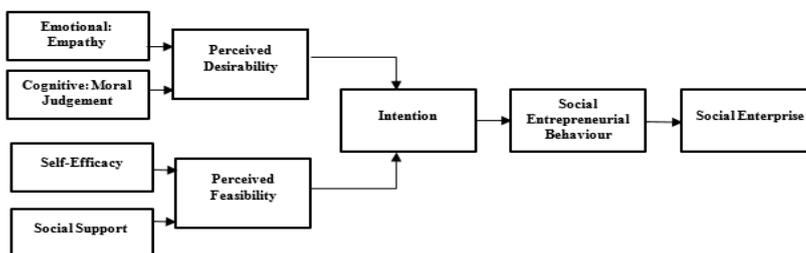
### **The theoretical context**

Research on the drivers of social entrepreneurship are theoretically rooted in the traditional entrepreneurship field (Bacq and Alt, 2018; Hockerts, 2017; Lehner and Germak, 2014). With reference to specific theoretical engagement, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) has been widely applied to social entrepreneurial intentions, including inspection of its components *perceived behavioural control, attitudes, and subjective norms* (Kruse *et al.*, 2019; Tiwari *et al.*, 2017). Ernst (2011) adopts TPB, and extends it subsequently to include traits and pro-social personality for the social entrepreneur. Elsewhere, Tran and Korfflesch (2016) use Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent *et al.*, 1994) to suggest the formation of social entrepreneurial intention is predicated on *self-efficacy* and the *expected outcome* of engaging in a behaviour. There is also reference to Entrepreneurial Event Theory (EET) (Shapero and Sokol, 1982). Broadly, EET proposes that entrepreneurship is underpinned by the elements *perceived desirability* and *perceived feasibility* which determine the *credibility* and *potential* required to develop entrepreneurial *intention* in an individual. *Perceived desirability* refers to the attractiveness of entrepreneurship and is composed of two discrete intrapersonal and extra personal constructs, *attitude* and *social norms*, both of which are affected by contextual factors such as the structural environment and the capitals (financial, social and human) of an individual, including skills and experiences (Ajzen, 1991; Schlaegel and Koenig, 2014). *Perceived feasibility*, similar to the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), refers to the degree to which one believes him/herself capable of performing entrepreneurial behaviour and access to resources, again both of these are influenced by the experiences, backgrounds and circumstances of individuals (Shapero and Sokol, 1982). *Perceived desirability* and *perceived feasibility* combine to determine the *credibility* of entrepreneurship and this in turn influences an individual's *propensity to act* and the *potential* for entrepreneurship. According to EET, *potential* is realised in response to some *precipitating event*, a displacement that can be a single or ongoing stimulus that spurs the individual out of latent potential

and focuses the mind on the intention for entrepreneurship (Shapiro and Sokol give the examples of redundancy, migration, and even subjective circumstances such as critical birthdays).

Drawing from these earlier theories of entrepreneurial intent, Mair and Noboa (2006) developed an adapted theory for social entrepreneurship specifically. Based on Shapiro and Sokol (1982) and borrowing also from Ajzen (1991), Mair and Noboa (2006) draw upon the EET antecedents of *perceived desirability* and *perceived feasibility* and the three constructs of TPB in formation of social entrepreneurial intent. This is presented in Figure 1. Critical to this model is the distinction (from commercial entrepreneurship) that posits that, for social entrepreneurship, *perceived desirability* and *perceived feasibility* are based on *empathy* and *moral judgement*, and *self-efficacy* and *social support*, respectively.

Figure 1: Mair and Noboa (2006) Model of Social Entrepreneurial Intention.



Empirically, studies that have applied traditional models of entrepreneurial intent to social entrepreneurship have tended to add cognitive and affective factors such as empathy, personal values and moral obligation as antecedents, with affirmative results. Tiwari, *et al.* (2020), for example, evidence a direct relationship between individuals engaging in social entrepreneurial behaviour and high levels of empathy and moral judgement (also Ernst, 2011 and Hockerts, 2017). Bacq and Alt (2018) find further that empathy indirectly affects social entrepreneurial intention through two mediating factors of self-efficacy and social worth. Kruse, *et al.* (2019) find that perceived behavioural control and attitudes towards the perceived desirability of social entrepreneurship mediate the

impact of subjective norms. Further, they suggest that personal values influence the dimensions and formation of social entrepreneurial intent. These studies have expanded our understanding of the social entrepreneur, but they are not without limitation. In particular, in most cases, emotional and moral drivers are still given primacy over contextual and situational influences. Consequently, they overlook the importance of the embeddedness of agency to inform social entrepreneurial behaviour. Emerging recently in response to this are new studies that seek to combine both agentic and contextual influences to investigate social entrepreneurship motivations (Brieger and DeClerq, 2019; Grimes *et al.*, 2013, Hockerts, 2017; Hu *et al.*, 2020). These few new studies are largely underpinned by theoretical development presented in Mair and Noboa (2006) with some promising outcomes for understanding. Hockerts (2017), for example, finds past experience with social problems a strong antecedent of social entrepreneurship intent. This is supported by Kruse (2020) who evidences previous experiences of working in a social enterprise affect social entrepreneurial intent through empathy and self-efficacy.

Interestingly, while Mair and Noboa (2006: 126) do recognise the importance of situational context, they do not include it directly within the model presented in Figure 1 though. While *perceived feasibility* does involve contextual factors, Mair and Noboa's antecedents to *perceived desirability* are largely agential, comprising personal responses to underlying contextual and experiential influences. Critically, the context and experience-based precipitating event in Shapero and Sokol's original theory is not mandated for social entrepreneurship by the adapted model. Instead, emotional and moral drivers are given primacy, and while these may have been informed by a preceding 'event' or experience of course (e.g. Dickel *et al.*, 2020; Hockerts, 2017), Mair and Noboa's model implies this happens *prior* to the intention formation process, if at all. This removal of context as an influence on desirability and the potential for a displacement event to spur action, reduces the ability to explore the effects of a social entrepreneur's circumstances, experiences and capitals on social entrepreneurship, resulting in the potential for circular reasoning: since these are not explored, they may be rendered not important.

## Methodology

The empirical work reported here is based on a qualitative, exploratory methodology, involving individuals in central Scotland who had created and operate a social enterprise defined as per the Scottish Government (2020) criteria as “businesses with a social or environmental purpose and whose profits are re-invested into fulfilling their mission”. Central Scotland was chosen as the location of this research specifically because the contribution which social entrepreneurs make to Scotland’s social, economic, cultural and environmental economy has increasingly been recognised in the last two decades (Jenner, 2016). In 2016, the Scottish Government released ‘Scotland’s Social Enterprise Strategy’ setting out a long-standing commitment to stimulate social enterprise activity, develop stronger organisations, and realise market opportunity (Scottish Government, 2016). Consequently, a 2019 report estimated that there were 6,025 social enterprises across the country, representing a sixteen per cent growth in numbers since the social enterprise census in 2015 (Social Value Lab, 2019). Based on the conductivity of this institutional environment (Urban and Kujinga, 2017), it is reasonable to suggest that social entrepreneurs may be drawn to create social businesses there.

To explore, testimony and opinion of those who are engaging in social entrepreneurship activity was required, including some depth of explanation of motivations. According to Bertaux (1981) and Smith and Elger (2014) the most appropriate means of accessing this type of data is by allowing actors to relate in their own words their experiences, reflections and opinions; their stories. In-depth life history narratives were therefore sought that would allow participants to reflect on the immediate and longer-term antecedents of and influences on their social entrepreneurship. As such, long interviews were conducted with few participants (12 people) using techniques that encouraged narrative histories, as used elsewhere for entrepreneurship research (Gartner, 2010; McCarthy *et al.*, 2014). The participants were recruited to the study using two approaches. First, a call for participants was made within the 2018/2019 cohort attending the School for Social Entrepreneurs (SSE), itself a social enterprise which provides training and support for social enterprise start-ups. Five of these self-selected to participate in the study. To include some more established social entrepreneurs, a second

‘networking’ approach was taken too that asked the initial five participants to name social entrepreneurs who had inspired them. More than 30 names were generated by this process, of which 21 were within the geography of the research. These were contacted and seven agreed to take part. Outline details about participants in the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Information

| Respondent | Age   | Gender | Sourced via SSE or Network | Business        | Social Mission                       | Employees |
|------------|-------|--------|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| R1         | 30-40 | Female | SSE                        | Coworking space | Community support                    | 4         |
| R2         | 30-40 | Male   | Network                    | Food and Drink  | Health                               | 55        |
| R3         | 30-40 | Male   | SSE                        | Food and Drink  | Employment for ex-prisoners          | 4         |
| R4         | 30-40 | Male   | Network                    | Food and Drink  | Clean water in Nepal                 | 7         |
| R5         | 41-50 | Male   | SSE                        | Psychology      | Mental health                        | 3         |
| R6         | 41-50 | Female | SSE                        | Food and Drink  | Health                               | 4         |
| R7         | 41-50 | Female | Network                    | Coworking space | Supporting arts and community        | 16        |
| R8         | 41-50 | Female | Network                    | Media           | Mental health                        | 3         |
| R9         | 51-60 | Male   | SSE                        | Housing         | Community support                    | 6         |
| R10        | 51-60 | Female | Network                    | Coworking space | Social Enterprise Support            | 16        |
| R11        | 30-40 | Female | Network                    | Housing         | Community support                    | 20        |
| R12        | 30-40 | Female | Network                    | Horticulture    | Work skills for disadvantaged groups | 7         |

Interviews were conversational to afford depth of testimony, but one specific item was included to engage direct with EET and the research agenda. This was the question: “Was there any specific thing that prompted you to start your social enterprise?”. This question allowed for a negative answer – that there had been no specific catalyst – but also allowed direct investigation of the incidence, as recalled by participants, of what Shapero and Sokol (1982) refer to as precipitating events (via the follow-up question “Can you describe this?”). Thereafter, as per Stake (1995), interviews were semi-structured using only an interview guide with thematic prompts, to encourage extensive relating of experiences and reflections to allow for rich exploration of themes identified in the literature, and also to enable and prompt issues not previously identified to emerge. All ensuing narratives were recorded and transcribed verbatim and itinerant issues, experiences and challenges associated with each participant’s motives and experiences of social entrepreneurship were explored with reference

to the adapted EET model in Mair and Noboa (2006) but including also inspection of any precipitating event(s) as per the original theory in Shapero and Sokol (1982). Analysis applied the technique described in King and Brookes (2016) with support from NVivo software. To reduce subjectivity and individual bias, analysis was conducted in the first instance by three of the four researchers independently, and consensus on themes emerging was achieved via consultation. This process included the development of an initial template from which both a-priori and unanticipated themes could emerge (Waring and Wainwright, 2008). Thereafter, King and Brookes' six stages of template analysis were stringently adhered to: (1) familiarisation, (2) preliminary coding, (3) clustering, (4) initial template production, (5) template development, and (6) final template. Once the final hierarchical list had been formulated, the researchers scrutinised patterns. The agreed template of hierarchical themes and expanded examples of evidence, are given in Appendix 1.

## **Findings**

### *What is the evidence for personally-informed altruism versus opportunism?*

Data relating to this question is elaborated in Appendix 1, but summary outcomes include that motivations that are broadly in line with commercial entrepreneurship were evidenced in the sample; personal income, flexibility and autonomy were cited by almost all. Beyond these, there were other key factors specific to social entrepreneurship that emerged. Among these, there was clear evidence of altruistic drivers of social entrepreneurship among participants, and sometimes these were deeply personal. R8 for example, had experienced violence and bereavement in her family and was acutely aware of the lack of support available, which then spurred her to start a social enterprise focused in this area. She explains:

*“We got started because our family went through a trauma and we realised that there was no support services to help people at the stage that they needed the help” (R8).*

R4 was similarly idiosyncratically influenced. He made a direct connection between his social entrepreneurship and his experience of becoming ill in Nepal from drinking dirty water. He felt

fortunate to be able to come home and use the NHS, and so he wanted to help those in Nepal who were less fortunate. In another example, R3's experiences as a child shaped his motivation to start a social enterprise that delivers employment skills training for ex-offenders. His testimony is illustrative:

*"My stepfather was in prison repeatedly... So yes, it's probably deeply personal and sort of strange solution to solving my own problem"* (R3).

Some participants' motivations were more ideological. R10's primary motives, for example, were based on changing current structures in place in the support of the third sector itself. Influenced by her previous experiences, she explains:

*"It was, and it still is, trying to create an alternative to mainstream supply streams. I think in the UK particular it [business support] is just an example of sort of the worst of capitalism."*(R10).

R10 expresses here a personal and values-based mission to contribute to the social and charity sectors in the face of the commercial market system that she feels ideologically opposed to.

These examples testify to the fact that, for some, the desirability of social entrepreneurship was informed by personally-meaningful mission, including compassion and altruism. But this was not consistently the case. R6, for example, started an artisan bakery social enterprise and explains her motives thus:

*"We have an adult autistic son... We decided that we were changing how we were doing things, changing our lifestyle. We were motivated by doing something that we could do with our son"* (R6).

In this case the motivation was not underpinned by a particular concern about bread quality or manufacture (ie., the social outcomes of the social business itself). Instead, the motivation here was the opportunity to provide employment and support for this family in the context of their specific circumstances.

Elsewhere, there was some evidence that it was the alternative business model of social entrepreneurship itself that was the main driver. Several participants had identified a commercial

business opportunity but had chosen a social enterprise business model as they believed it aligned with their values better than traditional business models. The testimonies of R11 and R12 are illustrative:

*"We said from the get-go that we wanted to work in an ethical way, and I think it's a really good business model"* (R11);

*"I needed to make a living... and I really liked the model that was emerging at that point which was social enterprise"* (R12).

In these cases, the social entrepreneurship was influenced by values, but not necessarily underpinned by a personal or experiential mission.

Departing further still from the influence of personal and ideological drivers, R1 had started her business with the general desire to create a social enterprise, but without any particular social mission. Pragmatically – indeed, entrepreneurially – she had systematically explored the environment for a feasible opportunity:

*"I put out a community survey and asked people what they wanted... The survey came back about co-working, and physical activity and group activity. So, I've written a business plan based on that."* (R1).

In this case, R1 was not a social entrepreneur in response to a specific personal or ideological altruism, but instead sought to be a social entrepreneur and *thereafter* scanned for an opportunity to that end.

Broadly, therefore, there was evidence of participants driven by altruism in this sample, but this was observed along a spectrum, with some in the sample placing more importance on the business opportunity identified than by a specific personally-driven social mission or the needs of particular beneficiaries. For some in the sample it would appear that they were motivated to entrepreneurship similar to commercial entrepreneurs but with some key personal or ideological underpinning. In some of these cases, the motivation was to become a social entrepreneur, either because it aligned with the values of the participants, as for R11 and R12, or because it facilitated some other opportunity, as for

R6's family. For R11 and R12 the socially contributory idea came first and the choice of business model followed. For R6 on the other hand, the business model came first and the social contribution opportunity was identified afterwards. Departing further from normative understanding, R1 actively sought to be a social entrepreneur and thereafter systematically investigated ways by which she might achieve this.

*Are contextual factors evidenced in the drivers of social entrepreneurship?*

Again, Appendix 1 provides elaborated data, but summary outcomes include that context emerged as a strong influence on the process of creating the social enterprises in this sample. First, the particularly supportive environment in Scotland does seem to have played a part in terms of the feasibility perceived among participants. There was broad consensus that a strong supportive social context exists within Scotland, with all participants expressing praise for its support of social entrepreneurship and the opportunities available for those wishing to engage in social business venturing. Related to this, seven out of the twelve social entrepreneurs in the sample were not originally from Scotland and among these were references to having been attracted there for social entrepreneurship specifically. R6, for example, originally from Australia, stated explicitly that once she had identified the opportunity to start the bakery social enterprise, she moved to Scotland because of the availability of funding there. R3 shared a similar story, she moved from London to Glasgow, as she perceived Glasgow to have fewer competitors and cheaper start-up costs. Therefore, in these cases, Scotland was the pragmatically selected location for the social enterprise.

The second notable evidence of the impact of context was that every participant replied in the affirmative to the question about a precipitating event. These are presented in Table 2. Responses varied enormously, from specific personal issues, as experienced by R3 and R4 for example, to broader references to compassion, ideology or values, such as R7 and R11 who wished to conduct their businesses in an ethical way. They included also quite pragmatic spurs, such as having an opportunity to create a subsidiary business, as was the case for R9 who subsequently chose to operate it as a social

enterprise, or to manage work and life after becoming ill, as was the case for R12, who also elected to start-up via a social enterprise business model.

The specific circumstances of each social entrepreneur in the sample were found further to be influential too. For some there was reference to the supportive social enterprise community. Previous experiences, and a social entrepreneur's human and social capital were also observably influential. R3, for example saw her business background as central to her social entrepreneurship:

*"My talent is for numbers and for understanding the market and being quite adept at business. I see my role as growing a business, and that business is as fiercely competitive and determined as the next one" (R3).*

R1 similarly drew from her previous business experience:

*"I've started a business before so I had enough skills in terms of what is required to run your own business. And when I discovered social enterprises, business savviness combined with the social aims... the model was really perfect" (R1).*

Several in the sample had previous work experience specifically in other social enterprises and social enterprise support organisations. For those with this experience, they were able to apply skills and knowledge learned to their social enterprise, as well as draw upon their existing networks.

Alongside business and social enterprise-specific experiences and circumstances were also all the other contextual influences identified already – those circumstances that led to the personal or ideological mission, or the values-based preference for a social enterprise business model, or even the pursuit of social entrepreneurship for other reasons. Each and all point to an agent acting in context, with this interaction influencing both the desirability and the feasibility for social entrepreneurship for these individuals.

In all cases explored, whether relating to personal or business experiences, the contexts of the social entrepreneurs in this sample, their experiences and circumstances, had influenced and continued to

influence the motivation to become a social entrepreneur. With reference to EET theory, each respondent was also able to identify particular key factors – entrepreneurial displacement events – that had acted as triggers to their engagement in social entrepreneurship. Some were personal, others more broadly values-based, others less so, but underpinned by antecedent desirability and feasibility, all prompted action. Thus, contextual influences were observable as antecedents in all of the life histories of participants in this research and their motivations could not be understood separate from these.

## **Discussion**

Results in this research suggest that motivations for social entrepreneurship are highly complex, involving personal values and experiences, backgrounds and circumstances of individuals. Altruism and compassion, much-asserted virtues of social entrepreneurship, were clearly evidenced, but were certainly not the only drivers. Other, more classic entrepreneurship drivers were observed too, including that even the opportunity may be systematically identified – as was the case for R1. This suggests that drivers of social entrepreneurship, while involving altruism and compassion, do so in a complex and inconsistent way.

Table 2 summarizes key information that emerged from the narrative testimonies in terms of the antecedents to participants' social entrepreneurship. First, two clear modes of motivation emerged among this sample of social entrepreneurs. These are labelled P and B in Table 2 to signal *personally informed mission* (P) and ideological preference for the social enterprise *business model* (B). In this latter type, some broad ideological opposition to commercial forms of business and capitalism may spur social entrepreneurship, with specific cause less of a prompt than the attraction of an alternative business model. These findings complement evidence from Yitshaki and Kropp (2016) suggesting, among other factors, ideological motivation as a key factor for becoming a social entrepreneur. There is additional evidence, notably from R1 and R6 in our sample, that the motivation to become a social entrepreneur can also precede identification of the specific opportunity. Consequently, supporting Zahra *et al.* (2009) and Tucker *et al.* (2019), we find that the identification for social entrepreneurship

opportunity *can* resonate with that for commercial entrepreneurship, in that a broadly interpreted mission to engage in an ethically-informed cause through social entrepreneurship may be the driver and *thereafter* a specific focus is sought.

In each interview, clear precipitating events were identifiable too, critical events that catalyzed actions, but which were informed also by the cumulative effects of background and experiences. Table 2 shows the displacement events identified and reported by each participant. These findings support findings in Dickel *et al.* (2020) on 'critical incidents', suggesting childhood experiences can provide a positive influence in social entrepreneurial intentions, and we extend this further to include critical events later in life too.

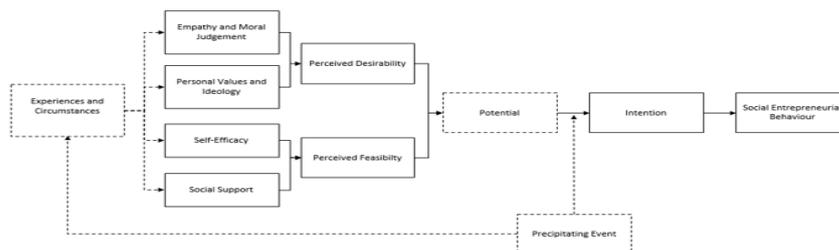
Other findings that mirror commercial entrepreneurship include the processes of realizing the social entrepreneurship observed. To elaborate, Scotland has a highly supportive and well developed institutional framework for the development and sustainability of social enterprises. This infrastructure is internationally celebrated and has been described as the best in the world. It is unlikely to be coincidental therefore that more than half of the social entrepreneurs in this sample did not come from Scotland, and instead had moved there in order to pursue their values-based mission. While the social issues with which the social enterprises included in the sample engaged were not peculiarly Scottish, the social entrepreneurship – the engagement with the cause and the contribution to social value – was being played out in a Scottish context. While this does not preclude altruism and values, it does suggest influence on the feasibility of engaging in social issues via an environment where that will be enabled and supported as per Urban and Kujinga (2017). We contend that this resonates clearly with classic notions of entrepreneurialism. More broadly, analysis supports the contention in Yitshaki and Kropp (2016), that context is an influence on social entrepreneurship, as it is in commercial entrepreneurship. In this study, motivations were observed to be influenced by myriad factors, including agential, emotional and values-based ones, influenced by circumstances, and other contextual factors such as the capitals of the social entrepreneurs, their backgrounds and their experiences.

### Implications for theory

From a theoretical perspective, by viewing the findings of this research through an EET lens, there is evidence of the nuances to perceived desirability and perceived feasibility added by Mair and Noboa (2006). In terms of *perceived desirability*, as extrapolated in Appendix 1, we find evidence of empathy and compassion emanating from previous personal experiences. Additionally, personal moral values were observed to play a strong part in the formation of motivations to start a social enterprise, notably a desire to operate business ethically, alongside more traditional factors such as autonomy, flexibility and desire for income.

In terms of *perceived feasibility*, as per Hockerts (2017) we find previous experience enables the perceived feasibility of some in the sample. We also find the influence of the availability of social support, as added by Mair and Noboa, relating to national support from government and other support organisations. Again, evidence of this is extrapolated in Appendix 1. Departing from Mair and Noboa (2006) though, this research does find evidence of precipitating events as key influences of social entrepreneurship, as detailed in Table 2. As such, we propose development of Mair and Noboa's adapted EET model as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Developed model of social entrepreneurship motives



This revised model of social entrepreneurship intentions takes account of drivers of social entrepreneurship that set it apart from commercial entrepreneurship, but allows that these might be mission-based in ways that include both personally-meaningful and also more opaque forms of social contribution. We assert that EET is a useful lens through which to view social entrepreneurship drivers, and that Mair and Noboa's work refines this for social entrepreneurship. We go a step further though and add two further elements. First, we assert context remains a key antecedent to perceived desirability and the wider circumstances of a social entrepreneur's experiences, skills, and capitals are as much an influence on social entrepreneurship motivations as any other type. Second, we observe in this research that precipitating events, as per the original EET theory, still prevail as drivers of social entrepreneurship, but that they may be flavoured by a particularly social or personal experience or ideological position. Thus rather than understand social entrepreneurship as entirely values-driven and agential, the developed EET presented in Figure 2 affords us a more nuanced view of the influence of social and personal antecedents to the pursuit of social entrepreneurship.

#### *Implications for practice and support*

Findings here evidence that the drivers of social entrepreneurship are myriad and complex, and while they may involve compassion and mission, in fact these are not mandated and in isolation are unlikely to be sufficient for social enterprise creation and operation. Other drivers, including contextual ones, are clearly implicated as important too. A central feature for more than half of our small sample was the attractiveness of the institutional environment, including the support available. This illustrates that policy and support can be instrumental in terms of the perceived feasibility of social entrepreneurship. Where there is specific need not met by market provision, the fostering of an environment conducive to social enterprise-based alternatives might be fruitful. In addition, the evidence in this research that the choice of social enterprise business model may be as strategically generated as values-based has implications in terms of support for such enterprises. It certainly

suggests a heterogeneity amongst practitioners, in turn implying variation in support, training, and resourcing needs.

## **Conclusion**

This paper concludes with the observation of two types of key drivers of social entrepreneurship. For some the driver was a personal, social or philanthropic mission, pre-identified as a social entrepreneurship cause and opportunity. For others the driver was the social enterprise business model, used to conduct commercial business in a socially and ethically-informed way, and within this group was evidence of social entrepreneurship involving scanning the environment for an opportunity just as a commercial entrepreneur would. In all cases, empathy and values were observable, as per Mair and Noboa's refinements to EET theory in terms of perceived desirability, but this altruism was inconsistently expressed, pointing to a heterogeneity of social entrepreneurship motivations, rather than a common type. Certainly, the choice of some of the social entrepreneurs in this research to locate in the social enterprise-friendly environment of Scotland is suggestive of a social entrepreneurship process that is calculated and strategic rather than emotional and responsive – though these are not mutually exclusive. Further, in terms of motivations, it is clear that some participants had started their social enterprise to respond to a personally-informed cause while others had scanned the environment to find one. Thus, while social mission and values did appear to have an influence on drivers, their expression was observably strategic in some cases, and this has implications for further research on the things that motivate those who would make social contribution through social entrepreneurship. In addition, further exploration of the critical events that spur social entrepreneurship is likely to be revealing, particularly where these are understood in terms of the social and personal circumstances of the individuals who start social enterprises and the social contexts in which they operate.

The research reported in this paper has some key limitations. Common to small qualitative studies, data relates to a particular environment and is not generalizable. In addition, methodological approaches to both sampling and analysis do not eliminate the risk of subjective interpretation or bias regardless of the measures taken to mitigate these. Further, the paper cannot claim to have exhausted the possibilities of scrutiny of extant knowledge and theory. Notwithstanding these limitations though, we propose three key contributions of our work. First, we provide evidence that non-altruistic drivers of social entrepreneurship are possible and observable. Second, we demonstrate that motivations for social entrepreneurship include both agency and context and in fact arise as an embedded process amongst agents and their circumstances. Third, influenced by the findings and analysis in this study, we propose a refined EET for social entrepreneurship. This includes the importance of context, and in particular, reinstates Shapero and Sokol's *precipitating event* as central in the theory.

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