This is a repository copy of *Navigating interpersonal feedback seeking in social venturing: The roles of psychological distance and sensemaking*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/172604/

Version: Accepted Version

NAVIGATING INTERPERSONAL FEEDBACK SEEKING IN SOCIAL VENTURING: THE ROLES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE AND SENSEMAKING

Andreana Drencheva[1]
University of Sheffield
Management School
Conduit Road, Sheffield, S10 1FL
United Kingdom
a.drencheva@sheffield.ac.uk
+44 (0)114 222 3340

Ute Stephan
King's College London
King's Business School
Bush House, The Strand, London, WC2R 2LS
United Kingdom
ute.stephan@klc.ac.uk
and
Technische Universität Dresden
Work & Organisational Psychology
Zellescher Weg 17, 01062 Dresden, Germany

Malcolm G. Patterson
University of Sheffield
Management School
Conduit Road, Sheffield, S10 1FL
United Kingdom
m.patterson@sheffield.ac.uk

Anna Topakas
University of Sheffield
Management School
Conduit Road, Sheffield, S10 1FL
United Kingdom
a.topakas@sheffield.ac.uk

Navigating interpersonal feedback seeking in social venturing: The roles of

psychological distance and sensemaking

ABSTRACT

This study advances understanding of interpersonal feedback seeking as a relational micro-foundational process whereby social entrepreneurs proactively involve others in venturing and engage in sensemaking when this fails. Our inductive analysis of 82 interviews with 36 social entrepreneurs reveals the agency in and the plurality and precariousness of feedback seeking by identifying three distinct feedback-seeking trajectories. Feedback seeking is an identity-driven process whereby how and why social entrepreneurs seek feedback depends on their psychological closeness to the targeted social issue. Our study elucidates the relationship between identity and feedback processes and uncovers psychological distance from the social issue as a new construct in social venturing.

Keywords: Social entrepreneurship; interpersonal feedback seeking; identity; image; psychological distance

Abbreviations:

IFS: Interpersonal feedback seeking

OB: Organizational behavior

SE: Social entrepreneur

Executive summary

Clinton and Sophia are founders of social ventures that develop solutions for local communities. They both believe that seeking feedback through interpersonal interactions is important, for instance, to co-create solutions with community members or to signal the prosocial nature of their venturing efforts. Yet, they both struggle to get responses to feedback requests from community members, customers, and funders. Reacting to this challenge, Clinton and Sophia take radically different approaches. While Clinton is investing hundreds of hours to encourage responses to feedback requests, Sophia has limited her feedback seeking.

Considering others' input is often seen as intrinsic to social entrepreneurship, reflecting the entrepreneurs' prosocial motivations and the nature of the social needs they address (Zahra et al., 2009). Consequently, research highlights the importance of integrating the input of stakeholders (e.g., beneficiaries, customers, funders) to shape social ventures' opportunities (Corner and Ho, 2010), governance (Ebrahim et al., 2014), start-up performance (Katre and Salipante, 2012), trust and networks (Smith et al., 2012), and social impact (Branzei et al., 2018; Stephan et al., 2016). The individual or micro-level process that underpins this integration of others' input into the venture is interpersonal feedback seeking—the process by which social entrepreneurs ("SEs") like Clinton and Sophia proactively engage others to elicit evaluative information about themselves and their ventures.

Interpersonal feedback seeking ("IFS") is rarely examined in social entrepreneurship research because scholars implicitly assume that others' input is readily available for SEs (e.g., Muñoz et al., 2018). However, Clinton's and Sophia's struggles to obtain interpersonal feedback when requested challenge this implicit assumption about feedback availability. Equally, while IFS is seen as beneficial, not all entrepreneurs seek feedback (Katre and Salipante, 2012), as illustrated by Sophia. This suggests that IFS may be a more difficult process than current social entrepreneurship research suggests. In sum, we lack understanding

of why and how SEs first engage with others to seek feedback, what challenges they face, and how they make sense of these challenges to navigate the IFS process.

This article addresses the following question: *How do social entrepreneurs navigate the process of interpersonal feedback seeking?* We conducted an in-depth inductive study involving 82 interviews with 36 nascent SEs. Our investigation unveils IFS as an identity-driven process in which SEs' psychological closeness to the social issues they target shapes how and why SEs seek feedback, and in what ways they make sense of challenges encountered in doing so. Psychological closeness (distance) describes individuals' subjective experience of whether something is close to (far away from) the self, i.e., whether it is present in their direct experience (Liberman et al., 2007; Trope and Liberman, 2010).

SEs who addressed social issues psychologically close to them and related to their identities sought feedback to improve their ventures' offerings and entrepreneurial practice. They interpreted salient challenges to their IFS as threats to how they saw themselves (i.e., identity threats), which led them to experiment with IFS strategies to protect their identities. By contrast, SEs who addressed social issues psychologically distant from them and unrelated to their identities sought feedback to establish an image as '*social*' entrepreneurs. They interpreted challenges in IFS as threats to how they wanted to be seen by others (i.e., image threats), which led them to experiment with IFS strategies to protect their desired image. Thus, SEs' sensemaking served different needs (i.e., protecting SEs' identity or image) and shaped different types of changes to their IFS strategies.

Our findings show that SEs' feedback seeking can take multiple forms according to their identities and relations to the targeted social issues. We also elaborate on the potentially important role in social venturing of psychological distance from the social issue and consider how it can contribute to critical aspects of SEs' work, such as developing social change strategies, mission drift, and mobilizing different resources.

1. Introduction

Obtaining feedback, or evaluative information, about venture-relevant decisions and behaviors is important for social ventures and entrepreneurs. Research suggests that social entrepreneurs ("SEs") seek and use feedback to develop opportunities (Corner and Ho, 2010; Muñoz et al., 2018; Perrini et al., 2010), understand beneficiaries (Walk et al., 2015), build trust (Smith et al., 2012), aid start-up performance (Katre and Salipante, 2012), and develop social impact (Branzei et al., 2018; Stephan et al., 2016). Moreover, feedback can help social ventures remain accountable to beneficiaries (Ebrahim et al., 2014) and counter mission drift (Ramus and Vaccaro, 2017). At the individual level, studies of social and commercial entrepreneurs suggests that the content of feedback received from others impacts entrepreneurs' identities (Conger et al., 2018; Demetry, 2017; Grimes, 2018; O'Neil et al., 2020).

The existing research has focused on the content of feedback, yet neglected the process of seeking feedback. The literature provides insights into the positive consequences of obtaining feedback for social ventures and entrepreneurs, but understanding of *how* SEs initially seek feedback is conceptually and empirically underdeveloped. Researchers often implicitly assume that feedback is widely available to SEs (one exception is Katre and Salipante, 2012). This misconception particularly limits our understanding of how SEs navigate the *process* of interpersonal feedback seeking ("IFS"). IFS is the proactive interactions of SEs with other individuals to obtain feedback about the effectiveness and appropriateness of venture-related decisions and behaviors (building on Ashford, 1986). IFS is conceptualized as a process in organizational behavior ("OB") research (Grant and Ashford, 2008) but not yet examined in its own right in social entrepreneurship research. Instead, in social entrepreneurship research IFS emerges as a relational micro-foundation in the start-up process (e.g., Katre and Salipante, 2012; Smith et al., 2012). Consequently, what challenges SEs face and how they make sense

of them to navigate IFS remains unclear.

This article addresses the following research question: *How do SEs navigate the IFS process?* We conducted an in-depth inductive study involving 82 interviews with 36 nascent SEs. Our findings suggest that SEs' feedback seeking is an identity-driven process that they navigate through sensemaking patterns shaped by the psychological distance between the SE and the targeted social issue. Psychological distance is the degree to which a social issue is present in an SE's direct experience of reality (Liberman et al., 2007). Some SEs directly experience the social issues they target, such as personally suffering gambling addiction or having a child with a medical condition that is poorly understood by schools and social services. These social issues are a part of how SEs see and define themselves (i.e., part of their identity). Other SEs address social issues that they have not personally experienced, such as finding employment after imprisonment, and that are unrelated to their identities.

When SEs address psychologically close social issues, they seek feedback to improve their offerings and entrepreneurial practice. They interpret salient IFS challenges as identity threats and change their IFS strategies to protect their identities. Conversely, when SEs address social issues that are psychologically distant and motivated by economic opportunities, they seek feedback to establish a *social* image. They interpret salient IFS challenges as threats to how they want to be seen (as caring *social* entrepreneurs), and change their IFS strategies to protect the desired image. This key insight can be seen across the three IFS trajectories we identified: entrepreneur-oriented and community-oriented trajectories, for SEs psychologically close to the social issues, and opportunity-oriented trajectory, for SEs psychologically distant from those issues. Overall, our findings show the plurality of feedback seeking with distinct sensemaking patterns to protect identity or image, which in turn shape different types of changes to IFS strategies.

Our findings make several contributions. First, they advance understanding of the

relationship between identity and feedback processes in entrepreneurship. By focusing on proactively seeking feedback, instead of responding to it (e.g., Conger et al., 2018; Demetry, 2017; Grimes, 2018), our findings unveil the agency in and precarity of feedback processes for entrepreneurs. Specifically, our unique focus on proactive feedback seeking as a sensemaking process expands understanding of three aspects: the plurality of feedback seeking, what constitutes an identity threat, and crafting an image aligned with entrepreneurs' identities.

Second, our findings reveal surprising heterogeneity of social entrepreneur motivations complementing the existing emphasis on prosocial motivation (e.g., Miller et al., 2012). What is more, they introduce psychological distance from the social issue as a novel and potentially critical construct in social venturing to better understand not just feedback seeking and sensemaking, but also potentially processes of social change, mission drift, and resource mobilization. Introducing psychological distance from the social issue can thus address our limited understanding of how the social issue influences social ventures' functioning (Mair and Rathert, 2020) by providing a theoretical mechanism of how social issues 'translate' into the experience of SEs where they then guide strategic choices and actions.

Finally, our findings have theoretical implications for the IFS stream in OB research by introducing a new theoretical lens (sensemaking) and a new construct (role identity) for understanding why and how individuals seek feedback differently from one another and over time. Importantly, explicating how SEs change their IFS strategies by experimenting with the process, content, sources, and timing of IFS complements OB research's focus on two main strategies of seeking feedback—direct inquiry and monitoring (Parker and Collins, 2010)—whose use is assumed to be stable and uniform.

2. Theoretical background

Social venturing is typically defined as organizing efforts driven by concern *for others* and

enabled by working *with others* (Branzei et al., 2018). Social ventures pursue prosocial objectives, such as reducing homelessness or inequality, through market mechanisms (Mair et al., 2012). Such venturing is *social* in the relational processes it embeds because achieving prosocial goals requires engagement with diverse stakeholders. Research documents the importance of relational processes for social venturing: these ventures involve diverse stakeholders whose input is critical for their emergence, performance, and ability to catalyze social impact (Branzei et al., 2018; Stephan et al., 2016). For example, SEs develop new opportunities by involving multiple stakeholders who possess different knowledge (Corner and Ho, 2010; Katre and Salipante, 2012), bring unusual perspectives (Mongelli et al., 2017), provide tangible resources, and increase ventures' credibility (Di Domenico et al., 2010; Perrini et al., 2010). These relational processes introduce social ventures to diverse stakeholders, such as direct beneficiaries, community members and leaders, funders, collaborators, policymakers, and customers, representing different domains and interests.

Considering the centrality of others' input and insights in social venturing, there is surprisingly no empirical and theoretical understanding of the micro-foundational processes of how SEs initially engage others. Indeed, the extant literature assumes that SEs are provided with input (e.g., Muñoz et al., 2018). However, social ventures have stakeholders with divergent interests and privileges (Powell et al., 2018): some (e.g., funders) may be in privileged positions to share input with SEs, while others (e.g., beneficiaries) may lack such opportunities or capabilities (Stephan et al., 2016). Thus, to understand how others come to inform and influence the social venture, it is essential to understand how SEs actively seek input and make room for others' involvement. One specific type of input SEs seek is interpersonal feedback. The next three sections overview IFS in social entrepreneurship and OB research, and explain sensemaking's potential role in SEs' navigation of the IFS process.

2.1. *SEs' IFS*

SEs' IFS is a proactive, bidirectional interaction between an SE and at least one other individual, initiated by the SE to obtain self- or venture-relevant evaluative information about the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of venture-related decisions and behaviors (adopted from Ashford, 1986; Ilgen et al., 1979). As a specific type of evaluative information, feedback differs from advice, which is general information on how to approach tasks, often before an action or a decision (Phye, 1991). While SEs' IFS has never been studied in its own right and is sometimes labeled differently—e.g., "seeking feedback" (Katre and Salipante, 2012) or "giving voice" (André and Pache, 2016)—interpersonal interactions to solicit evaluative information often emerge as a theme in inductive and exploratory studies of social entrepreneurship. While not explicitly focused on IFS, such studies (Corner and Ho, 2010; Katre and Salipante, 2012; Smith et al., 2012) offer glimpses into SEs' IFS and show that SEs seek interpersonal feedback from within and outside the venture and in different directions— downward (e.g., employees), horizontally (e.g., partners), and outward (e.g., community leaders and members).

These studies suggest that IFS can play an important role in social venturing. IFS aids conceptualizing opportunities and creating and improving offerings in new social ventures (Katre and Salipante, 2012); improves social ventures' capabilities to create social impact by understanding beneficiaries' experiences, needs, and frustrations (Walk et al., 2015); and facilitates growing networks and building trust within and outside the venture (Katre and Salipante, 2012; Smith et al., 2012). Thus, IFS may improve social venture performance (Katre and Salipante, 2012) and help to avoid mission drift when scaling by giving voice to beneficiaries (André and Pache, 2016; Ebrahim et al., 2014).

Despite these anticipated benefits from IFS, counter-intuitive findings show that not all SEs seek feedback (Katre and Salipante, 2012). Yet, because IFS emerged inductively in studies of other phenomena, such as venture emergence (Corner and Ho, 2010; Katre and

Salipante, 2012), it is typically only vaguely defined and treated as a simple, one-off activity following a single decision on whether to seek feedback. Thus, it is unclear why SEs may refrain from IFS. OB research suggests that IFS is a process (Grant and Ashford, 2008), rather than the simple activity conceptualized in social entrepreneurship research. It seems likely that the complexities and challenges of this process may lead individuals to abandon IFS.

2.2. OB research on IFS

For over 30 years, OB research has quantified aspects of IFS to examine who seeks feedback, when, and why. Recent reviews (Ashford et al., 2016) and meta-analyses (Anseel et al., 2015) have summarized what we know about employees' motivations for seeking feedback, how their personalities influence IFS, and the frequency, strategies, and potential outcomes of IFS. Overall, OB research shows that employees are motivated to improve their performance by directly requesting interpersonal feedback or monitoring their environment for cues that provide it (Parker and Collins, 2010). However, they are also motivated to refrain from seeking feedback to protect their self-views and how they believe others see them (i.e., image) (Anseel et al., 2015; Ashford, 1986; Hays and Williams, 2011). This is because individuals prefer to maintain a consistent view of themselves (Baumeister, 1999) and are concerned about the impressions they project to others (Ibarra, 1999). OB research reveals individuals' fear that requesting feedback could indicate lack of knowledge or competence. Consequently, studies have examined IFS frequency with the assumption that employees seek feedback less frequently when the perceived cost is high (Anseel et al., 2015; Hays and Williams, 2011).

The cost–benefit analysis underpinning decisions to seek feedback, as suggested in OB research, does not account for external challenges faced by SEs, the nature of SEs, and the connections between SEs' identities and their ventures. First, this analysis is based on motivations to seek feedback mostly within formalized relationships, i.e. from line managers within the employing organization (Chuang et al., 2014) or from advisory boards (Ashford et

al., 2018). It does not consider external challenges, which are likely to be plentiful for SEs who seek feedback from others outside their emerging organizations and with whom they have no formalized relationships. The lack of such relationships can translate into failed attempts at IFS. Such external challenges can serve to "jolt" routines (Meyer, 1982), interrupting existing ways of thinking and thereby triggering sensemaking (Weick, 1995). Second, a cost–benefit analysis with only limited choices for seeking feedback does not reflect the proactive and creative nature of SEs, as individuals who readily assume responsibilities (Stephan and Drencheva, 2017), act reflexively (Conger et al., 2018), and may create additional ways to seek feedback, rather than simply refraining from IFS.

Finally, such a cost–benefit analysis neglects SEs' role identities—the internalized behavioral standards related to specific roles (e.g., SE, mother) that are used to define the self (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Thus, role identities represent a type of self-views. SEs' role identities are closely tied to their social ventures and can influence opportunity development (Wry and York, 2017) and re-evaluation (Conger et al., 2018), engagement with stakeholders (York et al., 2016), and legitimation (O'Neil and Ucbasaran, 2016). Research suggests that social (Conger et al., 2018) and commercial entrepreneurs (Grimes, 2018) are concerned with protecting their role identities when provided with disconfirming feedback that challenges their ideas or disappointing scores from certification bodies. As entrepreneurs' identities are closely intertwined with their ventures, challenges in IFS will likely elicit sensemaking—an interpretive process with identity at its core (Weick, 1995) and triggered when unexpected events challenge one's understanding of the situation. Thus, a sensemaking lens fits the reflective nature of SEs and can help us understand how they navigate the IFS process and respond to external challenges in different and creative ways.

2.3. Sensemaking

Sensemaking occurs when individuals experience confusing, disruptive, or ambiguous

events, or if expected events do not occur. These events are salient cues that *violate individuals'* *expectations* and raise the questions "what's going on here?" and "what do I do next?" (Weick et al., 2005, p.412), thus creating meaning through cycles of *interpretation* and *action* (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Sensemaking is an interpretive process in which SEs (or other individuals) provide seemingly plausible explanations for confusing situations, thereby mobilizing action in a particular direction (Dutton et al., 1983). Thus, sensemaking involves not only noticing and *interpreting* information but also *acting* on the revised interpretation of the situation with experiments aiming to restore the SE's understanding (Weick, 1988, 1995).

More specifically, sensemaking involves three core "moves" (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014). Experiences and expectations guide attention and shape what SEs pay attention to and how they bracket cues as relevant or otherwise. The first sensemaking move is noticing an inconsistency between expectation and reality, which can be an unexpected occurrence, a challenge, or the absence of an anticipated event. This inconsistency interrupts existing ways of thinking and acting and motivates SEs to (re-)interpret situations and meanings (Jay, 2013; Smith and Besharov, 2019) as the second move. Finally, SEs test their interpretations of situations and meanings with enactments that confirm their new understanding or prompt further interpretation (Jay, 2013; Smith and Besharov, 2019). Thus, different SEs may experience the same event and interpret it differently, leading to different actions.

Overall, SEs likely engage in sensemaking to navigate IFS because this process can be ambiguous (e.g., emergent challenges), difficult (e.g., related to identity), and meaningful (e.g., important for outcomes) (Thomas et al., 1993). Yet, too little is known about SEs' experiences of IFS to understand their sensemaking patterns and navigation of the process. Explicating how and why SEs engage in sensemaking to navigate IFS is important for understanding whether and how SEs seek feedback and, therefore, how others' input shapes the opportunities SEs exploit, their ventures' performance, and the social impact they generate. Thus, this study

investigates how SEs navigate the IFS *process*.

3. Research design

Given the limited research on SEs' IFS, we used an inductive approach appropriate for "how" questions (Edmondson and McManus, 2007) and employed previously for exploring entrepreneurs' experiences (Rouse, 2016). Our approach also follows recommendations for studying advice-seeking by CEOs—a similar population engaging in an analogous phenomenon whose micro-foundational processes are poorly understood (Ma et al., 2019).

3.1. Participants

We selected nascent SEs as a strategic sample because IFS can play an important role given their difficulties in developing operational social ventures (Renko, 2013). Past inductive research pointing to IFS has also focused on nascent SEs (Corner and Ho, 2010; Katre and Salipante, 2012). Moreover, choices and behavioral patterns early in venture development are known to imprint and exert lasting influences on organizational strategy and performance (Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013; Muñoz et al., 2018). Finally, researching nascent SEs minimizes hindsight, selection, and survival biases that are salient when researching phenomena with entrepreneurs in established organizations (Davidsson and Gordon, 2012). Overall, selecting a theoretically rich and narrow context is appropriate for inductive theory building as it reveals nuances that might be obscured in broader settings (Langley and Abdallah, 2011).

We recruited 36 nascent SEs from two support organizations in the United Kingdom (see Table 1, with individual and venture pseudonyms to protect identities). The support organizations sent an invitation email to all individuals who had requested start-up support in the previous 12 months. We received 112 expressions of interest through a completed screening questionnaire. All interested individuals were screened on four main criteria using questions for identifying nascent SEs from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Terjesen et al., 2012): (1) currently trying to start any activity, organization, or initiative with a particular social,

environmental, or community objective; (2) has taken active steps in the past 12 months to start this activity, organization, or initiative; (3) generates or plans to generate revenue through trading; and (4) has not generated a surplus for more than three consecutive months. The 75 individuals who met these criteria were invited to provide informed consent to be interviewed. On receiving informed consent forms, we started data collection, in parallel to data analysis. This allowed us to stop growing the sample after reaching theoretical saturation, i.e., when no substantially different experiences were found as more data were collected from new participants (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Individuals who had provided consent but did not respond to our invitation to schedule an interview (n = 24) were sent two follow-up reminders before we moved to the next listed name.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

3.2. Data collection

Due to the interpersonal nature of IFS and our focus on SEs' experiences, the data came from 82 semi-structured interviews at different time points with 36 participants. We started primary interviews with a wide scope to understand the social ventures and situate the SEs' IFS. Next, we asked participants to describe in detail two IFS interactions from the past two months, including their motives, decisions, methods, individuals considered or approached, and any challenges. We also asked for details of two interactions that participants were reluctant to engage in or instances in which they considered but refrained from IFS. By focusing on recent IFS events we captured significant and memorable IFS interactions, mundane IFS interactions, and those the SEs considered but could not or decided not to engage in. For example, the IFS interactions the SEs shared ranged greatly in perceived significance and included instances of seeking a spouse's feedback on a blog post to seeking a potential investor's feedback on the legal structure of the social venture. Secondary and tertiary interviews had a more structured approach to explore emerging themes, check data, clarify information (Gioia et al., 2012), and

follow up on how the SEs reflected on the IFS with their decisions and salient challenges.

We conceptualized IFS as a micro-process that starts unfolding before an observable IFS interaction occurs and may continue unfolding afterward, as SEs take time to reflect, interpret, and further refine their IFS strategies. By soliciting SEs' accounts of interpretations and decisions before specific IFS interactions and non-interactions, we gained nuanced descriptions of why SEs sought feedback, what challenges they faced, their reflections on these challenges, and changes to their IFS strategies. This allowed us to uniquely capture meanings, interpretations, and enactments as experienced by the SEs (Orbuch, 1997). The accounts of IFS decisions from their own perspective highlighted "the ambivalences, uncertainties, and angsts that are a day-to-day reality" (Orbuch, 1997, p.461). Hence, interviewing SEs was the most appropriate data collection approach for three reasons. First, through interviews they could provide rich, detailed accounts of specific experiences, regardless of magnitude and outcomes. Such evidence on IFS decisions and interpretations is not available from other data sources, such as archival documents. Second, the accounts detailed situations in which SEs had considered IFS but not engaged in it. This was important for understanding what challenges they faced, how they made sense of them, and how they continued with or abandoned IFS activities. Such considerations cannot be observed or accessed through other data collection methods. Third, interviews are less obtrusive than observation of interpersonal interactions, thus minimizing the researchers' influence.

To minimize recollection and salience biases, we focused on specific, recent IFS experiences. We emphasized the confidentiality and anonymity of data, allowing participants to share less socially desirable information. Indeed, participants expressed high vulnerability and angst, inconsistent with social desirability but in line with the stress and anxiety entrepreneurs experience (Cardon and Patel, 2015). This account-based approach has been used to study similar micro-processes, such as courageous actions at work (Schilpzand et al., 2015).

3.3. Data analysis

We followed common prescriptions for inductive qualitative data analysis (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Gioia et al., 2012; Rouse, 2016; Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010). During data collection, we engaged in parallel, iterative data analysis to explore how SEs navigated IFS. While we describe our analysis as mostly linear for readability purposes, and highlight only key turning points in the later stages, the process was highly iterative, moving between and among the data, relevant literature, and emerging patterns to refine the analysis into particular conceptual categories and distinct relationships between them (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.3.1. Step 1: Coding for elements of the IFS process

We started with open coding to categorize raw data about the IFS process into first-order categories that gave voice to the SEs engaged in the focal phenomenon and made their perspective the foundation of the analysis. We coded units of meaning using "in-vivo" labels reflecting the language used by SEs or simple phrases describing the meaning of the unit as first-order categories (Strauss and Corbin, 2008). This stage revealed that SEs sought feedback for diverse reasons, used many IFS strategies, encountered three distinct challenges when seeking feedback (lack of engagement of feedback sources, lack of access to appropriate feedback sources, and lack of time for IFS), and responded to these challenges with 11 different types of experiments. We constantly compared each unit of meaning with the previous one in the transcript and all units within a category to refine categorical boundaries.

As open coding continued, we also began axial coding. The first-order categories described the key elements of SEs' IFS experiences from their own perspective but did not reveal theoretical explanations and relationships. To distill themes that could be theoretical elements, we engaged in axial coding by abstracting and consolidating first-order categories into second-order themes and aggregated dimensions, as theoretical interpretations of SEs' lived experiences (Gioia et al., 2012). At this data analysis stage, we developed initial aggregated

dimensions: we categorized overall decisions to seek feedback, systematized explanations of the challenges SEs encountered when engaging in ISF, and synthesized their multiple ways of experimenting with IFS into four types of experiments. Again, we used constant comparison to delineate and differentiate themes and dimensions. When themes were created or changed, we reanalyzed all transcripts based on the new themes to clarify categorical boundaries. We also combined related themes into the same aggregated dimension and sought insights into the relationships between dimensions.

3.3.2.   Step 2: Identifying sensemaking as a mechanism to navigate the IFS process

In step 1 of the analysis, we focused on the commonalities between all SEs. For example, all SEs neglecting the challenge of limited time for IFS, while they experienced the other two challenges as eliciting shock, disappointment, sadness, or conflict. However, we noticed that even when they faced the same salient challenge, SEs spoke differently about it, for example, as to whether it reflected their own vulnerability or that of their beneficiaries. Indeed, the challenge prompted them to reflect on their initial decisions to seek feedback and surfaced taken-for-granted purposes for IFS. We, therefore, started to explore sensemaking[1] as a mechanism through which the SEs navigated the IFS process and refined our approach to investigate specific sensemaking patterns. During this data analysis stage, we focused on two aspects of sensemaking: interpretation and enactment. We differentiated how the SEs interpreted the challenges as three distinct vulnerabilities and came to view their four types of experiments as enactments of their new understanding of the challenge and the situation. At this stage, we dropped the challenge of limited time for IFS because it did not seem to trigger sensemaking.

[Insert Fig. 1 about here]

---

[1] While sensemaking emerged from the data analysis, we provide an overview in the theoretical background for ease of reading.

3.3.3.   Step 3: Coding for SE differences and comparing narratives

Next, we focused on the complete narratives of two participants – Sophia and Clinton – because they experienced the same challenge yet interpreted it differently and engaged in different experiments, despite the similarities between their social ventures in addressing local issues. In line with the sensemaking literature's view that experiences and expectations guide what is noticed or neglected (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014), we sought differences in their narratives that might explain their differing sensemaking patterns. They spoke of themselves very differently: Sophia considered herself a serial entrepreneur engaging in her next venture, while Clinton routinely described himself as a member of the local community that his social venture aimed to serve. These role identities (Stryker and Burke, 2000) were also consistent with the dominant purposes the two SEs articulated for their IFS.

At this stage, we identified that the key difference between Sophia and Clinton was psychological distance (Liberman et al., 2007) from the social issues they targeted. While Clinton aimed to address an issue directly experienced in his community and reality, Sophia's venture targeted an issue outside her direct experience. With this preliminary insight, we reanalyzed all transcripts, focusing on founders' start-up motivations and role identities to capture their psychological distance from the social issue of their ventures. In this part of the analysis, groups of SEs emerged. SEs who shared start-up motivations and role identities also sought feedback for similar purposes, perceived similar salient challenges when seeking feedback, and shared enactments. As Section 4 will describe, we came to understand these sequences not as single, contained decision-making events but as three coherent trajectories describing dominant IFS patterns.

As the importance of role identities emerged, we also reanalyzed interpretations of the challenges, which we had labeled "vulnerabilities." Reanalyzing these interpretations led to changing this label and splitting the category (Grodal et al., 2020) into two: identity threat,

whereby SEs questioned the meaning of the role they were internalizing or their fit with that role (Petriglieri, 2011), and image threat, whereby SEs questioned the discrepancy between their desired image and what they potentially projected. This further clarified the differences between trajectories and reinforced the importance of psychological distance.

In the final stage of analysis, we developed descriptions of the three IFS trajectories that captured the common elements between trajectories and distinguished the trajectories from one another. We then identified appropriate labels for each trajectory that described how the SEs navigated the IFS process in line with their relations to their targeted social issues.

3.4. *Trustworthiness of the findings*

We took several steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Overall, we aimed to remain close to SEs' lived experiences and maintain theoretical relevance through critical and challenging reflections and discussions. First, we employed an insider–outsider team research design to balance lived experiences and theoretical relevance (Bartunek and Louis, 1996). Accordingly, the first author coded all data and the team engaged in regular debriefings. This allowed one team member to be close to SEs' lived experiences and responsible for enhancing their voices, while other members maintained an "outsider perspective" to ensure theoretical relevance. During team debriefings, we reviewed interview transcripts and discussed emerging insights, future data collection, and analysis. "Outsider" researchers raised critical questions and challenged emerging findings to clarify conceptual boundaries, relationships between categories, and theoretical framings (Gioia et al., 2012). This process was further enhanced by critical discussions with academic experts in IFS, social entrepreneurship, and sensemaking. Second, during data collection, we performed several checks through probing questions in primary interviews and conducting secondary and tertiary interviews to confirm previously shared accounts and clarify insights. Third, we developed a theory grounded in SEs' lived experiences and language, while maintaining theoretical rigor

and parsimony (Gioia et al., 2012), by distinguishing first- and second-order categories, themes, and aggregated dimensions (see Fig. 1). Fourth, we used member checks (Guba, 1981) by summarizing our findings on SEs' challenges in IFS and their approaches to addressing them in a written report, on which participants were asked to give feedback, thereby confirming that we had accurately captured these aspects of their lived experiences.

4. Findings

Our investigation revealed that SEs navigated the IFS process by interpreting challenges as threats to their identity or image, which they aimed to protect by experimenting with feedback seeking. Whether SEs interpreted IFS challenges as identity or image threats depended on their psychological distance from their targeted social issues. That is, the SEs addressed social issues that were psychologically close (within their direct experience) or distant (outside their direct experience). More specifically, we identified three distinct IFS trajectories: entrepreneur-oriented, community-oriented, and opportunity-oriented (see Fig. 2). While entrepreneur- and community-oriented SEs aimed to address psychologically close social issues experienced by themselves and their communities, opportunity-oriented SEs started their ventures to pursue economic opportunities in psychologically distant social issues.

Psychological distance to the social issue intersected with founders' identities and desired outward image to inform the purpose of their IFS, which differed across the three trajectories. Specifically, SEs addressing a social issue that had personally affected them experimented with a provisional identity as entrepreneurs and sought feedback to strengthen this; SEs addressing a social issue that had affected their community identified as community members and sought feedback to co-create solutions with these members; and SEs pursuing an economic opportunity employed IFS to be seen as *social* entrepreneurs—responsive, engaged, and responsible, thus enabling pursuit of the opportunity.

As the SEs sought feedback aligned with their purpose and relation to the social issue, they

faced multiple challenges. However, SEs' relations to the social issue and their purpose for IFS defined their expectations and what cues they paid attention to or downplayed. SEs therefore perceived some challenges, or the absence of anticipated events, as threatening and interrupting to understanding themselves and IFS. They felt anxious, questioned their self-view (identity threat; Kreiner and Sheep, 2009), or worried about how others saw them (image threat). These challenges often surfaced implicit and taken-for-granted purposes and identities behind founders' start-up motivations and IFS decisions. Equally, SEs downplayed or ignored the challenge of limited time to seek feedback. They checked their interpretations of the challenges through experiments (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015) to protect provisional identities, reaffirm existing identities, or protect their image. Overall, because the SEs had distinct identities and related to their social issues differently, their sensemaking served different needs and, in turn, shaped different types of changes to their IFS strategies.

Next, we describe all trajectories including SEs' identities and psychological distance, IFS purpose, the challenges they encountered, and their sensemaking patterns.

[Insert Fig. 2 about here]

4.1. Entrepreneur-oriented IFS trajectory

4.1.1. Psychological distance and associated identity

SEs on the entrepreneur-oriented IFS trajectory were psychologically close to the targeted social issue because they had experienced or anticipated experiencing it as a personal trauma, which served to motivate their start-up. Their narratives disclosed personally traumatic experiences that had shaped how they saw themselves and the solutions they developed. For example, Peter started his social enterprise after personally suffering with gambling addiction, while Elinor started after adopting a child with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and years of trying to cope with very limited support. A small group of SEs on this trajectory also started their social ventures to act against anticipated trauma for themselves and their children due to

the climate crisis (e.g., Greg, Lisa). For example, Daniel S. shared:

> *When my wife and I had our first child, we changed our lifestyle—no cars, no planes, no meat, only holidays to places we could reach on foot, bike, or train. I am terrified that my children will suffer tremendous pain from climate change, which touches so many aspects of our lives. It is not just weather but also food insecurity, and access to water, and … I realized what we were doing was not enough and if I want a better future for my children, or a future, I need to help other people to take action.*

Common among the SEs on this trajectory was transitioning to a new role, as a dramatic, yet necessary, shift to catalyze positive social change, as Peter exemplified:

> *I am a banker. I was a banker. So I did banking for 10 years. Pretty senior. […] And I looked for treatment and there is very little out there. There is a lot for drinking and drugs. There is a lot out there for sex addiction and even shopping addiction. But there is very little out there for gambling addiction. I eventually found the National Problem Gambling Clinic in Soho. And really, other than that, the only places that offered anything were private clinics, so very expensive places. Very expensive residential rehab clinics. And to be honest when you go into those you only really have cognitive behavioral therapy. It is still quite basic stuff and for me that wouldn't be enough on its own. So I decided "Right, OK. Something needs to be done about this." […] It is something I am quite passionate about. I think my business, my social venture, my social enterprise, my whatever you want to call it, will add real value simply because I understand how a gambler thinks, I understand how to overcome a gambling addiction. I understand the differences between an occasional gambler and a compulsive or a pathological gambler. And I understand what works to actually get over that. This is why I am starting the business… but I've never done this before.*

Even SEs who had previously worked as freelancers found the entrepreneurial role very different. For example, while Robin had worked as a freelance graphic designer, she recounted differences in the need to maintain consistency, represent an entire organization, and be responsible for collaborators: "I've never done anything like this before."

The transition to a new role meant these individuals were letting go, at least partially, of previous professional identities (e.g., banker, engineer) and constructing a provisional identity (Ibarra, 1999) as entrepreneurs. This provisional identity was possible and desired but not yet fully elaborated as a professional identity. For example, many of the SEs used the label "entrepreneur" rarely and with qualifiers: "I don't call myself an entrepreneur. I am not sure I am an entrepreneur yet. Yes, I am starting a business, but that's just the paperwork and there is more to it" (Sadie). They were trying to "act the part" as entrepreneurs in their actions and

interactions, yet not always clear what the part entailed, how well they acted it, or if it was a good fit for them. They also did not see themselves as members of a community, nor recognized that such a community may exist. In stark contrast to SEs on the community-oriented trajectory, entrepreneur-oriented SEs saw themselves as "doing it alone" (e.g., Tim, Pradip, Rose) and spoke of their ventures as "my baby" (e.g., Daniel H., Daniel S., Clara).

4.1.2. Purpose of IFS

Entrepreneur-oriented SEs sought feedback to meet the behavioral standards of the entrepreneur role, thus strengthening their provisional identity. They considered feedback seeking a common behavior of entrepreneurs, as instructed by books, such as *Lean Startup* (e.g., Peter, Daniel H., Angela J., Robin), and the incubators and support initiatives of which they were members (e.g., Roger, Clara, Greg). Thus, IFS was one way to experiment with their provisional identity and practice the associated behavioral skills. They also considered IFS important to learn how to perform the rrole. Though confident in understanding the social issue and the solution they were developing, SEs were often unsure about their entrepreneurial abilities and how to perform the entrepreneur role: "my lack of confidence in whether I can deliver on the promise" (Tim); "as you notice, I am terrible talking about money. I don't think I am a natural entrepreneur, so I have to learn" (Sarah). They were often unsure of the meaning of the role and of performing it well, as Greg reflected:

> *how completely like a fish out of water I feel. Everything... I've been a teacher for 20 years. So I went to school, went to college, went to university, went back to school. Actually trying to start a business is a massive departure from everything that I know.*

For SEs on this trajectory, IFS was one way to learn about and acquire what they considered the required knowledge, skills, and habits of a capable entrepreneur. Their feedback requests related to strategic decisions, management issues in day-to-day operations, personal style and approaches (e.g., how to lead others), and personal habits for improved performance (e.g., time allocation, lifestyle choices). As Pradip explained:

> *I talk to people about this all the time because I know I don't have the answers and people who have been successful might have answers that apply to me. I always... I don't think this is helpful, but I am always asking for feedback because I haven't done this before.*

This importance of "learning the ropes" (e.g., Natalie, Greg, Alister) of the entrepreneurial role to strengthen the associated provisional identity starkly contrasted with their passion and confidence in understanding the social issue and its solution. Founders on this trajectory considered becoming capable entrepreneurs as the only way to catalyze positive social change and remain objective, as Peter highlighted:

> *Also because I suffered the addiction and now I work in the field, I need to make sure I constantly stay objective rather than just passionate about an area that affected me. [...] to make a difference this needs to be a viable business, not a passion project.*

4.1.3. Salient challenge

Entrepreneur-oriented SEs recounted access to appropriate feedback sources as the most salient challenge, eliciting anxiety and discomfort and needing to be addressed. They perceived this challenge to limit their access to relevant feedback to learn what it means to be an entrepreneur and how to perform the role well to strengthen their provisional identity. The SEs considered that individuals with expertise in a specific domain or with significant commercial entrepreneurial experience were the "appropriate" or "suitable" feedback sources to help them "learn the ropes of the job." Yet, they recognized that these feedback sources were outside their daily work or existing networks. This accessibility challenge was often salient for SEs when they drew contrasts with their previous or other jobs, such as university lecturers, commissioners, or bankers, benefiting from opportune and immediate access to feedback sources. As Natalie reflected:

> *As a university lecturer, we get feedback all the time, either from students or peers, and I ask for feedback all the time on problem solving and it is immediate there. Those people are around me every day and I can always ask them. [...]It is just that at the moment I am not surrounded by the right people, or any people really, to give me feedback.*

4.1.4. Sensemaking

Entrepreneur-oriented SEs engaged in sensemaking to protect their provisional identity as entrepreneurs. They interpreted the challenge as discrepancies in the meaning of the entrepreneur role and between their behaviors and the role's behavioral standards (Petriglieri, 2011). Consequently, their enactments involved experiments with the sources and content of feedback requests to minimize these discrepancies.

4.1.4.1. Interpretation

In seeking to understand the situation and how to function within it, entrepreneur-oriented SEs interpreted the challenge of access to feedback sources as questioning their fit with and the meaning of the role. Lack of access to "appropriate" feedback sources, such as other entrepreneurs, advisors, investors, and gatekeepers, highlighted to SEs that they could not engage in a behavior considered central to the role they were transitioning into. This forced them to reflect on their networks and whether they needed to be surrounded by entrepreneurs and other relevant stakeholders they could learn from: "I just… I am not part of those circles. Who do I ask for feedback then?" (Tim); "my professional network is different, very different. No one in it has his own business. Or started a business" (Alister).

However, judging "appropriate" feedback sources was based not only on knowledge and experience but also on how initial responses by potential feedback sources raised discrepancies between the SEs' behaviors and what they were told it meant to be an entrepreneur. These interactions thus diminished informants' provisional identities as entrepreneurs. The discrepancies emerged partly due to the types of organizations the SEs aimed to build—social ventures nor prioritizing profit maximization—and partly due to the development stage of their ventures, which often precluded paying themselves a salary. Yet, both business-oriented feedback sources and family members implied that profit maximization, or at least income generation, was the expected entrepreneurial outcome. As Sadie recounted about her partner:

> *He is a businessman. He is very much about business making lots and lots of money, so if it is not going to make you rich, it is not a business. That is his world view. His*

motivation is all about making lots of money. And he didn't really understand that concept of building a business that wasn't going to make someone rich.

Rose reflected a similar experience with her partner:

I realized my husband is the only one I wouldn't seek feedback from. And although I do sometimes mention the project, majority of the time it is met with hostility because I am not bringing in any income. So it is very... It is a bit stressful really. The requirement for me is really to get out and go get a real job, and trying to make this work is quite hard because it is not very well respected in my family. [...] He is the one who is bringing the income, so it is understandable and he is absolutely right, but it is just difficult for me because therefore I can't talk to him about it at all. He regards it as a waste of his brainpower given that it is not bringing in any money and you know I have to think about my relationship with him and my family, not just the project.

In interpreting access to and identifying "appropriate" feedback sources, SEs also questioned the meaning of the entrepreneurial role due to the conflicting expectations they tried to navigate. They considered that, besides IFS, maintaining competitiveness was also a common and desirable behavior for entrepreneurs. This raised conflicting expectations: to obtain feedback from individuals leading other commercial or social ventures, SEs had to disclose relevant information on which sources could provide feedback. This could include ideas for new products and services, methods and approaches of program design, or product features. They feared appropriation of their ideas by feedback sources: "I was worried that someone might steal the idea because it is such a good idea" (Daniel S). Olivia highlighted this sense of vulnerability:

I wouldn't want to tell her about some of the work I am doing because I am concerned she might take some of the ideas and I know she is the same. We are now in competition.

Further diminishing provisional identity was their fear of letting down others by not fulfilling the role requirements. Contrary to their provisional identity as competent entrepreneurs, SEs on this trajectory feared that IFS could signal lack of knowledge and "mistakes." Thus, they were "afraid that people will think I am not good at my job" (Lisa) and hoped to "get away with them not finding out I've screwed up" (Daniel H). Such fears evidenced discrepancies between who they were and the role standards, and were experienced

in relation to venture stakeholders and with personally significant others, as Roger reflected:

> *I think from a personal perspective it is difficult to ask for feedback from my partner just because I feel there's a lot of pressure on me. I left my job. She's been the one financially supporting me for a little while and there's extra pressure for me to make this work to prove to her that her belief in me was well-founded and I can do this. So it is difficult to expose your vulnerabilities in your personal life. I try not to do that.*

4.1.4.2. Enactment

Engaged in enacted sensemaking about the challenge of accessing feedback sources, SEs on this trajectory experimented with whom they approached and the content of feedback requests. These experiments demonstrated attempts to protect their provisional identity as entrepreneurs by controlling IFS interactions and minimizing anticipated discrepancies between their behavior and the role standards.

In making sense of their circumstances through experiments with whom they approached for feedback, SEs made careful decisions about feedback sources. They refrained from IFS with certain individuals or groups to avoid conflicts over the meaning of the entrepreneurial role and discrepancies between existing networks and what they considered to be entrepreneurial networks—characterized by support from significant others and peers. Among those they avoided were (social) entrepreneurs and charity leaders who were not trusted "because they might steal my ideas" (Daniel H), as well as family members: "my husband would get fed up of me talking about it, so I don't tend to talk about it at home" *(*Angela J). Reflecting on how feedback requests exposed the lack of support for his social venture, Alister summarized his approach to refraining from IFS with family members:

> *It is not something for them. It is not something we involve them in because it makes life more difficult, so we just get on with it. It is totally separate from our family lives. We don't talk about it and don't involve our families into this.*

Instead, the SEs experimented with proactively and carefully reaching out to individuals outside their networks to request feedback. They engaged in a sometimes long process of identifying potential new feedback sources, researching them, and leveraging existing

relationships and membership organizations for introductions and assessment of whether these sources could be trusted. They traveled to other parts of and even outside the country to seek feedback from individuals not considered to be competitors. For instance, Olivia traveled from the UK to Los Angeles to seek feedback on her approach and role as an entrepreneur from the founder and employees of a community arts organization outside her network. Tim's approach was similarly proactive, spending several months searching for the "right" person who would understand the purpose of his application and not pose appropriation risks:

> *It is me going after people, like me meeting with [name of feedback source] of [name of organization]. I was the one who contacted her. I emailed her and said, "Look, I've got this project and I'd like you feedback. Can we meet?"*

Engaged in enacted sensemaking on their lack of access to feedback sources, SEs also experimented with the content of their feedback requests. They carefully phrased requests to influence meaning and future actions, striving to minimize potential threats to their provisional identity as entrepreneurs. To minimize misunderstanding, SEs often "positioned" and "signposted" their feedback requests with specific explanations of what they did, what they were seeking feedback on, and what they hoped to gain from the feedback. They engaged in careful disclosure of partial information, thus protecting important aspects of their ideas, or used humor to signal awareness of the risks. For instance, Peter was "careful with how much I share, about the methodology and the ideology. For example, I share what I do, but not why and how I do it. That's what I do." Angela J phrased her requests to disclose only partial and absolutely necessary information to gain feedback, and used humor to signal her awareness of the potential competitiveness implications of IFS: "I get quite positive feedback and that unnerves me a bit and then I always make a joke about it and say: 'And if you pinch that idea, I'll know who it is.'" SEs further experimented with the content of requests by segmenting feedback sources into different groups and seeking feedback from them on different, specific topics. For example, instead of refraining from seeking feedback from family members, Daniel

H focused requests on "certain things I will ask in the family" while avoiding "certain things I wouldn't." He applied a similar logic to feedback requests to investors and other SEs to minimize threats to his identity and image. Angela J summarized this approach as:

> *I have these little pockets of people I speak to about different things. There are those two people I speak to about myself and then with the others I don't. It is only about the business. It is very much in departments and it works.*

Thus, through their sensemaking patterns, SEs aimed to protect their provisional identity as entrepreneurs by minimizing their insecurities in relation to role standards.

4.2. Community-oriented IFS trajectory

4.2.1. Psychological distance and associated identity

SEs on this trajectory were psychologically close to the social issue they targeted because they recognized it through their membership of a geographic community (e.g., in a specific neighborhood or a town) or a community of interest (e.g., a closely knit community of young people who have been bullied and excluded) (Lumpkin et al., 2018). They identified with the community and expressed this identity by starting a social venture to serve the community. Their narratives were filled with descriptions of complex, nested social issues (e.g., wellbeing and exclusion among older people like Calvin or young people like Sam; food poverty and climate justice in Clinton's neighborhood), how these social issues affected their communities, and why they were acting to address these issues because of their community membership: "I am one of those men" (Calvin); "this has plagued our community since… I don't remember a time when we weren't dealing with these issues" (Lauren). The language used when discussing the social issues and their ventures indicated that these SEs considered themselves members of the specific community and that this membership was core to their identity. For example, they often used first-person plural pronouns ("we," i.e., the community) to talk about their social ventures, even when describing their individual actions, such as legally registering the organization or securing funding: "We only started this activity… or I started" (Clinton); "as

we were working on this, well I was working on it" (Sam). Yet, they did not consider themselves sole representatives of the community and recognized diverse experiences within it, hence the purpose of IFS to co-create with community members.

4.2.2. Purpose of IFS

Tied to their community-member identity and start-up motivation to support the community, SEs on this trajectory viewed IFS as part of their overall practice of co-creating the social venture *with* community members, not *for* the community. Founders' long-term vision was that "the community can shape that development and they'd ultimately not only shape it but be embedded within it and continue to receive the outputs of it" (Clinton); "I genuinely want The Workshop to be everybody's workshop rather than just my idea" (Calvin). This approach toward co-creating solutions was described as "more meaningful. It is authentic and sustainable because if the people who use the platform develop the platform then it will work better … I am one of the people who has been bullied and stigmatized, but that is only one perspective. The experiences in the community are very different" (Sam). This is why SEs on this trajectory sought broad feedback from the community about the solution. The dominant purpose of IFS was contributing toward coproducing solutions, as summarized by Clinton:

> *They are things done to people, done at people. They are solutions that are imposed on people, rather than what I am trying to achieve with the engagement of the land, which is people feeling that they've had an input. That they've shaped the direction of this. That they created the space. That they created the garden. That they've had an input in what it will achieve and what it will do.*

4.2.3. Salient challenge

While SEs on this IFS trajectory experienced multiple challenges, the only salient and meaningful one was the lack of or limited engagement by community members in providing feedback. This cue elicited anxiety, questioning, and attempts to tackle the challenge. They all shared instances of "struggling a little bit to excite that group" to engage in conversations (Sam), attend meetings (Clinton), and provide feedback: "[w]hen we met a week ago, I was

very conscious I was doing all the talking" (Calvin). This low engagement starkly contrasted with founders' expectations of active community engagement and their ideals about co-creation. This challenge not only violated their expectations of IFS as a mechanism for co-creation but also called into question whether they were actually community members, as they saw themselves. These violations of their expectations of IFS and the self triggered sensemaking among SEs.

4.2.4. Sensemaking

Community-oriented SEs engaged in sensemaking to reaffirm their existing identity as community members by interpreting the challenge and enacting experiments showing care for the community. Low community engagement in response to their feedback requests prompted SEs to question the meaning and expression of their community-member identity (Petriglieri, 2011): were they really a member, what did it mean to be a member, and did they understand what the community needed? For Sam, "it's thrown… It's made me think that maybe I don't understand what we need as a community." Calvin noted:

> *I am one of these men, but maybe I am not. If you're a man in your 60s and you've just retired, and you feel lost and your sense of purpose is gone, and your wife is trying to push you out of the house, starting a social enterprise won't be something you consider. Probably not.*

4.2.4.1. Interpretation

In seeking to understand the situation and how to function within it, SEs on this trajectory interpreted the difficulty of sourcing feedback from community members in ways reaffirming their identity as community members who cared about the community. They reasoned that the challenge was rooted in community members' vulnerability, and so considered how their status, stressors, and experiences made it difficult for community members to provide feedback. The SEs recognized that responding to their feedback requests required effort and time, yet community members "are very, very busy and they sometimes say 'Yes, we'll get back to you on that,' and they never do" (Lauren). This interpretation demonstrated care for the community,

aligned with founders' start-up motivation to serve the community, and reassured the SEs that they still understood the community and what it meant to be a member, thus reaffirming their identity as community members.

SEs also identified that vulnerable community members who relied on the social venture may experience power dynamics that limited their voice and confidence to share feedback. Often the social venture was the only organization that provided or could provide support for the community. Thus, the SEs rationalized members' limited engagement as "feeling nervous about sharing ideas that can shape the project" (Clinton) for fear of losing future access to the service. As Calvin explained in relation to older individuals suffering exclusion and poor mental health:

> *it's somebody you're offering ongoing support to and you ask them for feedback on how it's going and what could be better, usually the easiest option is for people to say "Oh yeah, it's good. It's fine. I'm doing alright."*

SEs noted that members' limited engagement in IFS could be due to fear of exposing their status: the act of responding to feedback requests could expose community members' stigmatized status and vulnerability by identifying them as someone who needs support, has mental health challenges, or lives in poverty. Considering a group of individuals he could not engage in providing feedback, Clinton explained that "[s]ome people are quite isolated and they really struggle to come forward, they have an embarrassment."

4.2.4.2. Enactment

Engaged in enacted sensemaking, the SEs on this trajectory experimented with the IFS process in ways that demonstrated care for community members and attempted to minimize the pressure on them. Aligned with their community-member identity, SEs' enactment aimed to make it easier, more flexible, and safer for members to share feedback by creating multiple opportunities and methods to do so. SEs acknowledged that addressing this challenge required a long, effortful process; however, this effort and care also helped to reduce their own

questioning of whether they were indeed members and understood the community. For Clinton, this process took "well in excess of 500–600 hours' worth of time. Probably even more. I haven't sat down to think how long that took me but it was over many months of discussion."

More specifically, SEs experimented with ways to strengthen and leverage feedback relationships with individuals and groups in their respective communities, and sought to create dedicated groups of members to provide regular feedback. This included creating "feedback teams" (Lauren), "co-creator groups" (Sam), and "steering groups" (Calvin, Colin) very early in the venture-emergence process. These groups helped bring community members closer to SEs' decision-making process in relation to the solution, and aimed to enhance members' voice and confidence in sharing feedback. For example, Sam established an advisory "co-creators team" of young people who represented the community: in exchange for providing feedback on the digital platform, they were given a 15% shareholding in the venture. Sam considered the equity stake essential to provide "an incentive to give us good feedback and help us build a good product because they have a share in the company," in contrast to the lack of member engagement he encountered earlier. He summarized the advisory co-creators' role as follows:

> *So they are not big roles officially and only involve a few hours of work, but they are crucial for us because they bring these new perspectives from different worlds and can give us feedback about different parts of the project that we don't have much experience in.*

Engaged in enacted sensemaking on members' low engagement in providing feedback, SEs on the community-oriented IFS trajectory also experimented with the channels for seeking feedback, striving "to find innovative ways in which to capture them and [make it] easy for them to give feedback" (Lauren). They developed communication platforms through which members could share feedback in response to ongoing requests. Some channels relied on technology-mediated communication, such as blogs (Calvin), regular e-newsletters (Calvin, Clinton), and WhatsApp groups (Sam), with requests for feedback on specific topics or issues related to the solution. SEs also created spaces to engage in feedback seeking with community

members in person, including regular consultations (Clinton), open meetings (Calvin), and coffee mornings (Lauren) open to all community members with the purpose of seeking feedback. Recognizing that stigma may prevent community members from attending open events, SEs also attempted to reach out to individuals in private, "[t]o give them a voice without them having... an embarrassment" (Clinton).

These sensemaking patterns demonstrated care for the community, aligned with founders' relation to the social issue and reaffirming their identity as community members who understood the community and acted in its service.

4.3. Opportunity-oriented IFS trajectory

4.3.1. Psychological distance and associated identities

SEs on this trajectory addressed psychologically distant social issues. Their stated motivation for starting the social ventures were economic opportunities that also allowed them to catalyze positive social change around a social issue (e.g., support for prisoners' families, smoking and violence prevention, economic development). They recognized these economic opportunities through their existing role identities, such as entrepreneurs, teachers, and public servants, and aimed to portray an image of *social* entrepreneurs to pursue the opportunities. Unlike for SEs on the other two trajectories, the social issues were unrelated to these SEs' personal need or the need of the community they identified with. Participants' discourses revealed a myriad of meanings of "economic opportunity": to supplement income (Jennifer); to remain active in the labor market after redundancy, amid doubts about finding a similar position at her age (Sandra); to transition to retirement (Brendan). For Sophia and Andrew, both serial entrepreneurs, neglected issues were opportunities for innovations that could generate significant profits. Thus, all the SEs on this trajectory explicitly aimed to balance economic and social demands. As Sophia explained:

> *From a business point of view, it makes a lot of sense to enter this space. One, it is absolutely neglected, no one is really offering anything meaningful to local clubs, and*

two, it is a huge market with both local councils and national sports bodies as potential customers. And it does create social change, but I don't see the economic and the social aspects as mutually exclusive. You can make money and make a difference. At the end of the day, I have bills to pay. I work damn hard, my team works damn hard, we should all be getting paid fairly.

While SEs on this trajectory held salient and well-established role identities that helped them identify the opportunities they pursed, they all wanted to portray an image of *social* entrepreneurs—responsive, engaged, and credible. Most had developed B-to-B business models (e.g., Angela N) and often worked with customers from the public sector (e.g., Colin), so their enterprises being seen as *social* conferred an advantage over traditional commercial entities or was necessary where similar services were offered by other social enterprises. Thus, portraying the image of a *social* entrepreneur was considered essential to pursue the economic opportunity and balance economic and social demands, even though this image did not entirely align with SEs' identities.

4.3.2. Purpose of IFS

Opportunity-oriented SEs viewed IFS as a symbolic action (Zott and Huy, 2007) that conveyed subjective meaning: its dominant purpose was to increase the venture's visibility and signal a *social* image of responsiveness, engagement, and credibility to key stakeholders, such as customers, funders, beneficiaries, employees, and partners. The SEs considered themselves dependent on these key stakeholders for tangible and intangible resources (e.g., funding, sales). They considered IFS as a safe, low-cost tactic allowing them to "be seen," raise awareness, and gain attention from others and ultimately access resources. For example, Josie B perceived IFS "as another way to raise awareness about my organization," while Angela N and Dominic echoed a similar approach to IFS as "a form of marketing" that allowed "people to see that we exist." Building on this general visibility, SEs also anticipated that by seeking feedback, stakeholders "will view us positively" (Josie B) and "look at us favorably" (Sandra) because IFS signaled engagement, participation, and incorporating others' input (i.e., responsiveness).

Opportunity-oriented SEs sought feedback so that others would view them as responsive to and representative of the needs of customers and beneficiaries, thus boosting the credibility of their image. They recognized that, as founders of their social ventures, they were the face of the organization: "at the moment the brand is all Sophia" (Sophia), "I am the public face" (Andrew), "because it's me that everybody sees" (Selena), often as "outsiders" to a specific field. Yet, the SEs also had to demonstrate that they knew their customers and beneficiaries, understood their communities and social need, and "built from the perspective of a community leader" (Sophia), not from their own perspective. Thus, they considered that engaging in IFS signaled effort to understand the needs of beneficiaries and customers and responsiveness to those needs when developing and designing solutions. As Josie H illustrated:

> *If we are saying to our stakeholders, whichever group it is, "We need to know what you think, and we are interested in what you think, and we want to make things better for you," then that strengthens our relationships with them because it makes them think that we are responsible and responsive.*

SEs used IFS to signal that they were developing solutions that were credible, rather than operating as outsiders. Unlike community-oriented SEs, founders on the opportunity-oriented trajectory did not express motivations for coproducing solutions together with beneficiaries. Instead, they aimed "to be seen as" concerned with others' input and to raise their credibility. Reflecting on his outsider status in the education field, Andrew shared how he approached IFS:

> *I needed credibility... I am always confident in what I am doing and why I am doing it, but it is always difficult to convince others when you don't have evidence or previous success or any professional experience in that field... So having been only a pupil and a student, but never worked in education, I am coming from outside and I need to make sure that what I am expressing they can understand and see as credible.*

Viewing IFS as a symbolic action for image purposes shaped the content of founders' feedback requests and the sources they approached. They sought feedback mostly about their solutions, but the content of their requests was often irrelevant: in many cases, the mere act of seeking feedback was perceived to contribute toward a positive image among feedback sources. Additionally, the SEs recounted their IFS interactions in engagement with broader groups of

stakeholders to demonstrate credibility.

4.3.3. Salient challenge

The most salient challenge for SEs on this trajectory was the lack of or limited engagement by feedback sources, which signaled a meaningful discrepancy between SEs' experiences and expectations of IFS as an image-management tactic. SEs shared how challenging it was to engage with feedback sources: they were "still trying to chase that up to get feedback" (Josie B) and "[t]rying to get hold of him has been a nightmare" (Josie H). They shared instances where "[w]e didn't have many people turn up" to feedback meetings (Dominic) because "they also have other much better things to be doing" (Angela N). Colin summarized this challenge:

> *Getting feedback is quite hard because sometimes people just can't be bothered to give you feedback, they might just even lie and say everything is looking alright when really and truly it's not.*

4.3.4. Sensemaking

Opportunity-oriented SEs engaged in sensemaking to protect their *social* image, thus interpreting the challenge as highlighting discrepancies between the image they wanted to portray (e.g., *social*, caring) and the image they may be portraying (e.g., pestering others). They experimented with the timing of feedback requests to minimize these discrepancies.

4.3.4.1. Interpretation

While opportunity-oriented SEs experienced the same salient challenge as community-oriented SEs, they interpreted it differently. In making sense of their circumstances, they recognized that their IFS could challenge the image they aimed to present. These SEs acknowledged that sources engaged in IFS voluntarily because "there's no gigantic incentive for them" (Selena) to respond to feedback requests. While they relied on IFS to shape a positive and *social* image with feedback sources and broader stakeholder groups, SEs also expressed concern that feedback requests could be seen as "pestering" (Selena, Dominic, Colin) and cause feedback sources to feel "hounded" (Selena), "threatened" (Yvette), "annoyed," or "stressed"

(Andrew, Angela N). From SEs' perspective, being seen as "pestering" or "threatening" was worrying as it contradicted the image they wanted to present as *social* entrepreneurs—caring and responsive to stakeholders' needs. Dominic summarized the balancing act of IFS between shaping a positive *social* image and potentially threatening that image:

> *When we started, I wanted our beneficiaries and our customers to see that I care, that I want to do good by them. And this is where all these meetings and requests [for feedback] came from. And I still think that can be helpful… But I have also become more… What matters more? That they think of me as someone who cares and wants to respond to their needs, or that I am that oldie pestering them? Is the benefit greater than the harm? And how do I know when they'll think of me this way or that way?*

4.3.4.2. Enactment

In making sense of the challenge of feedback sources' low engagement, SEs on this trajectory enacted changes by experimenting with the timing of feedback requests, exhibiting care for their image, in line with their IFS purpose. Such experiments with timing included proactively refraining from or delaying feedback requests: "I am going to defer the meeting" (Samantha); "so I might be waiting until things quieten down for him" (Josie B). Reflecting on why he did not ask one employee for feedback, Brandon shared: "it deteriorated into a very emotional meeting and I was trying to avoid that because it is difficult for me and for her and I didn't want to upset her."

These experiments included careful timing of IFS to avoid "continual pressure" (Angela N) on feedback sources and wait for "the right timing, when they are not busy. I have to be a bit careful that way" (Selena). Opportunity-oriented SEs also created rules of thumb about timing so as "not to over ask them" (Sophia) and avoid "putting unnecessary pressure on the person" (Andrew) if they have already provided feedback, helped in other ways, or "don't have much time to give feedback" (Andrew). Yvette shared a similar approach of avoiding asking for too much and scaffolding feedback requests:

> *So I am very, very economical about that. Very careful how much I ask for. […] So I try to always remember where they are and make the steps that I am asking from them very clear and make sure they are very small.*

SEs shared rules of thumb for when to ask for feedback and giving advance notice to potential feedback sources. For example, some rules were based on emerging challenges, such as "I feel that something is not going right" (Jennifer) or "as soon as there's a sign that someone stops coming" (Sandra). SEs explicitly informed potential feedback sources to expect a request early on, thus helping with their own planning: "so there's an expectation at the end of whatever they're doing that they'll give me feedback" (Andrew). Finally, founders' rules of thumb covered the frequency of reminders and chasing up feedback: "send them one chaser and then after that I just leave them" (Adrian).

Overall, in making sense of their circumstances, SEs on this trajectory questioned what subjective meanings and signals they were conveying and enacted experiments with the timing of feedback requests to protect their image as *social* entrepreneurs.

5. Discussion

Our inductive study based on 82 interviews with 36 SEs reveals that IFS is an identity-driven process that SEs navigate, including its challenges, through sensemaking. SEs' sensemaking patterns are shaped by their psychological distance from the targeted social issue. When SEs address psychologically close social issues with which they identify, they seek feedback to improve their ventures' offerings and entrepreneurial practice. In turn, their sensemaking includes interpreting salient challenges as identity threats and changing IFS strategies to protect their threatened identities. In our study, this describes community-oriented and entrepreneur-oriented SEs. In contrast, when SEs address psychologically distant social issues seen as economic opportunities, they seek feedback as a symbolic action to present a *social* image. Their sensemaking includes interpreting the salient challenge as an image threat and changing IFS strategies to protect their desired image. These founders are opportunity-oriented. Within the three IFS trajectories we identified, sensemaking patterns serve different needs among SEs, i.e., to protect identity or image (see Fig. 2). Our findings have implications

for research in (social) entrepreneurship and OB.

5.1. Agency in and precarity of feedback seeking: Elaborating the interplay between identity and feedback processes in entrepreneurship

Although we focused on *social* entrepreneurs, our findings advance emerging understanding of the relationship between identity and feedback processes in entrepreneurship more broadly. Past research assumes that feedback is readily available to entrepreneurs and has, thus, focused on how entrepreneurs *respond to and integrate* feedback in their venturing efforts and how the content of feedback provided by others impacts entrepreneurs' identities (Conger et al., 2018; Demetry, 2017; Grimes, 2018; O'Neil et al., 2020). In contrast, our investigation focuses on how entrepreneurs expend substantial effort proactively seeking feedback and how this is guided by their identity. Thus, we offer a new, complementary perspective that draws attention to the effortful and agentic nature of entrepreneurs' IFS because, for entrepreneurs, feedback is not always easily and freely available. Our findings suggest that even when entrepreneurs seek feedback, they may not receive it, and so must learn how to elicit feedback and adapt their strategies through sensemaking. In this way, we draw attention to the agency in and the precarity of IFS as a process that can threaten identity. Next, we unpack in more detail how our findings elucidate three aspects of feedback processes.

First, we newly expose the plurality of IFS with different trajectories not equally available to all entrepreneurs. While previous research has described IFS uniformly for all entrepreneurs as a simple act (Collewaert et al., 2016; Katre and Salipante, 2012), our findings highlight the complexity of the process, with different challenges, choices, purposes, and changes shaped by identity and sensemaking. In turn, sensemaking serves different needs in reaffirming or protecting existing or provisional identities. These identity-centric sensemaking patterns mean that the IFS process unfolds differently for entrepreneurs based on their identities when starting the founding journey. Thus, not all trajectories are equally available to all entrepreneurs, at least

initially. Broadly, our findings show how the initial nature of entrepreneurs' identities shapes how they engage in IFS, from why they seek feedback to how they respond to challenges and change their IFS strategies. Additionally, it is also possible that the trajectories identified here can apply to other entrepreneur groups beyond SEs, such as novice entrepreneurs experimenting with and elaborating a provisional entrepreneur identity (Demetry, 2017), or those attempting to portray an image consistent with that expected by stakeholders (Fisher et al., 2017), for instance the image of a coachable entrepreneur to obtain VC investment (Ciuchta et al., 2018).

Second, we extend current understanding of what constitutes an identity threat in feedback processes and, in turn, what strategies entrepreneurs enact to mitigate identity threats. Prior research has focused on the content of provided feedback as a potential identity threat (Conger et al., 2018; Grimes, 2018): examples include disconfirming feedback challenging the entrepreneur's business idea (Grimes, 2018), or a disappointing B Corp Certification score challenging their view of their organization as *social* (Conger et al., 2018). In light of this identity threat, the literature portrays entrepreneurs as avoiding, resisting, and questioning provided feedback to protect their identities or engaging in identity work. In contrast, our findings draw attention to the very process of IFS, showing that beyond feedback content, how others respond (e.g., whether they provide requested feedback) or whether entrepreneurs even have "appropriate" feedback sources can also threaten entrepreneurs' identities. Critically, some entrepreneurs may not even receive feedback to threaten their identity due to the challenges they encounter in seeking feedback (e.g., engaging others to respond to requests). In sum, we complement existing research focusing on the content of feedback by drawing attention to the IFS process itself as a potential threat to entrepreneurs' identities.

By unveiling the precarity of and new identity threats related to the IFS process, we also uncover new strategies deployed by entrepreneurs to mitigate identity threats, thus highlighting

the agentic nature of entrepreneurs' navigation of feedback processes. Similarly to emerging research (Grimes, 2018), our data show that refraining from IFS is one strategy to protect identities. Importantly, our findings demonstrate the plurality of the refraining strategy, which can be temporary and/or limited to specific individuals to suit different purposes. Our findings further complement the literature by showing that refraining from IFS is far from the only strategy to protect identities in feedback processes. Entrepreneurs can experiment with the timing of feedback requests, whom they approach, how they seek feedback, and the content of requests. Indeed, some entrepreneurs invest significant time and energy seeking feedback to reaffirm their identities. Critically, these experiments alter our understanding of the nature of IFS: whereas past studies view IFS as a simple activity (Katre and Salipante, 2012), our findings highlight that entrepreneurs change their IFS strategies to navigate the process in agentic ways.

Finally, we extend current understanding of how entrepreneurs can use IFS to craft their image in ways aligned (or not) with their identities and perceived audience expectations. Previous research has demonstrated how entrepreneurs' IFS can be seen positively by investors (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2018). In line with these findings, our research shows that entrepreneurs seek feedback as a symbolic action (Zott and Huy, 2007), aware of the expectations of different audiences. Our findings also reveal plurality in how entrepreneurs expect the behavior to be perceived by different audiences. Some SEs aimed to portray the image of an entrepreneur, aligned with their provisional identity, because IFS is a common and desired behavior among entrepreneurs. Other SEs sought feedback to portray a *social* image, expecting the act to be perceived as a sign of responsiveness, engagement, and credibility in the social issue domain, even if this image was not aligned with their identities.

While past research focused on how IFS may be positively perceived by audiences (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2018), the SEs in our study offered a more nuanced perspective. They highlighted the importance of also considering the potential negative

meanings that audiences can draw from entrepreneurs' IFS—a sign of weakness and incompetence or "pestering" and "annoying." While our data represent only the experiences and perceptions of SEs, and not of feedback sources, the suspected negative interpretations of entrepreneurs' IFS may be missing from the literature because it focuses on the perceptions of investors (Ciuchta et al., 2018; Warnick et al., 2018) with specific power dynamics between them and entrepreneurs. Our study complements and extends this line of inquiry and calls for future research to consider additional stakeholder groups, such as employees or customers, who were salient to the SEs in our study.

5.2. *Uncovering heterogeneous motivations and psychological distance in social venturing*

Our findings foreground new heterogeneity of SEs' start-up motivations and, in turn, introduce psychological distance from the social issue as an explanatory mechanism to explore how the targeted social issue influence important social venturing processes. First, our findings challenge the taken-for-granted assumption that SEs are solely or mainly driven by prosocial concern. Both theoretical and empirical work emphasizes the prosocial motivations of SEs in the form of personal values, motives, and emotions, (Miller et al., 2012; Kruse et al., 2020; Stephan and Drencheva, 2017 for a review). Consequently, research has focused on the social goals of social ventures (Stevens and Moray, 2015) and how these goals need to be protected or balanced against economic demands (e.g., Smith and Besharov, 2019). In addition to prosocial motivation, our findings show that SEs can be motivated by satisfying a personal need for help or by economic opportunities to generate income for themselves or profits.

Second, our study introduces psychological distance from the targeted social issue as a potential explanatory mechanism in understanding how social issues influence critical aspects of social venturing. Moreover, psychological distance to the social issue also helps to understand better SEs' start-up motivations. In our study, economic start-up motivations were associated with SEs addressing psychologically distant social issues; whereas psychological

closeness was intertwined with start-up motivations of addressing personal needs that also affected others or needs that related to the SE's community. Our findings reveal that psychological distance from the targeted social issue is an expression of SEs' identities and that it matters for how SEs seek feedback, for how they make sense of challenges in IFS, and for how they navigate these challenges.

Beyond motivations, our findings suggest psychological distance has the potential to enhance our understanding of how the social issues addressed by social ventures matter in social venturing. To date, social entrepreneurship research has surfaced insights into how ventures navigate the tensions between economic and social/environmental demands (Jay, 2013; Smith and Besharov, 2019) within different institutional contexts (Desa and Basu, 2013) and based on SEs' identities and identifications with their ventures (Wagenschwanz and Grimes, 2021; Wry and York, 2017). Yet, social issues, as the raison d'être for social ventures, are often neglected (Mair and Rathert, 2020). Considering psychological distance advances insight into the theorical mechanism of how social issues 'translate' into the experience of the individual entrepreneur. It thus provides a critical bridge to understand how the reality of social issues manifests in the experience of SEs and may guide their actions and choices about the venture. Specifically, we propose that psychological distance can offer new insights into three critical aspects of social venturing: positive social change strategies, mission drift, and access to resources. We elaborate these potential links as fruitful future research avenues.

According to construal-level theory (Trope and Liberman, 2000, 2003), psychological distance is a subjective experience that influences how individuals think about events, issues, and constructs and whether they act. When individuals experience an event or a social issue as psychologically distant, their mental representations of the issue are high-level, abstract, and simple. However, when individuals experience a social issue as psychologically close, their mental representations are low-level, concrete, and detailed, and thus likely to inspire action.

For example, science communication research suggests that when individuals subjectively experience the climate crisis as psychologically distant, they are less likely to act pro-environmentally than those who experience it as psychologically close (Loy and Spence, 2020).

SEs' psychological distance from the social issue can explain why they develop specific social change strategies or face mission drift in different directions. When psychologically close to and holding a detailed representation of the social issue, SEs are better positioned to develop deep-level, positive social change strategies that catalyze durable and pervasive social impact, increasing in reach over time (Stephan et al., 2016). However, such detailed understanding of the issue may come with greater emotional intensity (Van Boven et al., 2010), resulting in prioritizing social over economic demands as one form of mission drift (Grimes et al., 2019). Conversely, when SEs are psychologically distant from the targeted social issue, and thus have a more abstract representation of it, they may be more likely to develop surface-level positive social change strategies that produce a temporary and contingent social impact (Stephan et al., 2016). These SEs may prioritize economic demands and neglect social demands, thus experiencing mission drift in a different direction (Grimes et al., 2019) compared to SEs psychologically close to the social issue.

Stakeholders' psychological distance from the social issue can also influence how SEs mobilize resources. SEs' psychological distance emerged as one key construct in this study, yet other individuals and groups, such as funders, customers, employees, and volunteers, can also experience psychological distance from the social issue. Emerging research in crowdfunding (Rose et al., 2020) shows that potential contributors to campaigns are less willing to support psychologically distant campaigns, such as those in early development stages or with a temporally distant expected product delivery date. Similar reasoning can be applied to the decision making of funders, investors, and crowdfunding contributors on supporting social ventures based on their psychological closeness to the targeted social issue. This reasoning can

also be extended to human capital and whether individuals are willing to work or volunteer for a social venture based on their psychological distance from the social issue, analogous to the pro-environmental action scenario studied by Loy and Spence (2020). Indeed, Loy and Spence's (2020) research suggests that SEs can use psychological distance to access resources by bringing social issues closer to individuals' daily experiences with visuals and local stories.

Overall, psychological distance offers novel avenues for researching important aspects of social ventures' work, such as social change strategies, mission drift, and access to resources.

5.3. Expanding understanding of feedback seeking in OB research

Our findings contribute to the IFS stream in OB research by introducing a new theoretical lens (sensemaking) and a new construct (role identity) for understanding why and how individuals seek feedback differently from one another and over time. Our research investigates a foundational concept from OB research with a new group of feedback seekers, with a new method for this research stream, and through a new theoretical lens. Consequently, our findings depict IFS as a sensemaking process that is iterative and reflective, with diverse experiments and changes to IFS strategies. This contrasts with the dominant OB approach, which emphasizes the rational economic lens of cost–benefit analysis (Anseel et al., 2015). Importantly, our sensemaking accounts reveal that individuals may act in fundamentally different ways when seeking feedback and navigating the challenges, beyond varying the frequency of IFS. These different ways of seeking feedback enrich OB research on IFS by explicating the plurality of experiments that individuals conduct with the IFS process, feedback sources, content, and timing of requests, leading to changes in their IFS strategies over time. These accounts contrast with and complement the relatively straightforward acts of seeking feedback directly from supervisors and peers, and monitoring the environment for feedback cues (Parker and Collins, 2010), as commonly considered in OB research.

Unveiling the role of existing and provisional identities in IFS also opens new avenues for

OB research, which has acknowledged that IFS can have implications for one's self-views (Ashford et al., 2016) but not yet considered role identity and identity threat as specific constructs. These constructs can provide new avenues to address conflicting findings on the relationship between IFS and self-views: Renn and Fedor (2001) report a positive relationship between self-efficacy and IFS, whereas Brown et al. (2001) find no relationship. Future research in this area can focus on identity and identity threat as different aspects of self-views. For example, future research can investigate the differences in how, how frequently, and why individuals seek feedback based on their existing and provisional identities (or conflict between multiple identities) and what they experience as identity threats, which can provide nuance to the self-efficacy perspective.

By virtue of its setting, our study introduces a new group of feedback seekers (i.e., SEs) to OB research on IFS, which has been employee-centric (Ashford et al., 2016). We believe that our findings can inspire future research on groups of feedback seekers so far neglected in OB research, such as strategic leaders, independent workers obtaining a variety of work for different clients or employers (Clinton et al., 2006; Petriglieri et al., 2019), and individuals pursuing passion projects (Berg et al., 2010). These worker groups face similar challenges to SEs in terms of uncertainty, strategic decision making, and the need to shape image through the symbolic nature of IFS. For SEs, strategic leaders, and independent workers alike, IFS is not just a personal resource, as conceptualized in OB research (Ashford, 1986), but also a resource for their organizations, given the significance of strategic leaders for organizational outcomes (Hambrick and Mason,1984). These groups may also face unique challenges when seeking feedback, such as limited access to and engagement of feedback sources, as we identified. These challenges are not recognized in OB research because its participants are usually in established organizations and within formalized relationships not available to all workers. While (social) entrepreneurs, strategic leaders, and independent workers have been

neglected in OB research on IFS, the changing nature of work and organizations (Barley et al., 2017; Burke and Ng, 2006) means they are becoming increasingly common and deserve more attention to identify how they can best seek feedback.

5.4. Limitations and future directions

Acknowledging the limitations of the research, we present our findings as an early step in exploring how SEs navigate the IFS process through sensemaking to protect their identities or image. First, this study focused only on IFS to gain rich insights about this phenomenon from SEs' perspective, and so neglected feedback giving. Future research should examine how those approached for feedback respond to requests. For example, participating SEs considered how IFS can be perceived by others in a positive or negative light. Future research can examine more directly how stakeholders (e.g., employees, customers) perceive founders' IFS and what judgments they make about (social) entrepreneurs, which will also complement the current focus on investors' perceptions (Warnick et al., 2018).

Second, our analysis presents the three IFS trajectories as mostly separate, yet it is possible that they overlap or that SEs transition from one trajectory to another. Two aspects of our data suggest potential overlaps and transitions. The first is that some SEs on the community-oriented (i.e., Clinton, Calvin) and opportunity-oriented (e.g., Andrew, Samantha) trajectories also sought feedback on topics aligned with the entrepreneur-oriented trajectory (e.g., related to performance as an entrepreneur). While these were specific, isolated incidents, instead of fully formed trajectories with multiple interactions of a consistent pattern, they suggest that SEs can potentially have secondary IFS trajectories.

The second aspect is that Sandra showed signs of transitioning from the opportunity-oriented to the community-oriented trajectory during data collection. Having started her social venture to earn a living after redundancy and holding a very strong salient identity as a teacher of young people with disabilities, her community membership became more prominent in her

narrative during the six months of interviews. Shifts were apparent in how she described her social venture (i.e., from specialist music provision for young people with disabilities to a community hub) and the targeted social issue (i.e., from limited music-making opportunities for young people with disabilities to a lack of community cohesion). However, no other participant exhibited a transition between trajectories. This is potentially due to the limited timeframe of our data—six months for most participants, and no longer than eight months (Angela J). Given the importance of start-up motivations and SEs' identities in our findings, changes in venture focus and identities within such short timeframes are highly unlikely, so robust evidence for transitions between trajectories was unlikely to emerge within the timeline of our data collection.

Future research can examine when and how SEs combine or transition between IFS trajectories and with what outcomes for themselves as individuals with diverse identities and for their social ventures. This would be a particularly fruitful research area with serial or portfolio (social) entrepreneurs, who may have different salient identities and start-up motivations across their ventures, thus allowing the examination of enabling and hindering factors when transitioning between and combining trajectories.

5. Conclusion

This article uncovers the IFS process as identity-driven and shows that SEs navigate this process and its challenges through sensemaking. SEs' sensemaking patterns are shaped by their psychological distance from the targeted social issue. Our study gives new insights into the relationship between identity and feedback processes with a focus on the agency in and plurality of IFS. It demonstrates the importance of psychological distance from the social issue in social venturing in relation to IFS and sensemaking with potential links to the type of social change strategies, forms of mission drift, and resource acquisition. Implications for OB research on

IFS are also offered, specifically a new theoretical lens and a new construct to enrich under-

standing of how and why individuals seek feedback differently from one another and over time.

References

André, K., Pache, A.-C., 2016. From caring entrepreneur to caring enterprise: Addressing the ethical challenges of scaling up social enterprises. Journal of Business Ethics, 133, 659–675.

Anseel, F., Beatty, A.S., Shen, W., Lievens, F., Sackett, P.R., 2015. How are we doing after 30 years? A meta-analytic review of the antecedents and outcomes of feedback-seeking behavior. Journal of Management, 41, 318–348.

Ashford, S.J., 1986. Feedback-seeking in individual adaptation: A resources perspective. Academy of Management Journal, 29, 465–487.

Ashford, S.J., De Stobbeleir, K., Nujella, M., 2016. To seek or not to seek: Is that the only question? Recent developments in feedback-seeking literature. Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 3, 213–239.

Ashford, S.J., Wellman, N., Sully de Luque, M., De Stobbeleir, K., Wollan, M., 2018. Two roads to effectiveness: CEO feedback seeking, vision articulation, and firm performance. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 39, 82–95.

Barley, S.R., Bechky, B.A., Milliken, F.J., 2017. The changing nature of work: Careers, identities, and work lives in the 21st century. Academy of Management Discoveries, 3, 111–115.

Bartunek, J., Louis, M.R., 1996. Insider/Outsider Team Research. Sage, New York.

Berg, J.M., Grant, A.M., Johnson, V., 2010. When callings are calling: Crafting work and leisure in pursuit of unanswered occupational callings. Organization Science, 21, 973–994.

Branzei, O., Parker, S.C., Moroz, P.W., Gamble, E., 2018. Going pro-social: Extending the individual-venture nexus to the collective level. Journal of Business Venturing, 33, 551–565.

Brown, S.P., Ganesan, S., Challagalla, G., 2001. Self-efficacy as a moderator of information-seeking effectiveness. Journal of Applied Psychology, 86, 1043.

Burke, R.J., Ng, E., 2006. The changing nature of work and organizations: Implications for human resource management. Human Resource Management Review, 16, 86–94.

Cardon, M.S., Patel, P.C., 2015. Is stress worth it? Stress‐related health and wealth trade‐offs for entrepreneurs. Applied Psychology, 64, 379–420.

Chuang, A., Lee, C.Y., Shen, C.T., 2014. A multilevel perspective on the relationship between interpersonal justice and negative feedback-seeking behaviour. Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, 31, 59–74.

Ciuchta, M. P., Letwin, C., Stevenson, R., McMahon, S., Huvaj, M. N., 2018. Betting on the coachable entrepreneur: Signaling and social exchange in entrepreneurial pitches. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 42 (6), 860-885.

Clinton, M., Totterdell, P., Wood, S., 2006. A grounded theory of portfolio working: Experiencing the smallest of small businesses. International Small Business Journal, 24, 179–203.

Collewaert, V., Anseel, F., Crommelinck, M., De Beuckelaer, A., Vermeire, J., 2016. When passion fades: Disentangling the temporal dynamics of entrepreneurial passion for founding. Journal of Management Studies, 53 (6), 966–995.

Conger, M., McMullen, J.S., Bergman Jr, B. J., York, J.G., 2018. Category membership, identity control, and the reevaluation of prosocial opportunities. Journal of Business Venturing, 33, 179–206.

Corley, K.G., Gioia, D.A., 2004. Identity ambiguity and change in the wake of a corporate spin-off. Administrative Science Quarterly, 49, 173–208.

Corner, P.D., Ho, M., 2010. How opportunities develop in social entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice, 34, 635–659.

Davidsson, P., Gordon, S.R., 2012. Panel studies of new venture creation: A methods-focused review and suggestions for future research. Small Business Economics, 39, 853–876.

Demetry, D., 2017. Pop-up to professional: Emerging entrepreneurial identity and evolving vocabularies of motive. Academy of Management Discoveries, 3, 187–207.

Desa, G., Basu, S., 2013. Optimization or bricolage? Overcoming resource constraints in global social entrepreneurship. Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal, 7, 26–49.

Di Domenico, M., Haugh, H., Tracey, P., 2010. Social bricolage: Theorizing social value creation in social enterprises. Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, 34, 681–703.

Dutton, J.E., Fahey, L., Narayanan, V.K., 1983. Toward understanding strategic issue diagnosis. Strategic Management Journal, 4, 307–323.

Ebrahim, A., Battilana, J., Mair, J., 2014. The governance of social enterprises: Mission drift and accountability challenges in hybrid organizations. Research in Organizational Behavior, 34, 81–100.

Edmondson, A.C., McManus, S.E., 2007. Methodological fit in management field research. Academy of Management Review, 32, 1155–1179.

Eisenhardt, K.M., 1989. Making fast strategic decisions in high-velocity environments. Academy of Management Journal, 32, 543–576.

Gioia, D., Corley, K.G., Hamilton, A.L., 2012. Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. Organizational Research Methods, 16, 15–31.

Grant, A.M., Ashford, S.J., 2008. The dynamics of proactivity at work. Research in Organizational Behavior, 28, 3–34.

Grimes, M.G., 2018. The pivot: How founders respond to feedback through idea and identity work. Academy of Management Journal, 61, 1692–1717.

Grimes, M.G., Williams, T.A., Zhao, E.Y., 2019. Anchors aweigh: The sources, variety, and challenges of mission drift. Academy of Management Review, 44 (4), 819–845.

Grodal, S., Anteby, M., Holm, A.L., 2020. Achieving rigor in qualitative analysis: The role of active categorization in theory building. Academy of Management Review. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0482.

Guba, E.G., 1981. Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. Educational Communication and Technology Journal, 29, 75–91.

Hambrick, D.C., Mason, P.A., 1984. Upper echelons: The organization as a reflection of its top managers. Academy of Management Review, 9, 193–206.

Hays, J.C., Williams, J.R., 2011. Testing multiple motives in feedback seeking: The interaction of instrumentality and self-protection motives. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 79, 496–504.

Ilgen, D.R., Fisher, C.D., Taylor, M.S., 1979. Consequences of individual feedback on behavior in organizations. Journal of Applied Psychology, 64, 349.

Jay, J., 2013. Navigating paradox as a mechanism of change and innovation in hybrid organizations. Academy of Management Journal, 56, 137–159.

Katre, A., Salipante, P., 2012. Start-up social ventures: Blending fine-grained behaviors from two institutions for entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice, 36, 967–994.

Kreiner, G.E., Sheep, M., 2009. Growing pains and gains: Framing identity dynamics as opportunities for identity growth, in: Roberts, L.M., Dutton, J.E. (Eds.), Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations: Building a Theoretical and Research Foundation. Psychological Press, New York, pp. 23–46.

Kruse, P., Wach, D., Wegge, J. 2020. What motivates social entrepreneurs? A meta-analysis on predictors of the intention to found a social enterprise. Journal of Small Business Management. Online First. DOI: 10.1080/00472778.2020.1844493.

Langley, A., Abdallah, C., 2011. Templates and turns in qualitative studies of strategy and

management, in: Ketchen, D., Bergh, D. (Eds.), Research methodology in strategy and management vol 6: Building methodological bridges. Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., pp. 201–235.

Liberman, N., Trope, Y., Stephan, E., 2007. Psychological distance, in: Kruglanski, A.W., Higgins, E.T. (Eds.), Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles. The Guilford Press, pp. 353–381.

Lincoln, Y.S., Guba, E.G., 1985. Naturalistic inquiry. Sage, London.

Loy, L.S., Spence, A., 2020. Reducing, and bridging, the psychological distance of climate change. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 67, 101388.

Lumpkin, G.T., Bacq, S., Pidduck, R.J., 2018. Where change happens: Community-level phenomena in social entrepreneurship research. Journal of Small Business Management, 56, 24–50.

Ma, S., Kor, Y.Y., Seidl, D., 2019. CEO advice seeking: An integrative framework and future research agenda. Journal of Management. https://doi.org/0149206319885430.

Mair, J., Battilana, J., Cardenas, J., 2012. Organizing for society: A typology of social entrepreneuring models. Journal of Business Ethics, 111, 353–373.

Mair, J., Rathert, N., 2020. Let's talk about problems: Advancing research on hybrid organizing, social enterprises, and institutional context, in: Besharov, M.L., Mitzinneck, B.C. (Eds.), Organizational hybridity: Perspectives, processes, promises (Research in the sociology of organizations, vol. 69). Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 189–208.

Maitlis, S., Christianson, M., 2014. Sensemaking in organizations: Taking stock and moving forward. Academy of Management Annals, 8, 57–125.

Marquis, C., Tilcsik, A., 2013. Imprinting: toward a multilevel theory. Academy of Management Annals, 7, 195–245.

Meyer, A.D., 1982. Adapting to environmental jolts. Administrative Science Quarterly, 27, 515–537.

Miller, T.L., Grimes, M.G., McMullen, J.S., Vogus, T.J., 2012. Venturing for others with heart and head: How compassion encourages social entrepreneurship. Academy of Management Review, 37, 616–640.

Mongelli, L., Rullani, F., Versari, P., 2017. Hybridisation of diverging institutional logics through common-note practices – An analogy with music and the case of social enterprises. Industry and Innovation, 24, 492–514.

Muñoz, P., Cacciotti, G., Cohen, B., 2018. The double-edged sword of purpose-driven behavior in sustainable venturing. Journal of Business Venturing, 33, 149–178.

O'Neil, I., Ucbasaran, D., 2016. Balancing "what matters to me" with "what matters to them": Exploring the legitimation process of environmental entrepreneurs. Journal of Business Venturing, 31, 133–152.

O'Neil, I., Ucbasaran, D., York, J.G., 2020. The evolution of founder identity as an authenticity work process. Journal of Business Venturing. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106031.

Orbuch, T.L., 1997. People's accounts count: The sociology of accounts. Annual Review of Sociology, 23, 455–478.

Parker, S.K., Collins, C.G., 2010. Taking stock: Integrating and differentiating multiple proactive behaviors. Journal of Management, 36, 633–662.

Perrini, F., Vurro, C., Costanzo, L.A., 2010. A process-based view of social entrepreneurship: From opportunity identification to scaling-up social change in the case of San Patrignano. Entrepreneurship & Regional Development, 22, 515–534.

Petriglieri, J.L., 2011. Under threat: Responses to and the consequences of threats to individuals' identities. Academy of Management Review, 36, 641–662.

Petriglieri, G., Ashford, S.J., Wrzesniewski, A., 2019. Agony and ecstasy in the gig economy:

Cultivating holding environments for precarious and personalized work identities. Administrative Science Quarterly, 64, 124–170.

Phye, G.D., 1991. Advice and feedback during cognitive training: Effects at acquisition and delayed transfer. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 16, 87–94.

Powell, E.E., Hamann, R., Bitzer, V., Baker, T., 2018. Bringing the elephant into the room? Enacting conflict in collective prosocial organizing. Journal of Business Venturing, 33, 623–642.

Ramus, T., Vaccaro, A., 2017. Stakeholders matter: How social enterprises address mission drift. Journal of Business Ethics, 143 (2), 307–322.

Renko, M., 2013. Early challenges of nascent social entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice, 37, 1045–1069.

Renn, R.W., Fedor, D.B., 2001. Development and field test of a feedback seeking, self-efficacy, and goal setting model of work performance. Journal of Management, 27, 563–583.

Rose, S., Wentzel, D., Hopp, C., Kaminski, J., 2020. Launching for success: The effects of psychological distance and mental simulation on funding decisions and crowdfunding performance. Journal of Business Venturing. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106021.

Rouse, E.D., 2016. Beginning's end: How founders psychologically disengage from their organizations. Academy of Management Journal, 59, 1605–1629.

Sandberg, J., Tsoukas, H., 2015. Making sense of the sensemaking perspective: Its constituents, limitations, and opportunities for further development. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 36, S6–S32.

Schilpzand, P., Hekman, D.R., Mitchell, T.R., 2015. An inductively generated typology and process model of workplace courage. Organization Science, 26, 52–77.

Smith, W.K., Besharov, M.L., 2019. Bowing before dual gods: How structured flexibility sustains organizational hybridity. Administrative Science Quarterly, 64, 1–44.

Smith, W.K., Besharov, M.L., Wessels, A.K., Chertok, M., 2012. A paradoxical leadership model for social entrepreneurs: Challenges, leadership skills, and pedagogical tools for managing social and commercial demands. Academy of Management Learning and Education, 11, 463–478.

Stephan, U., Drencheva, A., 2017. The person in social entrepreneurship: A systematic review of research on the social entrepreneurial personality, in: Ahmetoglu, G., Chamorro-Premuzic, T., Klinger, B., Karcisky, T. (Eds.), The Wiley Handbook of Entrepreneurship. John Wiley, Chichester, pp. pp. 205–230.

Stephan, U., Patterson, M., Kelly, C., Mair, J., 2016. Organizations driving positive social change: A review and an integrative framework of change processes. Journal of Management, 42, 1250–1281.

Strauss, A., Corbin, J., 2008. Basics of qualitative research. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Stryker, S., Burke, P.J., 2000. The past, present, and future of an identity theory. Social Psychology Quarterly, 284–297.

Terjesen, S., Lepoutre, J., Justo, R., Bosma, N., 2012. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 2009 Report on Social Entrepreneurship. Retrieved from http://www.gemconsortium.org/report.

Thomas, J.B., Clark, S.M., Gioia, D.A., 1993. Strategic sensemaking and organizational performance: Linkages among scanning, interpretation, action, and outcomes. Academy of Management Journal, 36, 239–270.

Trope, Y., Liberman, N., 2000. Temporal construal and time-dependent changes in preference. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79 (6), 876–889.

Trope, Y., Liberman, N., 2003. Temporal construal. Psychological Review, 110 (3), 403–421.

Trope, Y., Liberman, N., 2010. Construal-level theory of psychological distance. Psychological

Review, 117 (2), 440-463.

Van Boven, L., Kane, J., McGraw, A.P., Dale, J., 2010. Feeling close: Emotional intensity reduces perceived psychological distance. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98 (6), 872–885.

Wagenschwanz, A.M., Grimes, M.G., 2021. Navigating compromise: How founder authenticity affects venture identification amidst organizational hybridity. Journal of Business Venturing, 36 (2), 106085.

Walk, M., Greenspan, I., Crossley, H., Handy, F., 2015. Mind the gap: Expectations and experiences of clients utilizing job-training services in a social enterprise. Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics, 86, 221–244.

Warnick, B.J., Murnieks, C.Y., McMullen, J.S., Brooks, W.T., 2018. Passion for entrepreneurship or passion for the product? A conjoint analysis of angel and VC decision-making. Journal of Business Venturing, 33, 315–332.

Weick, K.E., 1988. Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations. Journal of Management Studies, 25, 305–317.

Weick, K.E., 1995. Sensemaking in organizations. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M., Obstfeld, D., 2005. Organizing and the process of sensemaking. Organization Science, 16, 409–421.

Wry, T., York, J.G., 2017. An identity-based approach to social enterprise. Academy of Management Review, 42, 437–460.

Zahra, S.A., Gedajlovic, E., Neubaum, D.O., Shulman, J.M., 2009. A typology of social entrepreneurs: Motives, search processes and ethical challenges. Journal of Business Venturing, 24, 519–532.

Zietsma, C., Lawrence, T.B., 2010. Institutional work in the transformation of an organizational field: The interplay of boundary work and practice work. Administrative Science Quarterly, 55, 189–221.

Zott, C., Huy, Q.N., 2007. How entrepreneurs use symbolic management to acquire resources. Administrative Science Quarterly, 52, 70–105.

Social entrepreneur[2]	Age	Sex	Entrepreneurial experience[3]	Full time	Social enterprise[4]	Development stage	Staff[5]	IFS trajectory
Calvin	45-54	M	Yes	Yes	The Workshop	Idea	0	Community-oriented
Sam	16-24	M	Yes	Yes	Secret Platform	In development	0	Community-oriented
Clinton	45-54	M	Yes	Yes	City Produce	In development	0	Community-oriented
Lauren	55-64	F	Yes	No	Local Sights	In development	0	Community-oriented
Olivia	35-44	F	No	Yes	Splash	Already sell	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Peter	35-44	M	No	Yes	WIN Problem Gambling Consultancy	Ready to sell	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Tim	45-54	M	Yes	Yes	eCare	Prototype	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Alister	55-64	M	No	Yes	A to Z	Prototype	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Sarah	45-54	F	No	No	Pet Partners	In development	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Pradip	25-34	M	Yes	No	Refresh Café	In development	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Daniel H	25-34	M	No	Yes	Local Works	In development	1	Entrepreneur-oriented
Lisa	25-34	F	No	Yes	Velove	Already sell	18	Entrepreneur-oriented
Rose	45-54	F	No	No	For Mums	Already sell	1	Entrepreneur-oriented
Roger	25-34	M	No	Yes	Able Generation	Prototype	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Robin	45-54	F	Yes	No	Eat Well	Already sell	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Elinor	55-64	F	No	Yes	Life with FASD	Prototype	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Greg	35-44	M	No	No	Growing Green	In development	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Angela J	45-54	F	Yes	Yes	Able Waves	Already sell	0	Entrepreneur-

[2] All personal names are replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.
[3] Previously started (alone or with others) a commercial, environmental, or social enterprise.
[4] All enterprise names are replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.
[5] Includes full and part-time employees.

Social entrepreneur[2]	Age	Sex	Entrepreneurial experience[3]	Full time	Social enterprise[4]	Development stage	Staff[5]	IFS trajectory
								oriented
Clara	25-34	F	Yes	No	A Million Smiles	Ready to sell	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Natalie	35-44	F	Yes	No	Dance for All	Already sell	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Daniel S	35-44	M	Yes	Yes	Easy Green	Already sell	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Sadie	35-44	F	No	No	Active Strength	Already sell	0	Entrepreneur-oriented
Sandra	45-54	F	No	No	Musicability	In development	0	Opportunity-oriented
Yvette	65+	F	Yes	No	Education for Today	In development	0	Opportunity-oriented
Brandon	55-64	M	No	Yes	Motion	Already sell	7	Opportunity-oriented
Josie H	45-54	F	Yes	Yes	Ableploy-ment	Already sell	3	Opportunity-oriented
Sophia	45-54	F	Yes	Yes	MyClub	Already sell	8	Opportunity-oriented
Jennifer	55-64	F	Yes	No	Age Better	Ready to sell	0	Opportunity-oriented
Andrew	25-34	M	Yes	Yes	Youth En-trepreneurs	Prototype	2	Opportunity-oriented
Josie B	35-44	F	No	Yes	Future Catering and Train-ing Services	Prototype	0	Opportunity-oriented
Dominic	55-64	M	Yes	No	Prison Impact	Ready to sell	0	Opportunity-oriented
Adrian	25-34	M	No	No	No to Violence	Already sell	5	Opportunity-oriented
Colin	25-34	M	No	No	New Media	Already sell	10	Opportunity-oriented
Samantha	55-64	F	No	No	Stop!	In development	0	Opportunity-oriented
Selena	16-24	F	No	No	Serious Play	Prototype	0	Opportunity-oriented
Angela N	45-54	F	No	No	Baby Steps	Already sell	0	Opportunity-oriented

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

First-order categories	Second-order themes	Aggregated dimensions

- Started social venture to serve the community
- Community as geographic entity
- Community as group affected by the same issue
- Identity as community member

- Started social venture to address (anticipated) personal trauma
- "It needs to be a sustainable business, not a passion project"
- "It's my baby"
- Transitioning to entrepreneurial role
- Letting go of established identities
- Trying on entrepreneur identity provisionally

Psychologically close to social issue

- Started social venture to pursue economic opportunity
- Established identity not related to social issue
- Social issue not personally experienced

Psychologically distant from social issue

Psychological distance

- "Done with people rather than on people"
- "Not mine; everyone's"
- "Mine is just one perspective in the community."

To co-create with community members

- "This is what entrepreneurs do, right?"
- Learning the ropes of the role
- Seeking feedback to gain the knowledge, skills, and habits to be a capable entrepreneur

To meet entrepreneur role standards

- "To be seen"
- "To be seen as credible"
- "To be seen as engaged"
- "To be seen as responsive"

To project an image of social entrepreneur

Purpose of interpersonal feedback seeking

- Access to feedback sources not opportune
- "I do not run in those circles"
- Complexity of venture requires niche expertise

Struggling to access appropriate feedback sources

- "Struggling to excite the group"
- Struggling to gain responses to feedback requests

Struggling to engage feedback sources

Salient challenges

- Community members are vulnerable in many ways
- "Do I really understand what we need?"
- "Am I one of us?"

- Conflict between behavioral standards of the role related to profits and current experience and choices
- Conflicting behavioral standards of the role
- Questioning the meaning of "entrepreneur"
- "I am not good at my job."

Identity threat

- Feedback requests potentially experienced as threatening, annoying, stressful, pestering
- Conflict between desired 'social' image and experiences

Image threat

Interpretation of challenge

- Strengthening and leveraging feedback relationships
- Developing feedback channels

Experimenting with IFS process

- Refraining from feedback seeking from specific sources
- Searching for new feedback sources

Experimenting with selecting feedback sources

- "Positioning" feedback requests
- Disclosing partial information
- Using humour
- Division of feedback topics between sources

Experimenting with the content of feedback requests

- Temporary avoidance of feedback requests
- Careful timing of feedback requests
- Rules of thumb for when to seek feedback

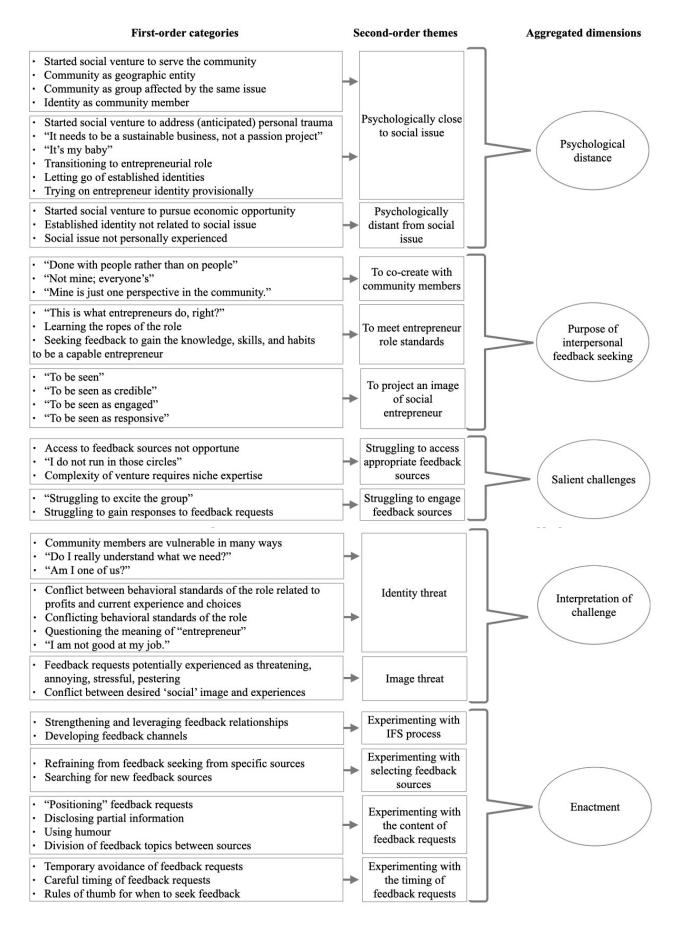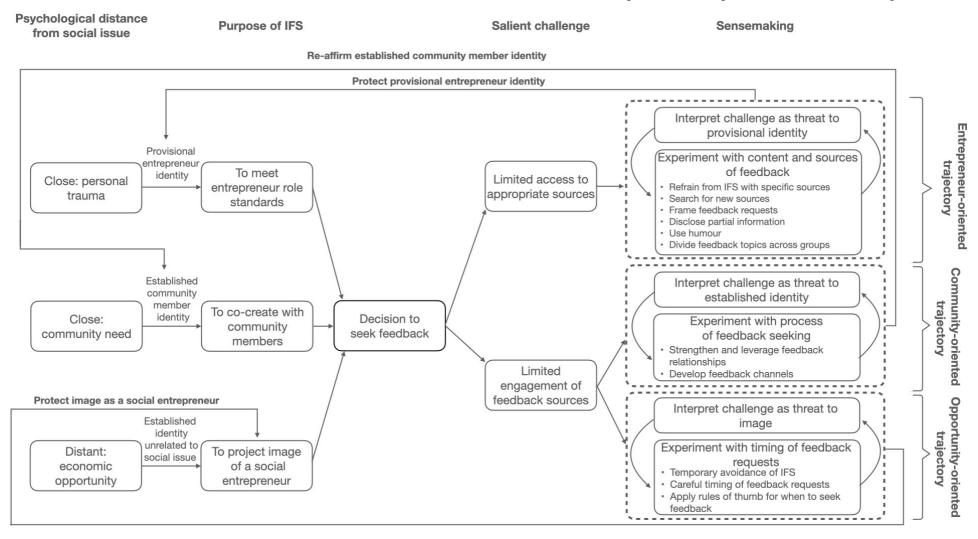Experimenting with the timing of feedback requests

Enactment

Fig. 1. Progressive data structure.

Note: Social entrepreneurs' identities and psychological distance from the targeted social issues shape the purpose behind their feedback seeking and, in turn, define their expectations of IFS. These expectations make specific challenges salient, which trigger sensemaking through interpretation and enactment to protect provisional identities, reaffirm established identities, and protect image.

Fig. 2. Model of interpersonal feedback-seeking trajectories.