



UNIVERSITÉ DE LIÈGE
HEC Liège – Management School

MIX AND MATCH: ESSAYS ON COLLECTIVE DYNAMICS IN NASCENT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Dissertation presented to obtain the degree of
"Docteur en Sciences Économiques et de Gestion"

Submitted by
Frédéric DUFAYS

August 14, 2016

Jury :

Helen HAUGH, University of Cambridge, Judge Business School
Benjamin HUYBRECHTS (Supervisor), University of Liege, HEC Liege
Teresa NELSON, Simmons College
François PICHAULT, University of Liege, HEC Liege
Bernard SURLEMONT, University of Liege, HEC Liege

ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship, as a form of entrepreneurship that combines a social-welfare logic with a commercial logic at its core, is increasingly recognized both in research and practice. However, its distinctive features are still subject to debate. Among these, collective dynamics appear particularly salient both in discourse on social entrepreneurship and in its practice. It is for instance argued that social entrepreneurs need to mobilize their network more intensively because they evolve in environments characterized by resource scarcity. Furthermore, a large majority of social entrepreneurial projects are borne by teams. This dissertation aims to take a closer look at these collective dynamics from an institutional theory perspective through a set of four related research papers.

The first paper argues that the sociology of social networks may constitute a promising theoretical lens to explain how and why social entrepreneurship arises by bridging micro- and macro-levels of analysis. It reviews the social entrepreneurship literature with regard to the social network concept, for which it identifies four different uses: embeddedness of social entrepreneurship, collective social entrepreneurship, networking as a critical skill or a fundamental activity of social entrepreneurship, and the creation of social capital as a goal of social entrepreneurship. It then borrows insights from theoretical frameworks that see the emergence of conventional entrepreneurship through a social network lens in order to develop a set of research proposals on social entrepreneurship emergence.

The second paper builds on one of these proposals to develop a theoretical model of hybrid organization emergence and a set of propositions. It advances several avenues and conditions under which the heterogeneity of the entrepreneurial team in terms of its members' social network and past socializations may imprint the entrepreneurial process and lead to the creation of hybrid organizations. The propositions connect the individual, team and organizational levels and thus contribute to understanding how institutional logics can be combined across different levels of analysis and throughout the stages of an entrepreneurial process.

The dissertation then seeks to refine elements of this theoretically developed model on the basis of empirical exploration. The third paper uncovers the meanings brought forward by individuals for entrepreneuring in team rather than solo in a social entrepreneurship setting through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. It locates these meanings at the individual (I-meanings), project (That-meanings), and environmental (They-meanings) levels. It highlights the intrinsic and extrinsic character of the motivations behind team entrepreneurship as well as the link with perceived uncertainty reduction. By doing so, it contributes to bring to light antecedents of team entrepreneurship.

Finally, organizational tensions in nascent social entrepreneurial teams are investigated in the fourth paper. This multiple-case study shows that nascent hybrid organizations experience performing, organizing, belonging, and learning tensions. The findings confirm that the types and patterns of tensions differ according to team size and to the strength of ties binding team members. The type of interest pursued (mutual or general interest) through the social mission is also identified as a factor influencing tension development. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that tensions tend to be located within a particular logic (social-welfare logic in this case) rather than between logics, as often suggested in the literature. Finally, bridging the institutional logic approach with French pragmatist sociological framework, the paper shows how a team can successively use different mechanisms to overcome a single tension.

Overall, this dissertation highlights the influence of collective dynamics, both at the network and at the team levels, on nascent social entrepreneurship, as a type of hybrid organizing. It contributes to institutional theory and to the literature on hybrid organizations more particularly by adding to knowledge on their emergence. It also participates in the development of (team) entrepreneurship literature by contextualizing theory and uncovering antecedents. Besides, it contributes to developing the social entrepreneurship sub-field by examining the early stages of the social entrepreneurial process. It finally offers practical implications for social entrepreneurs, for entrepreneurship support structures, as well as for policy-makers.